



11. End Times

In the darkness of the morning, Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside an empty tomb. A few days ago her beloved teacher and best friend had been crucified and killed by Roman soldiers. He was the one whom she had been led to believe was the Son of God, her Savior. When he died, she felt like all her hopes and dreams died with him.

Now, on Sunday morning, Mary and a few other women had come to visit Jesus' grave. When they arrived they found an unpleasant surprise. The stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away, and his body was gone. Mary was crushed. Not only had she lost her Savior and friend in a brutal, public execution, now she wouldn't even have a chance to mourn over his body. It was too much to bear.

As she stood outside the tomb, weeping in the gathering light of dawn, she was joined by a man who stood beside her and also peered into the grave. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Blinded by tears but assuming he was the caretaker of the cemetery, Mary pleaded with him: "If you have carried him away, please tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

He responded with one word: "Mary." At that word she looked up and saw a familiar face - the face of a man who had delivered her from demon possession, the face of a man who had taught her the meaning of forgiveness for the very first time, the face of a man that she never thought she would see again. It was Jesus!

Mary rushed to him, crying out "Teacher!" and almost knocked him over with a huge hug. She could scarcely believe it, but it was true - Jesus had risen from the dead! And at once, all his promises came rushing back to her. Hadn't Jesus promised that he was "the resurrection and the life?" Hadn't Jesus promised that all who believe in him would one day rise from their graves and join him for eternal life in heaven? Jesus, her Savior, was alive, and that meant that all of his promises were true.

(adapted from John 20)

This lesson deals with the "end times." What will happen at the end of our life? What will happen at the end of the world? Because of Jesus' resurrection on Easter, Christians do not have to be afraid. Like Mary, we have a Savior who gives us victory and eternal life.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON DIES?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

What happens when a person dies? The body and soul are separated. The body deteriorates, while the soul goes to God.

Read Luke 16:19-26.

What happens to the soul? Scripture teaches the realities of two states of existence after physical death: heaven and hell. In this parable, the beggar died and went to heaven. The rich man died and went to hell.

Luke 23:42-43 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The criminal on the cross next to Jesus went to heaven.

John 5:28-29 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”

One of the Bible’s most important teachings is that of the physical resurrection. One day, perhaps long after we have physically died, Christ will return to earth. He will raise every person’s body from the grave to be reunited with their soul for all eternity.

Summing up. . . .

- When a person dies, their soul separates from their body and goes to either heaven or hell.
- The body becomes dust, while the soul remains in either heaven or hell until Judgment Day.
- On Judgment day, all bodies will be raised and will go to be with their souls in either heaven or hell.

Let’s talk more about Judgment Day. . . .

WHEN WILL JUDGMENT DAY HAPPEN?

Read Matthew 24:3-14

Before Jesus comes again, certain things will happen. Here are some “signs of the times:”

- In society, there will be wars
- In nature, there will be natural disasters
- In the church, false prophets will arise and persecution will increase
- The gospel will be preached throughout the world (very last “sign” - after this the end will come)

How many of these signs had already been fulfilled when Jesus spoke these words to his disciples? How many of them have already been fulfilled today?

Read Matthew 24:42-44

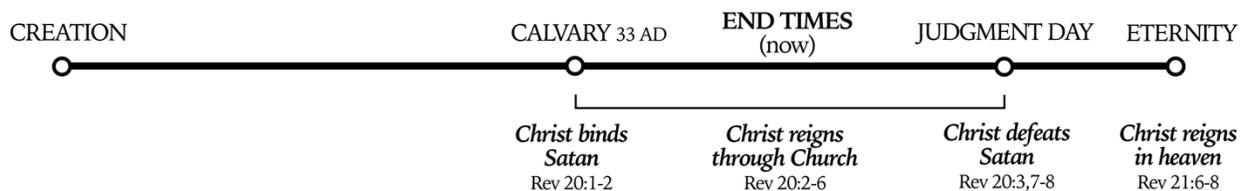
Only God knows the exact time, but Judgment Day is drawing very near.

A word about Revelation. . . .

The book of Revelation, a series of apocalyptic visions God gave to the Apostle John around 95 A.D., is one of the most misunderstood and abused books in the whole Bible. Many people have read Revelation and become terrified about all the crazy things that might happen at the end of the world.

But Revelation doesn’t need to scare us. John’s visions give us an intense, vivid, and often symbolic perspective on what is actually a very simple chronology:

- 2,000 years ago, Christ defeated and “bound” Satan when he died on the cross.
- Today Christ reigns on the earth - his kingdom is in the hearts of his people.
- One day soon, Christ will come again to permanently destroy Satan and bring us to heaven.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON JUDGMENT DAY?

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

Revelation 1:7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.

What will it be like when Jesus comes again? Although the first time he came (Christmas) Jesus quietly was born in a stable, the second time (Judgment Day) he will return in his full glory, descending from the clouds, and all people will see him.

Read John 5:24-29.

When Jesus comes again, all the dead (both believers and unbelievers) will rise from the grave to face judgment. And the judge will be Jesus.

- What will Jesus' verdict be for us? Why?
- Is it scary to know that on Judgment Day, Jesus will be your judge? Why or why not?

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Philippians 3:21 And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

There will be an amazing transformation of the universe, as well as an amazing transformation of our mortal bodies. (1 Corinthians 15 has many more details on this.) Just like Adam and Eve, believers will once again live in a perfect world with perfect bodies designed to live forever. Only this time, there will be no serpent to interfere with God's perfect plan.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

- Summarize the timeline of Judgment Day events, according to these passages.
- Contrast the Christian response to death with that of the rest of the world.

TAKING IT DEEPER

Agree or disagree

- All who believe in God will go to heaven.
- All unbelievers are going to hell.
- We can take comfort that even though our Christian loved ones die, they are always with us, watching over us everywhere we go.
- Hell is a place of everlasting fire.
- If we explore outer space far enough, we might find heaven.
- When Jesus comes, he will rule on earth for 1,000 years.

OPTIONAL:

When is a person prepared for the end of life?

Philippians 1:21-25 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.

2 Peter 1:13-15 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Luke 2:25-32 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (Isaiah 25:8) 55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (Hosea 13:14) 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

OPTIONAL: Discuss “What Do Historians Say About the Resurrection?” - Appendix, p. 98

Handouts

- Different views of the End Times and the difference it makes

- How should we view the pope?