

The Day of the Lord: What, When, and How Should It Affect Me Now?

1. Warm up: At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff mentioned that he's made a New Year's Resolution to preach briefer sermons. A couple weeks ago, some of us shared some of our New Year's Resolutions (serious or silly). Remind us what your resolution was (if any) and tell us if you're managing to keep it so far.

2. Sunday was the third installment in our sermon series called "By Their Fruits You Will Know Them – 8 Core Characteristics of Authentic Followers of Jesus." We've already seen that authentic followers of Jesus are people who: (1) receive and share lots of grace; and (2) have a heart of service that permeates their approach to life. The third installment in this series focused on the Second Coming of Christ and how that should affect us as followers of Jesus. Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled. . . . I will come again and take you to myself so that where I am you may also be." John 14:1-3. After his resurrection, as Jesus ascended into heaven, an angel said to his disciples, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:11.
 - a. If you grew up in church, what did they teach about the Second Coming of Jesus – and how did that affect you?
 - b. At this point in your life, how do you feel about the End of the Age and the Second Coming. Does the subject evoke fear or excitement within you? Are you curious or uninterested in the subject? Is this something you take seriously or dismissively?
 - c. Why do you think so many people are so fascinated by Biblical End Times prophecies?

3. Jesus' longest discourse on the End of the Age is found in Matthew chapters 24 and 25. Let's read the first part of that discourse, Matthew 24:1-8 and 42-44, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Jesus' discourse was prompted by the disciples' amazement as they gazed at the Jerusalem temple. This was the most incredible structure they'd ever seen, and they must have thought it would stand forever. Psychologists sometimes call this the "hypnosis of normalcy," *i.e.*, our human tendency to subconsciously assume that what is now will always be. When in your life has something happened that shattered the "hypnosis of normalcy" for you?
 - b. Ever since Jesus in his discourse identified signs that would foreshadow the End of the Age, people have gone to extraordinary lengths to compare those signs to earthly events in an effort to figure out how close we are to the end. Many different elaborate, detailed theories have been produced. But it's important to remember that, even as Jesus gave us signs to watch for, he added a very important word of caution, saying, "About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the

- Son, but only the Father.” Matthew 24:36. Then, for emphasis, Jesus repeated himself a second time, saying, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” Matthew 24:42. Note that verse 36 tells us that even Jesus himself didn’t know when the end would be. Why do you think even he didn’t know?
- c. Why do people fervently persist in predicting the End of the Age despite Jesus’ warnings that we will never be able to figure it out?
4. Jeff suggested that most theories of the End of the Age can be placed in one of three basic categories, as summarized in the chart on p. 4 below. Although everyone is reading the same prophetic passages, interpretations have differed widely. Many Christians believe that, as the end approaches, the world will spin out of control in a downward spiral of evil that’s so awful, Jesus will have to intervene to end to the world as we know it, and that’s when the Reign of Christ – the Golden Age – will begin. But many other Christians – actually, the majority of Christians – believe just the opposite. They believe a time is coming when the message of Jesus will be so thoroughly embraced throughout the world that we’ll actually experience an upward spiral of goodness the naturally paves the way for the dawning of the Golden Age Reign of Christ on earth. And yet other Christians believe that the Biblical prophecies are applicable to every generation of humanity – that in every generation we experience an intense struggle between the Apocalyptic forces of evil and the goodness of God vying for ascendancy, creating a seesaw cycle that produces a stalemate until God finally says, “Enough, it’s time” and Jesus returns to inaugurate the Golden Age.
 - a. Although none of us can be sure, which of these three interpretations most resonates with you – and why?
 - b. Jeff said he believes that any one of the three interpretations could end up being correct depending on the choices we humans make. In other words, maybe God has set an unalterable end point, *i.e.*, one way or another we’re going to get to the Golden Age Reign of Christ. But maybe out of deference to human free will, God has deliberately stepped back far enough that we, humanity as a collective, get to choose which of these three paths will get us there – the downward spiral, the upward spiral, or the circular stalemate. All of which would mean that the choices we make in the here and now – individually and collectively – REALLY MATTER because those choices all factor into the mix that will determine how we get to the End of the Age. What do you make of this theory? Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 5. So if God told us to expect and watch for the End of the Age, but also told us that we’re not going to be able to figure out when or how it will happen, what’s the point? Why did God bother to give us the signs and tell us to expect and watch. Several Bible verses suggest an answer. At the end of his discourse about the End of the Age, Jesus summed up by saying, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. . . . Blessed is the servant whose master will find them at work when he arrives.” Matthew 24:42, 46. And Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not grow weary in doing

what is right for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” So the reason for all the Bible prophecies about the End of the Age seems to be: to create a keen awareness within us that however bad things get, we should not give up because, in the end, goodness will prevail, love will win – one way or another, sooner or later, the Reign of Christ will come. And that gives us hope, and that hope gives us energy and incentive to press forward no matter how great the odds against us may seem. **This then is the third core characteristic of authentic followers of Jesus: We never give up because we know that, one way or another, the Day of the Lord is coming!**

- a. Being a follower of Jesus, Jeff said, is kinda like being a Colts fan. We never give up on the Colts because we know that someday, sooner or later, one way or another, they’ll make it back to the Superbowl again. In your personal life right now, where are you tempted to “grow weary in doing what is right” and give up?
- b. Given the way the world is going right now, where are you tempted to “grow weary in doing right” and give up?
- c. Giving up is fundamentally at odds with being a follower of Jesus because we know that, in the end, the goodness of God will prevail and that when and how that happens depends in part on us – what we do and don’t do. Remember, Jesus said that the kingdom of God, *i.e.*, the Reign of Christ, begins within each of us. Luke 17:20. Given what we’ve talked about tonight, where in your life right now are you feeling challenged to reclaim hope and defiantly refuse to yield to despair?

Matthew 24:1-8, 42-44

As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ²Then he asked them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ ⁴Jesus answered them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Messiah!” and they will lead many astray. ⁶And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: ⁸all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

How Will The End Come? Three Different Interpretations

