

# The End of the World as They Knew It (24:1-35)

Great to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to **Matthew 24**. In the year 2011, a Christian radio broadcaster named Harold Camping announced with *confidence* that the world would end promptly on October 21 of that year. *That* was the day, according to him, that every saved soul would be raptured from this earth and God would lay waste to the rest. And when he made that announcement, a very interesting thing happened: almost no one believed him. Like not even a little bit. But that's at least *partly* because he wasn't exactly a voice of *authority* on the subject by this time. Earlier that same year, he had stated with complete confidence that the world would end on *May 21*. He had also predicted a number of *other* dates for it to occur, dating all the way back to September 6, 1994. Harold Camping was nothing if not persistent.

But Harold Camping is also reflective of a *wing* of Christianity particularly *fascinated* by the end of the world; what some Christians call "the end times." Now truth be told, it's not a *bad* thing to think and study about the day when Jesus comes back. Throughout history, followers of Jesus have *often* talked about and *longed* for that day. I personally think, if anything, a lot of Christians could stand to think a little *more* about all of that than we *do*.

**But for some Christians, it's not just a *longing* for that day; it's almost an *obsession with it*.** And *particularly*, an obsession with determining exactly *when* and *how* it will happen. How to see it *coming*, in other words. These people will often keep a close eye on world events and start connecting dotted lines between *those* events and the events they think the bible speaks of as indicating the end of the world. If you spend much time around these people, they generally don't hesitate to make this obsession known. *Sometimes*, they even have charts and graphs they'll be glad to show you about it all. Or at least *books* about it. Have you guys at least *heard* of people like this?

Okay, so here's the thing...a lot of the things those people believe *come* from the passage we're covering this morning. Matthew chapter 24 is one of a handful of passages in the bible that seem to speak at-length about the end of the world. So if this is your first time with us on a Sunday morning, *hi*. You picked one heck of a week to show up. You are more than welcome to go get more coffee from the lobby; you may *need* it. But for you to know, this isn't like a "normal" thing for us to talk about on Sunday mornings. So maybe give us at least one more chance before you decide to never come back again. But we've been teaching through the book of Matthew line by line for a few years now, and this is the passage we're *on*—so we're gonna go for it.

Now, just to set your expectations correctly, I'm not planning on breaking out any diagrams, charts, or end times calendars during our time this morning. And maybe that's disappointing to some of you—sorry I'm not sorry. But I'm gonna approach things a bit differently than that. And part of that is because I *personally* wonder if people who approach *this* topic in *those* ways haven't actually missed the overall *point* of this passage. In fact, **I wonder if they haven't read this passage precisely the opposite way of how it was intended to be read.**

And, to put it slightly more *positively*, I wonder if this passage isn't a little more practically helpful and relevant than it often gets credit for. And before we're done today, I want to try and show you why I think that. Sound like a plan? Okay, let's dive in to **Matthew 24**, starting in v. 1:

**1** Jesus left the **temple** and was walking **away** when his **disciples** came up to him to call his **attention** to its **buildings**. **2** “Do you **see** all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not **one stone** here will be left on another; **every one** will be **thrown down**.”

So Jesus and his disciples are leaving the temple, where Jesus has been doing some teaching and some confrontation with the religious leaders there. But as they leave, the disciples start pointing out to Jesus how beautiful the temple *is*. And it *was indeed* beautiful. It was absolutely *massive* in scope—one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was thirty-one stories tall, which may not sound like much by today's standards, but in the first century, was almost *unheard* of. It was also constructed with some of the most expensive, magnificent materials on offer: gold, marble, and so on. So the disciples are *amazed* by it all, and they're marveling *about* it to Jesus.

Jesus, however, doesn't seem to be in the *mood*. He responds by telling them that “one stone [of the temple] will not be left on another. They'll all be thrown down.” What Jesus is alluding to there, in all likelihood, is the *destruction* of the temple that would happen in the year AD 70—right about forty years after Jesus says this.<sup>1</sup> Roman armies, under the general Titus, would lay siege to the city of Jerusalem, eventually take over the temple, and then level the entire temple structure to the ground. Jesus here is *predicting* (correctly) that that will happen. Which prompts a *question* from his disciples, v. 3:

**3** As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives (an overlook of sorts that looked back towards the temple), the **disciples** came to him **privately**. “Tell us,” they

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<sup>1</sup> More historical detail on this event [here](#).

said, “when will **this** happen (by which they mean *the destruction of the temple*), **and** what will be the sign of your **coming** and of the end of the age?”

Okay, so a lot of how you understand the rest of this passage *hinges* on how you understand what was just asked, and how Jesus answers it. Here’s how I would summarize it. In the *disciples’* mind, they just asked *one* question: **when will the temple be destroyed and Jesus return?** In the average Jewish person’s mind at the time, those things were going to happen at or *around* the same time: if the temple was destroyed, that must have meant that Jesus had returned and had made all things new. They referred to that moment in history as “the end of the age.” So they are asking Jesus about when *all* of that is going to go down.

But here’s the tricky part: Jesus *answers* as if it is two *separate* questions. *He* answers it as something like this. **Question 1** is **when will the temple be destroyed?** And **Question 2** is **when will Jesus return?** Do you see the difference? ~~In the disciples’ minds, those are the same event. In Jesus’ answer, they are two different events.~~ And a lot of the *confusion* around this passage is that it’s not 100% clear *when* Jesus is talking about *what*. When is Jesus talking about the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and when is he talking about his *return*?

And as you might expect, pretty much no Christians can *agree* on when he is talking about what. So that’s fun. *Some* Christians would say that Jesus is pretty much *only* talking about the destruction of the temple. Other Christians would say he’s pretty much *only* talking about his return. The *majority* of Christians think that he’s talking about some combination of both. But nearly everybody differs on what is *what*. So we’ve got our work cut out for us this morning.

And just for clarity, I do not think I am going to solve for us this *morning*, what Christians going back for centuries have *not* been able to solve. I don’t think that highly of myself. I do sometimes think more highly of myself than I should—I’ll grant you that—but I don’t think *that* highly of myself. So **here’s the plan: I’m going to give you my best crack at it. I’m going to tell you what I think makes the most sense of this passage, tell you that there’s freedom to disagree about some of the particulars, and then circle around to some application at the end that I think all of us can agree on**, regardless of how we see some of the specifics. Sound good? Is this complicated enough for you yet? (Again, coffee’s in the lobby.)

Okay, with that said, let’s take a look at Jesus’ *response* to the disciples—starting in v. 4:

**4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you.**

Okay. **That sentence, I would argue, is the pastoral *intent* behind most everything Jesus is going to say in this passage:** he doesn't want his disciples to be *deceived*. I say that in part because he is going to *repeat* that idea *at least five more* times in this passage before we're done. It seems to be a point of emphasis for him: *don't let anyone deceive you*, Jesus says. **A lot of stuff is about to go down in their world, and Jesus doesn't want them to be in the dark about it or deceived by it.** So now he's going to give them some *specifics* on what he doesn't want them to be deceived *by*—v. 5:

**5** For many will come in my *name*, claiming, 'I am the **Messiah**,' and will **deceive** (there it is again) many. **6** You will hear of **wars** and **rumors of wars**, but see to it that you are not **alarmed**. Such things **must happen**, but the **end is still to come**. **7** **Nation** will rise against **nation**, and **kingdom** against **kingdom**. There will be **famines** and **earthquakes** in various places. **8** All these are the **beginning** of birth pains.

So Jesus just mentioned quite a few big, scary sounding things. *Wars*. *Famines*. *Earthquakes*. And this is one of the places that people will often point to in the bible in order to insist that Jesus is going to return at any moment. They look at the news and see things like the war in Ukraine and go "see? The bible said there would be 'wars and rumors of wars—there it is! Jesus must be coming back in our lifetime!" Or they look at the *earthquakes* in Turkey earlier this year and go "see? The bible said there would be earthquakes—there's earthquakes! Jesus is coming back any day now! Everybody better keep your eyes peeled!" Those people *think* they are simply applying this passage of Scripture.

But I want you to think critically about that perspective with me for just a moment. Because followers of Jesus since the *beginning* of the Christian movement have been witnessing *wars*, and *famines*, and *earthquakes*. And since the *beginning*, at least *some* followers of Jesus have been *convinced* that those things meant the end of the world was imminent. And at least *so far*, none of them have been *correct* in thinking that. (Now, of course, the nature of going around saying things like that is that at *some* point they're going to be right.) But *still*, all of that should at least give us *pause* about understanding these passages that way, should it not?

But I also think **there's an even clearer reason we shouldn't understand what Jesus says that way. And that's the very language he uses.** Look back with me at v. 5-8. According to Jesus, do all of these big, scary sounding things happening mean that the end is *imminent*, or that the end is "still to come"? My bible says "still to come." Do all of

these things mean that we should all be *alarmed*, telling everybody the sky is falling? Or that we *shouldn't* be alarmed? My bible says that we *shouldn't* be alarmed.

And even that *last* part about these being “the beginning of the birth pains”—maybe you read *that* and go, “see!? *Labor* pains means you’re about to have a *baby*! There it is! All of this stuff means Jesus is coming back any moment.” But those of you who have recently had a baby, can I just ask you: when you had your *first labor* pain, did you then immediately pop out a baby? Or were the first labor pains the *beginning* of a very long, grueling process that *eventually* resulted in having a baby? For *most* people at least, it’s the second one.

So here’s what I’m getting at, and **this is vital to how I think we should understand this passage. I think Jesus is telling his disciples, not that all of those things are signs of the end, but that they aren't.** I think he’s trying to prepare them for some things that *will* happen, but that do *not* mean he has come back. So *that* when deceptive people show up in those moments and go “look, it’s me! I’m the Messiah, I’ve come back!” the disciples *know*, in that moment, *not* to believe them. So they aren’t *deceived* by them. Does that make sense? Everybody tracking with me there? Okay, continuing in v. 9:

**9** “Then, Jesus says, ***you*** will be ***handed over*** to be ***persecuted*** and put to ***death***, and you will be ***hated*** by all nations ***because of me***. **10** At ***that*** time many will turn away from the faith and will ***betray*** and ***hate*** each other, **11** and ***many*** false ***prophets*** will appear and (what’s that next word again?) ***deceive*** many people. **12** Because of the increase of ***wickedness***, the love of ***most*** will grow ***cold***, **13** but the ***one*** who stands ***firm*** to the ***end*** will be ***saved***.

Jesus says **not only will bad things happen in the world at large; they’ll also happen to followers of Jesus specifically.** Now, obviously, all of the stuff in *these* verses has *also* been happening ever *since* the day Jesus said it. For the past two thousand years, followers of Jesus around the world have been hated, persecuted, and killed. For the past two thousand years, people have turned away from their faith and hated each other. For the past two thousand years, some people’s love for Jesus has grown cold.

But here *again*, **I think Jesus is speaking specifically to the disciples standing in front of him at the time.** He’s preparing *them* for the grim reality that *they specifically* will be hated, persecuted, handed over to be killed. That *they* will witness people’s love for Jesus grow cold and people hate each other. That *they* will witness the increase in

wickedness. He's warning *them* that all of that is coming so that it doesn't catch them off-guard when it does. *Because*, v. 14...

**14 ~~And~~ this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**

Now, that verse *could* mean that Jesus is waiting to come back until every nation on earth has heard the gospel. In fact, some mission organizations today use this *idea* as a tagline. They say they want to get the gospel to every nation on planet earth, because Jesus said that once that happens, he will come back. That *could* be what Jesus means here. (And just personally, I'm hesitant to argue with *anything* that gets the gospel out to more places that need it, faster. So if reading it that way motivates you to join in those efforts, honestly, all power to you.)

But in context, **this could also very plausibly mean that Jesus isn't going to come back until at least the entire ancient world had heard the gospel.** In other words, what his disciples at the *time* would've *thought* of as the "whole world." So essentially the Roman Empire, and then some.<sup>2</sup> But **either way you read it, the point is that Jesus is waiting until more and more people hear about him before he comes back.** And that his disciples shouldn't assume that just because they are being hated and persecuted and handed over to die, that Jesus has come back and they've been forgotten about. Make sense?

Okay, good because this next part is a real doozy. Verse 15:

**15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—**

Okay, first and most *important* question: if a death metal band *somewhere* does not yet have an album called *The Abomination that Causes Desolation*, what in the world could they be waiting on? I can already *picture* the album artwork in my head. They've gotta get on that. But, *second* most important question: *what in the world is Jesus talking about here?*

Well, Jesus actually gives us a *nudge* in the right direction; he points us to the book of *Daniel*. We won't *turn* there for time's sake, but in chapter 11, there is a mention of an "abomination" that causes "desolation."<sup>3</sup> It *referred* to a time when a *Greek* ruler named Antiochus offered a *pig* as a sacrifice on the temple altar. Pigs, according to Old

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<sup>2</sup> Paul actually uses the phrase "the whole world" to mean this in Romans 1:8.

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Daniel 11:31

Testament law, were unclean animals. So offering a pig on the temple altar, at the holy place, was considered an *abomination*. But here's what's interesting. Years and years *later*, around AD 70, when the *Roman* armies took over the temple, *they too* offered pigs as sacrifices at the temple altar, at the holy place.<sup>4</sup> In other words, history repeated itself. So in all likelihood, *that* is precisely what Jesus is referring to here.

But the *reason* he brings it up is to give his disciples practical instructions on what to *do* when it happens—v. 16:

**16 *then*** (when you see *that happen*) *let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then (or, at that time) there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*

“When you see all of *that happen* at the temple,” Jesus says, “here’s what I want you to do: *run*. Get as far away as you can, as fast as you can. Don’t go back to get anything, don’t look back—just run for the hills. *Literally.*” Now, ***this part of the passage I think almost has to be referring to the destruction of the temple, and not to Jesus’ return.*** I say that for a *few* reasons.

First, it makes perfect *historical* sense. We know from history that almost *immediately* after the Roman armies sacrificed those pigs at the temple, their attack on Jerusalem got even *more* intense. They began killing what would end up being over a million people, most of whom were Jewish, and many of whom were followers of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> They carried another several *hundred thousand* off into slavery. Things got really, really bad in Jerusalem for a while. Jesus here is predicting that that is going to *happen*, and he’s telling his disciples what to do *when* that happens so they can survive.<sup>6</sup>

*Second*, reading it this way makes more *practical* sense than it referring to the future return of Jesus. Because think about it for a second: ***if Jesus is talking about his return, why on earth would he be telling his disciples to run away from it?*** Wouldn’t they want to run *towards* it? But *third*, let’s just *assume* for a second that Jesus *is* talking

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<sup>4</sup> More information [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> More historical details available [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> Luke’s account of this same teaching from Jesus makes this abundantly clear (specifically, Luke 21:20-21).

about his return. That he's telling followers of Jesus everywhere across all time, when they see "the abomination that causes desolation," they should run.

*Practically speaking, how should we obey that instruction from Jesus? Are we watching a livestream of the temple in Jerusalem at all times to know when the "abomination" happens there? There's one major problem with that: this temple is no longer *there*, on account of how it was destroyed. And even if it *was* still there: where exactly do we run when it happens? Do we go to Jerusalem *first* so we can run to the mountains *there*, just like Jesus said? Or do we *contextualize* it and run towards the mountains *here*, where we live? If that one, which mountains? We're in Knoxville—there are mountains literally in every direction! So which way is the right way to run?*

My point is that **we don't have near enough detail to know how to obey what Jesus says here**, if he is giving *us* instructions on what *we* should do, when he returns. / So *all* of this is why, to me, it makes far more sense to think that Jesus is specifically talking to his *immediate* audience, living in first century Jerusalem, who will need to escape the city before Roman armies destroy most everything around them. That, to me, is the best way of understanding what Jesus says. Verse 23:

**23** *At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' ("He has returned!") **do not believe it.** Which, just think about it: would be a somewhat *odd* thing for Jesus to say if he *was* in fact talking about his return. Because that would mean that whoever is saying those things, would be *right!* It would be *correct* to believe them! Verse 24... **24** *For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to **deceive**, if possible, even the **elect.** **25** See, I have told you **ahead** of time. **26** "So if anyone tells you, '**There he is, out in the wilderness,**' do not go out; or, '**Here he is, in the inner rooms,**' **do not believe it.** Again: weird thing for Jesus to say if those people would, in effect, be telling the *truth.* **27** **For** (and notice this next part) *as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, **so will be the coming of the Son of Man.** **28** Wherever there is a carcass, **there** the vultures will gather.***

Here's what Jesus is saying there: **when he does in fact return, we'll know.** We won't be wondering and speculating about whether or not it happened or *is* happening. We won't be wondering whether or not to believe people who say it's happening. There will be no ambiguity about it: we'll *know.* So, Jesus says, *don't believe people that come and tell you "Jesus has come back! It's already happened, he's over there!"* You do not need anyone to tell you it has happened; because when it does, you will *know.*

Now, this *next* part is where it admittedly gets a bit dicey, *interpretively* speaking. But we'll work through it together. Take a look at it with me at v. 29:

**29** “*Immediately after the distress of those days* “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ **30** “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. **31** And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

So a lot of us probably read this part and assume that it *has to be* talking about Jesus’ return. After all, it does say that people will “see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven...” And that certainly *would be* the *plainest* reading of these verses: that Jesus is now talking about his return. But at the same time, I don’t know that these verses are *necessarily* about that. Best I can see it, you’ve got **two options on how to understand v. 29-31**. Both options have some advantages and some disadvantages. I’ll try to unpack each option for you briefly. (So just as a fair warning: the next minute or two is going to feel the slightest bit like a seminary-level bible interpretation class. So about ten of you are going to love that, and the other couple hundred of you may want to use this time to catch up on your email.)

Either way, here are your options. **Option A** is that **Jesus** has indeed now shifted topics, and **is talking about his return**. As I said, that would certainly be the *plainest* reading of these verses. But reading it that way also creates a *problem*. Namely, a problem with the *timing* Jesus seems to lay out in the passage. Because in just a few verses, Jesus is going to say that all of this is going to happen “before *this generation*” passes away.<sup>7</sup> And every *other* time Jesus uses that language in the gospels, it means the generation of people alive at the time he says it.<sup>8</sup> In Hebrew thinking, a “generation” was a way of saying “about forty years.” So **if Jesus here is talking about his return, that means that either he was mistaken about thinking he would return in the next forty years, or that he did return in the next forty years, and all of us missed it** (which would be a bummer, to say the least). So **while that is the plainest reading, it also makes some of what Jesus says confusing at the best, and inaccurate at the worst**. So that leads us to...

**Option B**. Which is that **Jesus is still talking about the destruction of the temple**. Which would mean that the bulk of what he says in v. 29-31 is meant *figuratively*, and not

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<sup>7</sup> See v. 34

<sup>8</sup> See Matthew 11:16, 12:38-45, 23:36

*literally*. He doesn't mean the sun will *literally* go dark; he means it will *feel* like that to the people experiencing it. He doesn't *literally* mean he'll ride on the clouds; he means he will be revealed to be the Messiah in some sort of obvious, transcendent sort of way. Now, reading the bible *figuratively* does make some people uncomfortable, because a lot of the bible *shouldn't* be read figuratively. But there is precedent for *Jesus* using figurative language in the bible.<sup>9</sup> *And* there is precedent for this *specific* type of language being used figuratively in *other* places in the bible.<sup>10</sup> That doesn't *necessarily* mean that's what *Jesus* is doing *here*, but it does mean it's at least *possible*. Not out of the question. But *again*, all of that would obviously depart from the *plainest* reading of these verses. Which sometimes *is* a risky way to read the bible.

~~And if all *that* wasn't *enough* for us to consider, there's also a surprise **option C** that combines A & B. There is a possibility **Jesus is talking about both** events: his return, *and* the destruction of the temple. There is something scholars call "prophetic telescoping," where people in the bible will often talk about *multiple* future events using identical language.<sup>11</sup> So *Jesus could*, in some sense, be talking about *both* things here, some of it figuratively, and some of it literally. And to all of that *you* might ask, "Well which one do *you* think it is, Kent?" And my *answer* is that it depends on the day. I think any of those are really good answers. And I think some parts of the bible are difficult to understand. Anyway, have fun with all that! Godspeed to you.~~

The *good* news is that we have now arrived at the final verses of our passage. Those of you catching up on email can come back and join us now; welcome back. Everyone look with me at v. 32:

**32** *"Now learn this lesson from the **fig tree**: (y'all remember fig trees, from chapter 21? Ah, those were simpler times, weren't they? Anyway...) As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that **summer** is **near**. **33** Even so, when you see all **these things** (which things? We're not exactly sure, but some collection of all the things *Jesus* just mentioned), you know that it is **near**, right at the door. **34** Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all **these things** have happened. **35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

Okay. So regardless of the *uncertainties* about this passage, *here*, I think, is the point. We've been talking a *lot* this morning about the *trees*. Let's zoom out for a moment and look at the *forest*. / What did I say was the *pastoral intent* of this passage, back at the

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Matthew 5:29-30.

<sup>10</sup> See Isaiah 13:10, Isaiah 34:4, Ezekiel 32:7, Joel 2:10, Joel 2:31, Zephaniah 1:15, as well as Daniel 7:13-14.

<sup>11</sup> This is also sometimes called *dual fulfillment* of prophecy. [Details here](#).

beginning? That the disciples wouldn't be *what? Deceived*. Jesus doesn't want them to be *deceived*. The disciples are going to see a lot of things *change* in their lifetimes. A lot of *upheaval*. A lot of *violence, suffering, heartache, tragedy*. They're going to witness it from a *distance* (with "wars, famines, and earthquakes"), and from up *close* as they and people they *love* are persecuted, tortured and killed.

And knowing that they are going to experience *all* of that, Jesus wants to make sure that they aren't *confused* about it. On the *one* hand, he doesn't want them to look around at all of that and wonder if maybe Jesus has *already* come back and they *missed* it somehow. That he has just left them to fend for themselves; that he actually *isn't* coming back at *all*.<sup>12</sup> **Jesus is trying to help his disciples prepare in *advance* for all of that to happen, and help them know how to think and act *when* it happens.**

So with that intention, he says here in v. 35: "*heaven and earth* may pass away, but *my words* will *never* pass away." "Heaven and earth" was a well-known Jewish expression meaning basically, "everything that there is." Kind of like we would say "from beginning to end." **Jesus is telling his disciples that seemingly *everything*—that the *world as they know it*—may cease to exist before their eyes.** Not the end of *the* world, but certainly the end of *a* world; the world that they *knew*. A lot of things they know and love may be going away. **But he wants them to know that *none* of that means his words aren't true.** *None* of that means that Jesus has abandoned or forgotten about his people. *None* of that means that his promises aren't true or that they can't be trusted. Their world may in fact become a *terrifying* place before their eyes; and yet, *none* of that is going to stop Jesus from accomplishing his purposes. And, one day, making all things new.

And in *those* ways, I think Jesus' words in this passage cut their way straight through history, directly to *us*. Because *our* world can also be a terrifying place, just like *theirs* was. A *broken* place. We *regularly* witness its brokenness on a grand scale—every day that we unlock our phones and hear about tragedy after tragedy after tragedy. Most of us *also* experience its brokenness on a *personal* level—the brokenness in our *family* and *friends* and *relationships* and coworkers. We experience brokenness in our *own hearts* and *minds*. All of those things are realities for *us*, just like they were realities for *them*.

And just like *them*, we might be tempted to witness all of that, day after day, and draw the conclusion that Jesus either already *has* come back, and now he's left us to fend for ourselves—or just that this whole thing is a sham and we should stop acting like there's some grand light at the end of the tunnel. There are *plenty* of voices who will *encourage*

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<sup>12</sup> See Matthew 24:48-51

us to draw *those conclusions* from our situation. But in the midst of it all, I think Jesus speaks to his disciples, and directly to us. He says this: “*heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away.*” *Do not lose heart. Do not give up. Mourn and grieve, sure—but do not despair.* “The one who endures to the end will be saved.”

Mark my words: Jesus *will* return. And *when* he returns, we will *know*. On that day, he will set every single thing right that has gone wrong on this earth. He will wipe away every tear from every eye, and there will be no such thing as pain, suffering, death, or tragedy ever again for those that follow Jesus.<sup>13</sup> That day is *coming*, Jesus says. *Those words can be trusted.* Heaven and earth may pass away, but *his words will never pass away.* So in the meantime, we wait. *Now*, we don’t *just wait*—there is work to be done in the meantime. We’ll get to all of that in the next few weeks. But we wait with *confidence* that he has not forgotten us; he has not abandoned us. He *will* make all things new.

And we can *know* all of that because even on the day when things looked the darkest for *Jesus*, on the cross, he was actually accomplishing the *most*. He was demonstrating for us that his words can in fact be trusted, even when things around us are at their absolute worst. So each Sunday as a community, we go to the tables together and we remember *that* day. The day where it looked like darkness—suffering, tragedy, death—had won. But turns out it hadn’t—not by a long shot. And as we go to the tables, we *remember* all of that. We celebrate all of that. And we look *forward* to the day that he makes all things new. Where we will eat and drink with him in the new heavens and the new earth,<sup>14</sup> where death and tragedy is no more.

Amen? *Amen*. Let’s pray together...

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<sup>13</sup> See Revelation 21:2-4

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 26:29, Isaiah 25:6