

What Does Jesus Say About The Future?

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Years ago, my family and I were living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We were there working with the International Mission Board and it was my job to encourage new church starts there in the capitol city. Part of the role required me to raise the financial resources needed to fuel those church plants. To do this, I developed partnerships with churches and individuals here in America who were passionate about church planting.

These partnerships took a lot of hands on work to make happen. So after doing as much networking as I possibly could through email and phone calls, I had to travel back to the U.S. for 3 weeks.

While I was in the States on this trip, my wife was back in Ethiopia with our two kids. Jessi was about 7 years old and CJ was just a toddler. As it turned out, Ethiopia went to war with the neighboring country of Eritrea over a boundary dispute just before I left. There were troops moving through the streets of the capitol as I drove to the airport. The whole country was on edge. Needless to say, it was a terrible time for me to leave the country. But I really had no choice. I'd been planning this trip for months.

So while I'm in the states I'm making frequent phone calls back to Ethiopia. I'm talking with Pam and Jessi. I'm encouraging them that I'll be home soon. But it was a hard time of separation. As I got near the end of my trip, we were all counting the days before I returned.

I arrived in Houston, TX, the last stop of this trip. When I called home after arriving in Houston I could tell by Pam's voice that she was over this whole thing. The water had been out for a few days, which wasn't that uncommon. The electricity had been out for a couple of days, but that wasn't uncommon either. What was uncommon was that all of this was happening while I was in America. In Pam's mind, I was off having a grand ole time while she was dealing with reality! Then there was Jessi. Every time I spoke to her, I could hear the anticipation in her voice. My little girl missed me! I promised her that I'd see her in just a couple of days.

Finally it was time to head to the airport. I arrived at the ticket counter in plenty of time. My baggage was the right weight, my passport and tickets were all in order. I was ready to get this trip over with!

I worked my way to the ticket counter and handed everything over to the agent. She smiled politely as we made small talk about travel. But as we chatted, I could tell by the look in her eye that there was a problem. She looked at me and said, "Mr. Emmert, I'm sorry to tell you this, but Frankfurt, Germany is currently snowed in. All the flights heading in and out of there are

canceled. I'm afraid this means that you'll miss your flight to Addis Ababa and the next flight available won't be for 2 more days!"

I was devastated. I didn't say anything unkind to the woman. I knew it wasn't her fault. But she could tell I was heartbroken. She said, "I'll do everything I can to make it up to you. I'll put you in a great hotel and take care of all of your meals for the next couple of days. You can even call home to Ethiopia on us and give the news to your family."

So I went to the hotel room and picked up the phone. I called Pam and explained to her what had happened. She repeated my words back to me: "2 more days." And when Pam said that, I could hear Jessi in the background. She burst into tears. My daughter had been anticipating my return for 3 weeks now. She longed to hug my neck. She wanted to tell me all about school and what she was learning. She wanted to ransack my luggage and see if I'd brought her any gifts from my travels. Now it was going to be 2 more days!

For her, the disappointment was overwhelming. She had been living in anticipation of her father's return.

Have you ever longed for a reunion like that? Have you ever waited so long to see someone that you began to wonder if they'd ever actually show up?

There's something in our DNA that makes us anticipate moments like that.

The return of Christ is just such an occasion. In the little NT book of Jude, the author calls the return of Jesus "the great day." I love that!

Jesus himself talks at length with his disciples about his return — this Great Day that we should anticipate the way a child anticipates the return of her father. And Jesus has this conversation in a concentrated dose in Matthew 24. It's Jesus' most complete discussion about his second coming.

Throughout the history of the church, some people have become hyper-focused on the details of this chapter and also in the book of Revelation. If you've been in church a while, you probably know someone who is passionate about this topic. Lots of very sincere students of the Bible have sought to work through every detail related to what will happen as history winds down.

These details do matter. But we can get so caught up in them that we lose sight of the main point, which is this: Jesus promises us that a day is coming when life as we know it will come to a halt and a brand new reality will begin and the critical factor in this new reality has to do with our relationship with him.

So here in Matthew 24, Jesus doesn't answer every possible question you or I could ever raise about this the End Times. Instead, he answers 2 questions that are put to him by his disciples. So in the next few minutes, we're going to learn about those 2 questions.

You may be thinking, I've got way more than two questions! I get it! That's why we have a class available on Wednesday nights this semester on this topic. So if you've got questions that don't get answered in the next few minutes, this class is for you! Find out more in our groups guide on our website or app.

The main question each of us should have as we contemplate Jesus' return is this: Am I ready for it regardless of how it unfolds? We prepare for our futures here on earth. We have retirement funds and college funds. But what you decide to do with your eternity is the most important decision of your life. Nothing else compares.

Jesus has this discussion after he and his disciples pay a visit to the temple in Jerusalem. **Matthew 24:1-2** tells us about it: **1 As Jesus left and was going out of the temple complex, His disciples came up and called His attention to the temple buildings. 2 Then He replied to them, "Don't you see all these things? I assure you: Not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down!"**

The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship. There was no way to imagine life in Jerusalem without it. It was an architectural marvel and an absolute destination location. Seeing the temple was an "ooh, ahhh" moment in anyone's life and people traveled from all across the Middle East to see it. It's not hard to understand why that when Jesus and his disciples arrive in Jerusalem, they go to see this amazingly beautiful and important place.

I've had the opportunity to go to Washington DC many times. But every time I go, I want to go see the capitol, the White House and if possible, the Lincoln Memorial. They're awe-inspiring and I want to see them over and over again.

It's the same thing when I go to London, England. I always go to Westminster Abby and the Houses of Parliament. I just can't see them often enough!

That's where the disciples are. They're like shameless tourists come to town. They have to see the temple. It's a "can't miss" opportunity.

So when Jesus says it will be thrown down, it registers as an explosive statement. As the disciples continue their walk, you can just imagine the cross talk that was going on among them. *What do you think he meant? Doesn't he realize how big those stones are? How can he say that one won't be left standing on another?*

The facts seemed to be on their side. The foundation stones were the size of a semi-truck and weighed over 200,000 pounds each. These massive stones were stacked with great precision

forming a foundation that was stories high. We still don't know for certain how they moved them in to place. How would stones like that be overturned?

As Jesus and the disciples leave Jerusalem, his grim prediction would have still been ringing in their ears. They cross over to the Mount of Olives. When they arrive, they just can't take it anymore! They have to know some details.

Matthew 24:3 While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached Him privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

Now that they have some time with Jesus, they don't stop with just one question about the destruction of the temple. The very idea is so catastrophic in their mind that it makes them ask about Jesus' return as well. So they don't ask just one question, they ask 2.

- 1: When will these things happen? Meaning, when will the temple be destroyed?
- 2: What is the sign of your return? Jesus had mentioned his return to them before. They wanted to know more about it.

Jesus begins by answering the last question first. Before he gets in to the destruction of the temple, he starts talking about his return. For our conversation, given where we are now 2000 years removed from this moment, I think it will be easier for us to understand what is going on if we answer the questions in the order they're asked. It's hard for us to understand the stakes of the first question and how it made sense to the disciples to follow up with a question about Jesus' second coming. So let's take them in the order the disciples asked.

Fist, when will Jerusalem fall? When will this incredible, massive temple that has stood at the center of the Jewish faith for centuries be destroyed?

The stakes on this topic were sky high and it's only right the disciples would be concerned. At the time, the nation of Israel was occupied by the Roman government. Saying that the Romans were unpopular in Israel would be a huge understatement. The threat of outright rebellion was always a possibility.

Many people would have interpreted Jesus' claims to be the messiah — the savior — in political terms. If Jesus was the savior, then surely he was going to save Israel FROM Rome.

Imagine the contrast from that way of thinking when Jesus says that the temple and the city would be destroyed. Clearly it would be destroyed by the Romans. Instead of being delivered from them, apparently Israel would be destroyed by them. It would have been jarring for the disciples to hear, so they want to know when is this going to happen?

Here's Jesus' answer: **Matthew 24:15–27 15 "So when you see the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place" (let the reader**

understand), 16 “then those in Judea must flee to the mountains! 17 A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house. 18 And a man in the field must not go back to get his clothes. 19 Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days! 20 Pray that your escape may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For at that time there will be great tribulation, the kind that hasn’t taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again! 22 Unless those days were limited, no one would survive. But those days will be limited because of the elect. 23 “If anyone tells you then, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Over here!’ do not believe it! 24 False messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 Take note: I have told you in advance. 26 So if they tell you, ‘Look, He’s in the wilderness!’ don’t go out; ‘Look, He’s in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus begins his answer by referring to the Old Testament prophet Daniel. Daniel foretold a time when a foreign ruler would come into the temple and desecrate it. Most Jewish people linked that prophecy with something that happened around 168 B.C., when a ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes came into the temple, erected a pagan altar in it, and sacrificed a pig on it. But that wasn’t to be the last time something like that would happen. Jesus reaches back to the prophecy from Daniel’s day and says something like that is going to happen again. And when it does, it’s going to be bad news for the nation of Israel.

Jesus says that anyone who is paying attention should get out of town. His followers should head for the hills when this happens. When the Roman army comes to attack the city and destroy the temple, don’t even go home and get your clothes. If you’re in the field, leave immediately.”

Jesus says, it’s a terrible time to be pregnant because your travel is so limited. Pray it doesn’t happen in the winter when roads are frequently washed out and hindering your escape. Pray it doesn’t happen on the sabbath when you’re not supposed to travel, because this is going to be bad. Jerusalem is going to be destroyed and the temple with it. So be prepared.

Jesus then warns the disciples that the destruction would happen within that generation: **Matthew 24:32–34** 32 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near—at the door! 34 I assure you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.

So was Jesus correct? Sadly yes. About 40 years after Jesus speaks these words, the Romans seized silver from the temple to shore up declining tax revenues. The Jews were incensed because their temple had been defiled, and soon, a long, bloody rebellion was underway. The Roman army would eventually capture Jerusalem, make sacrifices to false gods there and destroy the temple.

History describes the desperation, disease, and famine that existed during the siege. It's heart breaking to even consider and it's hard for us to understand. As Americans, we've never known the kind of suffering that was experienced at this time. But it was awful.

I lived in Ethiopia just as relief efforts for the devastating famine that hit that country in the 1980s were winding down. Stories were still coming out about the suffering that was experienced during that time. There were stories of mothers being forced to choose to let their strongest children eat and allowing the weak to die because there wasn't enough food for everyone to survive. Can you imagine the soul crushing heartbreak in that kind of choice? When the Romans ended the Jewish Revolt, it changed everything. It ended the Jewish state and Israel didn't reemerge as a sovereign country again until modern times. What you and I know as the state of Israel just celebrated 70 years on April 18, 2018!

The Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees who dominated Jewish life during the days of Jesus ceased to exist. The destruction of the temple completely changed the worship of the Jews. And it ended any connection between the church and Judaism.

Thinking about the church, how did Christians in Jerusalem fare during the siege? It seems that many of the Christians in Jerusalem had gotten out of town before the siege. It was as if they'd been warned what to look for!

Now what about the second question the disciples asked? "What are the signs of your return?" Well, Jesus begins this answer by warning them against running after every false sign. **Matthew 24:4-8** ⁴ Then Jesus replied to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many. ⁶ You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these events are the beginning of birth pains.

Notice that Jesus warns his disciples of false Messiah's showing up before to the destruction of Jerusalem back in V23-24. Throughout history, there have been a number of false teachers who have made false claims.

It was true before the fall of Jerusalem. It's still true today. Right now there's a guy in Australia named Alan John Miller who leads a cult called Divine Truth. He claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus.

What about David Koresh? He led a cult called the Branch Davidian, that was involved in a standoff with the federal government in 1993 in Waco, TX. He claimed to be the spiritual descendent of King David and a messianic figure.

There are many, many more throughout history. And it's not just people who claimed outright to be the messiah. It's people all over the place who promote a picture or a version of Jesus that is not found in the Bible, and they're deceiving many.

Jesus says not only will there be false messiahs, there will be both actual wars as well as unconfirmed reports of wars. That's been going on for centuries. What about famines and earthquakes? Yes to both. They've been a part of life for centuries.

Jesus says, just like a woman experiences contractions during her pregnancy long before the baby is due, these events are just reminders that one day, Jesus will return.

So Jesus is saying, just like there was a spin up leading to the destruction of Jerusalem, there's going to be a spin up leading to my return. So in between these two gigantic events, there is a space of an unspecified time, and during this time there will be things like false messiahs, wars, famines and earthquakes.

When I was in college I went hiking on the Appalachian trail. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever done. We'd been hiking for a couple of days along this deep valley floor. Then we spent a full day climbing to the top of this mountain. We were exhausted when we got to the top, but as we finally started hiking the ridge, we see this amazing scene (Picture). You could see forever! The next mountain top looked so close! But experience of the last day had taught me differently. We'd just spent a gurelling 8 hours climbing the mountain we were on. To go from one to another represented more of the same.

That's kind of what you have going on here. When Jesus answers his disciple's question about the fall of Jerusalem, he's taking them up on a mountain. Then when he tells them about the signs relating to his return, he's pointing to another mountain. When you read about it here, it sounds like the two mountains are so close you can reach from one to the other. But in reality, there's a lot of hard hiking between the two. These two events aren't seperated by months, years or decades. They're separated by centuries. And the journey from one to the other isn't an easy one.

Jesus goes on to describe that hard work in the next few verses: **Matthew 24:9–13** ⁹ “Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name. ¹⁰ Then many will take offense, betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹² Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be delivered.

So Jesus says when you're in between the mountains of the fall of Jerusalem and His second coming, the way we are now, things won't necessarily be easy for His followers. It's going to take it's toll. A lot of people are going to grow dissatisfied along the way. People will grow tired of being looked at differently just because they're a part of the church. They'll get tired of playing by a different set of rules than everyone else. Along the way false teachers will rise up and tell you that there's no need to honor Christ in the way you live. People will begin to fall

away from the truth of the gospel. It will take its toll and over time, people's affections for Christ will fade.

But in spite of this, there will be those who love Christ their entire lives until his return. In fact, Jesus says, this perseverance is the hallmark of a true believer. A true Christ Follower won't be shaken. They have their ups and downs, but ultimately, they keep on serving, keep on loving, keep on believing.

If you think back over everything Jesus has said will happen in between the fall of Jerusalem and His return, you can see that all of these things have happened. There have been plenty of wars, plenty of false Christs, plenty of fallen believers, plenty of persecution and plenty of times when darkness has seemingly advanced with abandon. What Jesus wants to make clear to us is that prior to His return, the difference between good and evil will grow ever more pronounced. True Christ Followers just look more and more different from those around them. And they keep on sharing the truth of the gospel: **Matthew 24:14 This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.**

Jesus' command to take the gospel around the world will be completed. His good news will be proclaimed in every nation around the world. That's the job of the church! It's the command of Christ in the great commission when we're told to take the gospel around the world. You and I are a part of Jesus' plan here. It's why we think about missions and church planting here at Celebration. Because as we live in obedience to Christ's command at this point, we are a part of his plan for humanity.

So as we're in between these two mountains of the fall of Jerusalem and the return of Christ, in spite of all the hardship and the difficulty, we live for Christ. We share him boldly and we show his compassion and caring boldly and as Christ fulfills his purposes the end will come.

Matthew 24:29–31 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the celestial powers will be shaken. 30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Clearly this is bigger than just the destruction of the temple or of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus describes incredible celestial events. The sun will be darkened, the moon will not light, stars falling from the sky.

This is the day when Jesus is coming back in splendor and glory with a trumpet call from heaven. For those who have chosen to reject God, it will be a time of mourning because this day is the day of reckoning. He will come to fully and finally assert His reign and His rule over the world as the sovereign Son of God who deserves the praise of everyone.

But for his those who have accepted Jesus' offer of grace and mercy, it is the best of days. They are gathered together from the four corners of the globe. It will be an amazing scene.

Today you and I are living in that gap between these two events that Jesus foretold. It's been hundreds of years since these words were spoken and because of their complexity, it's easy for us to look at them as a curiosity and assume they have no real impact on our day to day lives. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

We should always live with an eye on eternity. We should always live in anticipation of what Jesus has to say. So how do we do that?

1: We live like the things of this world are temporary. It's easy for us to get invested in making our day to day lives just function. We put all of our energy into our jobs, school, sports or hobbies. It's been so strange during the pandemic to see so much of that put on hold because that's were our energy goes. But we need to learn the same lesson Jesus taught the disciples as they stood there in awe of the temple — the things of this world are passing. When Jesus stands in front of the temple and says there won't be a stone left on top of another, he's talking about some unimaginable destruction. He's saying, even the most amazing things you can imagine in this life are going to pass away.

Just listen to Jesus' words in **Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away**. Look at the contrast. Everything in this life will pass away, but Jesus' word won't pass away.

Jesus was spot on. Jesus foresaw the destruction of a city 40 years before it happened. The destruction was so great that the nation of Israel didn't return until the 1940s.

But Jesus word still stands. So when Jesus says, I will return one day in the future, we can take his word for it. He said he would be crucified. He was. He said he would raise from the dead. He said Jerusalem is going to be overturned, it was. He said, I will come again. He will.

2: We live in a state of anticipation. Just like my daughter was ready for me to come home any moment, we need to live in a constant state of readiness for the return of Christ. Our attitude should always be, *What if it were to happen today?*

If Jesus were to return this moment, what would I want to be found doing? I'd want to be found demonstrating the same caring and compassion that he showed. I'd want to be found faithfully living out His Word because it never passes away. I'd want to stand firm anytime there was pushback because of my confidence in Christ.

And living that way is a full time job, because the timing of Jesus' return is unknown to everyone but God himself. **Matthew 24:36, 42-44 "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son —except the Father only . . . 42 Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house**

be broken into. 44 This is why you also must be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus says nobody knows when his return will be, but he wants you and I to be prepared for that moment. In fact, the whole reason Jesus came was to make it possible for you and I to face that day not with fear and trembling, but with joy and anticipation. And step one in that preparation process is to accept Christ's offer to restore and redeem you.

He's aware of every moment, every detail in your life. He sees the shortcomings. He knows about the habits and the addictions and the abortion. And he is here to tell you that redemption from all if that is the reason that he left heaven, came to earth, lived an exemplary life to show us a better way, was crucified to pay the penalty for your sin and mine and then rose from the grave to deliver us even from death. He has done all of that for you and he invites you to follow him.

And not only has he achieved all of that, he has also kept every word that he has spoken and his promise that he will one day return for His Bride the Church is no different. Not one word of Jesus will fail.

And so today I encourage you, I beg you, as we conclude this in depth look into the words and claims of Christ, to trust him with your future. A future in which he promises will one day change forever and a day for which we absolutely need to be prepared. So let me pray with you and I invite you to take this moment to say, Jesus, I trust you to deal with my past. I trust you to align my present with your will. I will entrust you with my future. Let's pray together. PRAY