

Title: Consummation
Date: 07/28/24
Subject: Jesus Christ will come again to bring all things to God's planned conclusion.
Scripture: Mark 13:28-37

The Green Bay Packers kick off the 2024 NFL season by playing in Brazil...of all places...against the Philadelphia Eagles. Now that Jordan Love has been signed, things look a little rosier. I can tell you the score of the game before it even starts. Surprised? Absolutely no problem. Zero to zero.

The disciples wanted to know the score, specifically about the future. Sometimes it was in the near future. They had wanted to know what was going to happen to them as they had left everything to follow Jesus.

And now, just a few days before Christ's death, they were looking long term. They may have felt a little sheepish. They had witnessed Jesus silence his enemies who had tried to trap him with what they felt were difficult questions. Then they watched Jesus elevate a poor widow's unselfish giving of all she had as being greater than those who threw in large sums of money.

The disciples' opportunity came when they were leaving the temple. They called Jesus' attention to the it - its massive stones, magnificent buildings adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God.

The temple was magnificent. It took 46 years to complete and was finished just a few years before Jesus' final visit, so it still had that fresh gold smell. Herod had spent a fortune restoring and expanding the temple complex and the temple itself. One of the decorations he provided was a golden vine with grape clusters as tall as a person. Some of the stones were massive – 37 feet long, 12 feet high and 18 feet wide. First century Jewish author Josephus said, "Whatever was not overlaid with gold was purest white" (Jewish War, 5.5.6).

Jesus redirected their attention. He told them "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). Jesus' statement was tough to swallow. They wanted clarity. "The temple? Destroyed? That would mean something bad is coming this way, something like... the end." "When will the destruction of the temple happen?" And while they had Jesus' ear, they figured it was as good a time as any – how about the sign this will take place, and while we're at it, how about the sign for your coming back to earth and the sign for the end of the age (Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:4, Luke 21:7).

Not exactly "What time is supper? What are we going to eat? And is it almost ready?"

The biblical record devotes a great deal of space to Jesus' answer in what is known as the Olivet Discourse. Some of it is direct teaching. Some of it is in vibrant language – "for as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man...For 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" (Matthew 24:27, 29). Some of it comes through parables.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple took place in 70 AD. The Romans decimated the population during the battle or starving to death 1,000,000 people leaving a remnant of 100,000 who became

slaves. They knocked down the temple, stripped it of its gold and pried apart the stones to collect the gold that had melted from when temple was set on fire. Jesus warned his followers to be on the lookout and be prepared to flee. From that time on, the Jewish people would suffer the ongoing destiny of being trampled on and dominated by foreign powers.

This leaves the questions about Jesus' coming. We know the "who." What we want to know is what, where, when and how. We'll look into some of what Jesus has to say through one of the parables he used. Please turn to Mark 13 where we find the parable of the fig tree. Jesus had previously cursed a fig tree, but that's as far as the connection goes. Here he uses the fig tree as a simple agricultural lesson.

READ Mark 13:28-37

The title for the message today is Consummation. The term marks the completion of God's intended purposes for human life on earth. It's the end of all things, when the Son of Man comes in power and with great glory and God will usher in a state of perfection in heaven.

Jesus directs attention to the fig tree. When the twigs get tender and the leaves come out, you know summer is near. Pretty elementary horticultural science.

The equivalent of approaching signs of summer is that leading up to consummation there'll be opposition, deception, persecution, wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, signs in the heavens. This means the consummation is right at the door. Earlier Jesus said these signs are the beginning of birth pains (Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8). The beginning of birth pains - the little feelings of discomfort, physical signs that things are progressing, but the baby's coming isn't super imminent. The beginning of birth pains pointing to his coming have been happening since he left the planet. Jesus says that in spite of the pains that are coming, his people are to look forward in hope. His coming is just around the corner, right at the door.

This brings us to another interesting phrase in v. 30. Reread.

This has been understood as some of the people who were alive during the time of Jesus would still be alive when Jerusalem would be destroyed in 40 years' time. "Generation" would be understood as the gap between ages of various generations. If Jesus is pointing to his second coming, "generation" could point to the Jewish people group existing until the end. It also might refer to a future generation when these signs are becoming super intense. I think the best understanding is Jesus uses "generation" to speak to people who were living during his time and would witness the destruction of Jerusalem.

This fits with the contrast Jesus provides in v. 31. "Heaven and earth will pass away." We humans kind of grow attached to this planet. We have air to breathe, food to eat, scenery to enjoy, relationships. We shouldn't grow too attached. A time is coming when the entire planet and all the heavens will vanish. Gone. Zippo. Nada. Kablooey. All of humanity will be involved in the unprecedented change Jesus is bringing.

Jesus doesn't specifically mention it here, but he's not going to annihilate people and or send them into an eternal nothingness. He will bring about a new heaven and a new earth. It's the place where we who are his followers will live forever.

His immediate point is the entire physical universe will go away. In contrast, there's something that will last forever. His words. His words are truth and his truth is marching on and will continue to march on and on and on and on. His truth can't be changed or altered. It's constant, unwavering and will continue into and through eternity.

The timing of the glorious unfolding is unknown. The angels in heaven don't know the day or the hour nor does the Son of God. Wait. What? Rewind. The Son of God doesn't know the day or hour? It's fine for the angels not to be in on the plan because they aren't God and they possess limited knowledge. But Jesus - who is fully man and fully God not knowing? How is it possible for the one who is God to possess all knowledge and not know something? Simplest answer: Jesus didn't know the time of his return as he chose not to apply his knowledge. And if Jesus didn't know the time of his return, those who claim to be able to pinpoint the time, they don't know either.

We'd like to have a timetable. We'd like to have events laid out for us - ten years before Jesus comes back, this will happen; five years before, that will happen; two weeks before... one day before.

Sadly, some of that interest is so people, including Christians, can live the way they want and wait till the countdown gets close. Then get straightened out with God. However, a timeline would be a hindrance to our faith and trust in God.

Luke's account speaks to what people might do when it seems like God is delaying. It directly applies to Christ's return but also to God acting in our lives. "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life" (Luke 21:34).

Look at the last one first. Anxieties are the cares and concerns of this life, a preoccupation with the things of this life - getting ahead or at least caught up with others, power, prestige. This can lead to an attitude of despair, worry, and fear over our situations, the world's situation. Anxiety can be expressed through blaming God for what's happening or not happening in the world and in our lives. It could lead to giving in to the temptation to take life easy as Jesus hasn't come back yet, so maybe he won't come back for a while. That attitude can weigh us down and allow the world to overcome us. We're to calm down and not get distracted by the world. Jesus assures his followers that he'll return.

Others get into sins. Dissipation is overindulgence and degeneracy. Drunkenness is well, drunkenness. Sin is another way to be weighed down and overcome by the world which is becoming more anti-God.

Jean and I wanted to watch some of the opening ceremonies of the Olympics Friday night. It's interesting to see the athletes make their grand entrance into the stadium. However, in Paris, they were on boats coming down the Seine River. We didn't watch very much of the coverage as they interspersed French style entertainment with the parade of athletes. We heard one was going to be an immoral and blasphemous depiction of The Last Supper. It turned my stomach against wanting to watch any of coverage.

The warning from Jesus is about the day closing unexpectedly like a trap because it will come upon all those who live on the face of the earth (Luke 21:34, 35). People won't be prepared.

Peter writes about scoffers in the last times: “Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4). A sizable worldview at the time of Christ believed history was a treadmill (Stoics). Every 3000 years or so the earth would burn up and start over at the beginning. Humanity was stuck in a rut. There was no movement toward a climax, no end goal.

People can get the feeling that Christ’s second coming isn’t going to happen as it hasn't happened yet and there's no indication it's going to happen anytime soon. People think they may as well eat, drink and be merry because this is all there is - just enjoy life and vanish when it’s over. No need to be concerned.

The warning given to scoffers and those who doubt Christ's return is to remember God created the heavens and the earth was formed out of water and he used water to judge the people in the days of Noah. Almost every culture has a consciousness of what the Lord did as they have a flood story of people being judged and only a few people living. Sadly, they’ve often given credit to some false god.

Matthew’s account of the parable of the fig tree includes Jesus’ teaching about the days of Noah: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Everybody except eight people were living life as usual. They had no concerns about the future and weren't looking toward it. They focused on how great a life they could have in the present. They didn't give any heed to Noah's warnings about an impending judgment and their need to turn to the Lord. Jesus said it'll be the same way in the days leading up to his return.

Back in Mark - The solution offered by Jesus is given in v. 33: “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.” The Savior gives an illustration of a man who has put his servants in charge and tells them to conduct his business while he’s gone and to keep watching for him to return. They were to be ready, be prepared.

Jesus applies his story by making himself the owner of the house who will be coming back at an unknown time. The instruction is to keep watch because you don't know when he's coming. He shouldn't find us sleeping on the job, which is another way of saying living lives that we shouldn't be. We’re to anticipate his return at any moment. Jesus ends by saying to everyone “Watch!” The narrative in Luke speaks of being able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21: 36). Faithfully. Nothing to be ashamed of.

Matthew’s account adds another illustration. Jesus speaks of a homeowner. If he'd known when the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and not let his house be broken into. He'd be ready. Lights on. Phone set to 911. Shotgun on his lap. Or MacCauley Caulkin in the Home Alone movies.

Jesus concludes, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at the hour when you do not expect him.”

Watching is a constant theme throughout Jesus’ teaching and the rest of scripture. It's never pictured as sitting, staring into the sky, cloud gazing to see if we can find Jesus coming through them. Where’s Jesus?

Watching always stresses the element of being actively engaged in the concerns of Christ - love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, love your neighbor as yourself, make disciples of all nations. As we engage in our Master's business, we're to watch out for those who try to deceive. Be on the lookout for Christ to return. Live in such a way that we're prepared. Watching and alertness is front and center in other parables. Through the parable of the ten virgins, he tells us to keep watch because we don't know the day or hour of his return (Matthew 25:1-13).

Our VBS focused on the 7 C's of history. The last one is consummation which fits perfectly with where we've come to in our study of Christ's life. Quiz the VBS staff to make sure they're still alert after a long week. History began with Creation with God making everything "very good" (green, animal pal Eden the green parrot). Corruption. Adam and Eve disobeyed God allowing sin and death to enter the world to affect everyone (dark, Tox the dart frog). Catastrophe. God judged the world by sending the Flood and starting again, with Noah and his family (blue, Tox). Confusion. Humanity repopulated the earth and joined together to achieve what they wanted in rebellion against God. He confused their language people resulting in people scattering over the earth (Gray, Scatter the silverback gorilla). Christ. People existed that way until Christ entered the world bringing the good news of salvation (white and red, Rose the pink river dolphin). Cross. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died on the cross to pay for our sins and give us the gift of eternal life. Consummation. Bringing people who place their trust in Jesus to their eternal home in heaven (yellow, Bliss the birdwing butterfly).

Alexander Maclaren: "Christ's revelation of the future was not meant to gratify idle curiosity or to supply a timetable in advance, but to bring encouragement and lead to watchfulness. The exhortation is as applicable to us, for whatever our views about unfulfilled prophecy, death comes to us all at a time which we know not. We are to preserve an attitude of wakefulness and of expectancy, and to clear our hearts of perishable delights and short sighted, self-consuming cares, keeping ourselves in a continual posture of supplication. If our study of prophecy does that for us, it will have done what Jesus meant it to do. If it does not, it matters little what theories about the future's chronology we may adopt" (closer walk, 12/26/89).

Another man asks: "What good should the revealed plan of God for the future produce in the lives of his people? Wonder. Gratitude. Humility. Praise. Obedience. Watchfulness. Endurance. Witnessing to the lost" Bob Deffinbaugh, bible.org/seriespage/11-God-s-plan-future).