

Introductory

When we speak of The End, or The End Times, or the Lord's Day, or Judgment Day, or even The Second Coming of Christ, we are talking about essentially the same time and series of events. These events include the return of Jesus in glory, the Resurrection of all flesh – even those who don't want to be resurrected, the final and public judgment of all men (as described by Matthew), the final assignment of some to heaven and others to hell, the destruction of the old creation, and the beginning of life in the New.

Eschatology is the term that we use to describe talk of and teaching about the end of the world. The term has generally been used in a religious or philosophical context, but The Bomb brought with it, for the first time in modern times, talk of a *man-made* end to the world, and just when the Iron Curtain fell and it looked like we were over that sort of fiddle-faddle, the leftist radical Environmentalists jumped right in to tell us that we are actually *already in the process* of bringing about the end of the world, even as we speak.

Non-radical, right leaning Environmentalists, who might do things like; drive Prii, burn wood, grow and consume organic fruits and vegetables, faithfully recycle, strive for sustainability, and vote Republican know that neither nukes, nor global warming, nor anything else that man can do will bring about the end of the planet, and that's not a matter of personal opinion, but a matter of very basic Christian theology. God made it, and God will one day destroy it, but only in His good time and at His good pleasure.

The material that we dealt with last week focused on the question of the timing of the coming of The End. After that, the eschatological material takes on an *apocalyptic* tone; the end times are seen as bringing *unusual and cataclysmic events*. To be sure, some of the events spoken of last week, like earthquakes, are cataclysmic, but they are not unusual. The things spoken of here are not only cataclysmic and unusual, but almost exclusively one-time, things that have pretty much never been seen before.

When He is done talking in those apocalyptic terms, Jesus will then return to the original question asked of Him, the one about the exact timing of all of these events. By doing that, He shows Himself to be an excellent preacher and teacher. Pastors likewise need to answer the theological questions about religion that people are asking, and in order to know what those questions are, he must listen when they speak.

There is no more alert listener than the Christian listener who is being spoken to by a knowledgeable person speaking to a question that she has about her religion. Like commentaries, too many sermons spend too much time telling us things that we already know. Like commentaries, too many sermons spend time on minutia that really is not very important or interesting, things that upon hearing we ask, so what?

This text has parallels in both Matthew and Luke. You might want to pull out your *Gospel Parallels*, or go to one of several web sites that present these texts in three side-by-side columns. Going by the chapter headings in my *Gospel Parallels*, vv. 24-27 are called “The Parousia of the Son of Man,” and are matched with Matthew 24:29-31 and Luke 21:25-28. As is to be expected, the accounts say pretty much the same thing, and Mark’s account is the shortest, and Matthew and Luke add nuggets of information that we may want to mine as our exegetical dig progresses.

The next section heading in my book is “The Parable of the Fig Tree,” and includes vv. 28-29, and it parallels Matthew 24:32-33 and Luke 21:29-31. These accounts are almost word for word the same. The penultimate section is called “The Time of the Parousia,” vv. 30-32, Matthew 24:34-36, and Luke 21:32-33. The final section is called “Mark’s Ending to the Discourse,” and includes vv. 33-37.

You will note that in this final section Matthew and Luke have Jesus saying similar things, only in different contexts, to what Mark says here. You will also note that Luke’s ending (24:34-36) sounds a lot like Mark’s ending. We further note that, while the end of this reading concludes Mark’s eschatological material, Matthew and Luke include much more. We find that additional material immediately after this, but we also note that Luke includes what might be considered apocalyptic material in chapters twelve and nineteen.

Textual Notes

24. In order to understand what Jesus means by “in those days,” we must note what He has just been talking about, and to help our hearers to likewise understand what Jesus means by “in those days,” we must pass along to them what He has been talking about. He has been talking (vv. 14-23) about the well-known – or not – destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman army in 70 A.D., during the First Jewish-Roman War. When that cataclysmic event occurred, Jews from Jerusalem and Judea fled to Masada and Christians to Pella.

Masada and Pella

The flight to Masada, the siege, and the ultimate Roman victory and Jewish mass suicide are fairly well known, at least in part because more information is available than for Pella. The Jewish man Josephus, chronicler for the Romans, gives a lengthy and detailed account of the Masada adventure, and the site is still there, it has been dug, and according to WIK, “it is Israel’s most popular paid tourist attraction.” But most importantly, it was made into a mini series in the eighties, so it must be true!

The mini series is creatively entitled, *Masada*, it stars Peter O’ Tool as the Roman General Flavius Siva, and we made sure to be parked in front of the TV set for each of

the four episodes that aired in April of 1981, because we didn't have VCRs, so if you weren't there, you missed it. You might have to explain that concept to some of your younger listeners. However, now you can purchase the entire series on VHS or in DVD at Amazon for a reasonable price, used or new.

The ancient city of Pella no longer exists, but the name lives on in cities like Pella, Iowa, in churches like Pella Lutheran in Waupun, WI, and in people named after it. The city was destroyed by earthquake in 749 (WIK), and today "a small village remains in the area, and only small portions of the ruins have been excavated." Other sources place the earthquake in 747. If you google "Pella tourism," the hits are all for Pella, Iowa, and mostly for their annual tulip festival. You have to google "Pella Jordan tourism" to get the hits that lead to information about tours and some nice photos of Pella today.

The primary source for the Christian flight to Pella is historian and Bishop of Caesarea Eusebius (263 – 339). In his major work, *Church History*, he briefly and tantalizingly mentions the flight to Pella, saying "Furthermore, the members of the Jerusalem church, by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the City before the war began and settle in a town in Peraea called Pella. To Pella those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem..."

The Pella about which we speak was one of the ten cities of the biblical Decapolis ("ten cities"), is located in modern-day Jordan, and is not the Pella in modern-day Macedonia. Beginning in the nineteenth century, modern "bible scholars" have pretty much decided that Eusebius can't be trusted, and first questioned, then doubted, and by now are certain – in the manner of scholars of that ilk – that the whole Pella thing never happened. So modern scholarship thinks that respected church historian, pastor, and actual scholar Eusebius just made it up, and he made it up because....?

Jesus now continues talking about "in those day ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις," calling them "days of tribulation – τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνης," and talking about what will happen "after – μετὰ" that time of tribulation. He then talks about several cataclysmic events that will happen "after" the time of tribulation; the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple. We note that to talk about one event happening "after – μετὰ" another event gives a sequential ordering, but does not speak to the actual time, i.e. *how long* after. The first two things mentioned here as future events include the darkening of the sun, and the moon not giving its light.

25. Besides that, stars will be "falling – πίπτοντες" (present participle), from the sky, and the powers in the sky "will be cast down – σαλευθήσονται" (future passive)." The second verb is σαλεύω, and it occurs fifteen times in the NT, and it may also mean "shaken," but here "cast down" seems more likely. When it actually happens, then we will know for sure. The verb is not σείω, which occurs five times in the NT, and I was not able to determine a great deal of difference that would distinguish the meaning of one from the other.

The verb σείω occurs most notably three times within a week in Matthew's Gospel; when Jesus entered Jerusalem (of the crowd), at the Crucifixion (of the ground), and at the Resurrection (of the guards). The other notable occurrence of σείω is in Hebrews 12:26, and the verb σαλεύω occurs three times in Hebrews 12:26-27. In those verses, the writer is speaking in an apocalyptic manner about the End Times. The writer of that book may have had these words in mind when he penned those verses under inspiration.

26. More descriptive language about the order of things, as Jesus continues by telling His hearers “καὶ τότε ὄψονταὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – and *then* you will see the Son of Man.” *First*, the cosmological action of the sun, moon, and stars, and *then* comes Jesus, Who will come, “in the clouds – ἐν νεφέλαις.” The preposition of location “ἐν” followed by a noun (clouds) in the dative case indicates that Jesus will be beside the clouds (FGG p. 41), which makes sense. If He were inside of the clouds, then He would not be visible, and people would not be able to see Him. Probably they will be cumulus clouds, because that's how artists always depict it, but again, we'll have to wait and see.

His Second Coming will be “μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς καὶ δόξης. – with much power and great glory,” standing in stark contrast to His first coming. The first time, He was born with the animals to an unknown Mary, whose husband the small businessman was probably slightly better known, He grew up in Nazareth, a town at the end of the road, never had a great number of followers, and died the death of a criminal. While the people in Galilee and even in Jerusalem more or less noticed Him, and some followed Him, He was almost unknown outside of Palestine, which didn't count for much in the world that counted.

27. Remember how Jesus had told that one parable, the one about the wheat and the darnel weeds growing together, the one that talks about Christians in the World, where He tells us to live with the pagans and don't try to destroy them, but wait until later, after both the wheat and the weed have been harvested, and then the angels will sort it out? Remember that parable? Matthew alone records it (13:24-30). It's time for the angels to break out their combines and cut them some wheat – and darnel weeds.

Matthew tells us that “a great trumpet call – μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης” will accompany the coming of these harvester angels. The musical instrument spoken of by Matthew (σάλπιγγος) is the musical instrument used to call God's People to battle, and it is also used to signal the victory of God's People when they are victorious. Clearly, in this case the trumpet is signaling the latter, not the former, unless you are a Millennialist, which we are not. The Lutherans fought that theological battle in the late eighteenth century, and it's a done deal.

The angels will gather “the elect – τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς,” an adjective that occurs a surprising twenty-three times in the NT, and its verbal cognate “ἐκλέγομαι” occurs another twenty-two times. I just learned something; the doctrine of Election is not some obscure and convoluted invention of the theologians that is barely mentioned in the Bible, but an idea

that is referenced in a plethora of places and ways to the point that it rather permeates the entirety of the NT.

The harvesting angels will be both thorough and efficient, as they will gather “ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ’ ἄκρου γῆς ἕως ἄκρου οὐρανοῦ – from the four winds, from the extremities of the earth to the extremities of heaven.” No soul who has ever lived on the earth will be able to escape this final harvest, not even those who have had their bodies cremated for the express purpose of not wanting to participate in this event. Mark does not mention it, but we know from Matthew that after this comes the dividing of all people into the sheep and the goats, and then eternity in one of two possible places.

28. Jesus now goes back to the original topic, in this case the question (v. 4) about the timing of the destruction of the Temple, but now He has piled a lot, besides that, onto the eschatological plate. He talks about a fig tree because the people of His day knew all about fig trees. I will maybe say just that, or maybe just start talking about apple and pear and cherry trees, or just about any kind of tree with which Americans are familiar, deciduous and conifer alike, because those are the kinds of trees with which the Iowans to whom I will be preaching are familiar.

He tells His hearers to learn from the “parable – παραβολήν” of the fig tree, and it is extremely clear what they are to learn from the tree. I hate it when commentaries go on and on telling you things that any child can see, so I won’t.

29. See the second paragraph in v. 28.

30. This verse is harder, and its meaning keys on the word “γενεά.” Like a lot of words in any given language, that noun can mean several different things, depending on how it is used. The primary meaning of that Greek word is the same as the meaning of our American word “generation,” i.e. a period of about thirty years, a meaning seen most clearly in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. The secondary meaning of the Greek word “γενεά” is to refer to a particular *group* or *type* of people, a meaning not found in our American language, but a favorite of Jesus.

Jesus says that “οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ (aorist subjunctive) ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη μέχρις οὗ ταῦτα πάντα γένηται – this generation will not pass on until all of these things should have taken place.” We firstly note the twin negators “οὐ” and “μὴ,” emphasizing the utter impossibility of the first thing – the passing of a generation – happening before the second things – all of those things of which He has been speaking – should happen.

So is He talking about the passing of that *literal generation* of people before these things take place, or is He talking about the passing of this *kind* of people before these things take place? Some of these things will happen and are happening within the lifetime of these people, and other things – the apocalyptic cosmological things – have not yet happened at this writing, and so I’m going to making the case for a third option; both. The noun γενεά means both things; it’s a double entendre.

The Double Entendre is a figure of speech that consists of a spoken phrase that is devised in such a way that it can be understood in either of two ways, the first way being straightforward, the second not. For example, there used to be all kinds of billboards around here with the image of a John Deere snowmobile and the caption, “Nothing Runs like a Deere.” John tells us that after the Sacrament, Judas went out “and it was dark.” Double entendre is often of a sexual or vulgar nature, as per Mae West, Bond movies, and that 2009 Britney Spears hit about Amy.

Here the meaning is that many of the very people standing there listening to Him would still be alive for some of these eschatological signs, including things like the famines, earthquakes, false Christs, and even the destruction of the Temple. Just as clearly, some of those eschatological signs were not seen by those people, because they have not yet happened, at least up to this writing. That is the obvious meaning of the double entendre.

Not so obvious, what has not to this day ever passed away, is the generation – the kind of people – that rejects and mocks Jesus, and often those people are religious, like they were at the time of Jesus, and they may even be found in the church and calling themselves “Christians.” This group of people are often quite subtle in their mocking and rejecting of Jesus, yet mock and reject they do.

In a modern Jeffersonian manner, they pick and choose which parts of the Bible they will keep, and which parts they will discard like a worn-out, dirty sock. Many of them don’t really believe with any degree of certainty *any* of the words of Jesus or the Bible, and their rejection of such bedrocks as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection is a rejection of the work as well as the Person of Jesus Christ, and make Him into something that He Himself would not recognize.

And just look at the social anarchy these false teachers have wrought in the Christian west, teaching that God is way cool with things that He actually says are abomination in His eyes. It is a sad fact of life in this millennium that the sins that are ripping apart the very fabric of our society have been tacitly condoned or even actively praised by Christian pastors, whose understanding of Jesus and the religion that bears His name is surpassed only by that of any six year old Christian.

31. Now He gets to the culmination of all things, “ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται – heaven and earth will pass away,” and then juxtaposes that phrase with this, “but my words will never pass away – οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται.” We note that the verb is the same word, same form in both phrases, and that the negator “οὐ” is placed before the negator “μὴ” (see v. 30, par. 2). In reference to the erring religious leaders of His day, it’s almost like He’s speaking to us today, reminding us how eternal, unbending, and unchanging is The Word of God, and opposition to it.

32. Coming back once more to the original question about when these things will happen, as if this were not already clear enough, He explicitly tells them that nobody knows the exact time, not even He. And yet everybody and his brother, including not a small number of Christians, claims to know just that; the exact date of “that day.” The listing

of people who don't know include “οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῷ - the angels (not pastors) in heaven,” Himself, and then the exception clause, “εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ - except the Father,” Who *does* know the exact date and time.

33. He then issues two commands in the form of present imperative actives verbs. The first one “Βλέπετε –see, beware” was the first word out of His mouth (v. 5) in response to the original question way back in v. 4. The second command is “ἀγρυπνεῖτε – be awake” for this reason; “οὐκ οἴδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ καιρὸς ἐστίν – you do not know when the time is.” The noun “καιρὸς” is often used in an eschatological context. It is *not* the noun “χρόνος,” the word for time, but the word for “period” or “epoch,” whatever that means.

34. Last Sunday I was on something of a simile roll, using the word “like,” in the context of the figure of speech known as simile, seventeen times in one sermon. You can count your uses of “like” by using the “find” function (ctl + f) in Word. Some speakers can go weeks or months or years or an entire career without using even one. Jesus often begins parables, extended similes, with the word “like,” and here He sort of tells a mini-parable that begins with “Like – Ὡς,” to help the hearer to better understand what He has just told them; to be ever vigilant for the The End.

The story is about “a man having left the region – ἀπόδημος ἀφείς τὴν οἰκίαν – and house.” The noun ἀπόδημος indicates a trip of greater, rather than lesser distance, and the mention of “house” seems redundant, except that the focus of the story is going to be on just that place. But before He left, the man gave to each of His servants “ἐξουσίαν – authority,” the kind that pastors have, (over) the work of Him - τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ.” That phrase is an ellipsis; a figure of speech in which a word (in this case the preposition “over”) needed for the sentence to be grammatically correct is deliberately omitted.

He gave authority to more than one servant, but only to the “θυρωρῷ - door keeper” does He “command that he should be vigilant – ἐνετείλατο ἵνα γρηγορῇ.” The noun θυρωρῷ - door keeper” occurs in the NT here and three times in John; in 10:3, when Jesus talks about the guy who lies down in the opening of the sheepfold at night, acting as a door, and in 18:16-16, where it is used in reference to the servant girl who won't let Peter in to the residence of Caiaphas.

When we leave home, even when we're going a great distance and maybe going to be gone for a week or more, we lock the doors and figure that will deter the casual thief, and it does. Some people have alarms and other security systems to protect their homes. But a simple door lock is for the average Joe are a relatively recent development, and the security system is still out of the reach of most. The θυρωρῷ - door keeper was the only security system available in the NT world, and like a modern security guard, the rest of the staff may be able to relax, but only if the doorkeeper kept alert.

35. I don't know that I'd make too much out of exactly who is the θυρωρῷ, especially since the present imperative command “γρηγορεῖτε οὖν – therefore be vigilant” is in the second person plural, i.e. more than one person. In one regard, all Christians should be vigilant and on guard, but in another regard pastors and other leaders should be especially

vigilant against the enemies of the Church, those who would harm the congregation who are in the building.

There is yet another reason, besides being on the alert for bad guys, why the doorkeeper should be vigilant; “because you don’t know when the master of the house comes.” When He then talks about the different possibilities for the return of the master, He speaks not in terms of which day, but in terms of what the *time* of day. The master may return, Jesus says, at sunset, at midnight, when the rooster crows (before dawn), or at dawn.

36. This may or may not mean that the doorkeeper knew on which exact day the master would return, but it seems clear that the he or she was expected to be vigilant 24/7 because a bad guy can come at any time of the day. But since such a thing is unlikely to happen, the real practical problem for the doorkeeper is that the owner of the house definitely *will* eventually come back, and if he is found not on watch, it could mean his or her job. Heaven forbid should the owner find you sleeping at your post.

37. The final present imperative command “γρηγορεῖτε.- stay awake” now goes out to “all - πάντες,” and if it wasn’t clear before, then it is clear now to whom He is speaking.

Law/Gospel

Last Day/Last Day – The coming of the end of all things should be a frightening prospect for those, like us, who have reason to fear the wrath of God. Knowing that the end will be the beginning of something better, we instead look forward to it in eager expectation.

Humility/Glory – The first time, Jesus came in all humility, including death on a cross. He rose again in glory, ascended in glory, and will return glorious to take us to our final glory, which will last forever.

Sermon Titles

In That Day

Darkened Sun and Falling Stars

Watch

You Can Learn a Lot from a Tree

Hymns

The Day is Surely Drawing Near – LSB 508

Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying – LSB 516

Anything from the *End Times*, *Church*, *Church Militant*, or *Church Triumphant* sections

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Resources

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