

Hope Isn't Magic. It's Work.

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 November 2020

Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[0 : 0 0] Hey friends, we are in a brief little two-week series called Apocalypse, a How-To Guide. And I wanted to spend just a couple weeks as we kind of head towards the end of the year and Christmas and all that thinking about the end of the world, because we've probably been thinking about it in general this year.

So let's talk about what the Bible says about it, what God says about the end of the world. Last week, we spent some time in 2 Peter explaining that the world is not disposable, that there is a really toxic theology out there that says that, hey, the world is just going to be burned up and destroyed at the end of time, so us Christians are just kind of waiting for that day.

We don't need to have any concern about what's going on on the planet. God's going to scoop us up and stick us up in heaven, so let the world burn. This is bad theology. It's not what Scripture teaches.

And we're going to kind of keep going on that route today and thinking about, okay, so what does Scripture teach about the end of the world and our role that we play in it?

And we did it in eight questions. I put some questions up on, or like a Q&A; thing up on Instagram. People submitted questions. Also, of course, have my own kind of agenda of what I want to say today.

[1 : 0 9] So let's dive into it. Question number one, when is the end of the world? Somebody actually asked me for the day and time. I think it was tongue-in-cheek. So a couple of different answers. Number one answer to question number one, when is the end of the world?

You're in it right now, and not just because it's 2020, ha-ha. Scripture actually has this notion. Jesus had this notion. The New Testament, the early Christian church had this notion that the end of the world started sometime around the life of Jesus.

When God took on flesh in the person of Jesus, and Jesus went around doing good, healing, feeding, calling out systems of oppression, dying on a cross, defeating the powers of death and Satan, and the enemy, and being resurrected, starting the new creation project in Jesus' resurrection, that started the end of the world.

Acts chapter 2 talks about how this prophecy from Joel about the sun being blotted out, and the moon going dark, and the Spirit being poured out on all people, is fulfilled with the church, with the Holy Spirit being given to the church.

At least three times in the New Testament, we're told that the world as we know it is passing away right now. We are living in the transition between the world that was and the world that is to come.

[2 : 2 9] Imagine a Venn diagram of the world that was and the world that is to come. I don't know what my thumbs are doing. And there's that little shaded part in the middle of the Venn diagram. That's where we are right now.

The old thing is passing away, and the new thing is still being born, and we are in that in-between time. Now, I think the person who is asking their tongue-in-cheek question on Instagram was wondering, like, when specifically is Jesus coming back?

Because that's historically what Christians have been looking forward to, the day when Jesus returns. When is that? There was a book published in 1988 called 88 Reasons Why Jesus Is Coming Back in 1988.

It didn't work out, so the author then wrote a book called 89 Reasons Why Jesus Is Coming Back in 1989. It didn't sell nearly as many copies as you can imagine. Christians have always thought, like every generation of the church, has always had this notion that they were the last ones.

And there's something good about that, because that propels us, that energizes us to be up to God's work, bringing the restoration and renewal of all things. But we also should probably stop setting times and dates on the end of the world, because we just always get it wrong.

[3 : 43] Number two, question number two, someone asks, Is the rapture before the seven-year tribulation? Halfway through? After? So, if you don't know what the rapture is, consider yourselves lucky.

The idea of the rapture was invented sometime in the 1830s. And in the 1830s, there was this guy named John Darby, and John Darby came across 1 Thessalonians 4.16, that says, Jesus himself will come down, and those who are still alive will be caught up in the air with them, and will meet the Lord in the air.

And he came up with this idea of the rapture, that Jesus' return would be split up into two parts, a secret coming, and then the actual real coming that everybody would know about. The secret coming, the dead in Christ and those who are still alive would be scooped up by Jesus, put up in the clouds, and be sent off into heaven, while the rest of the world was left to burn for about seven years.

And then Jesus would have his actual return, and everybody knew about it and said everything right. Now, Christians have always believed that Jesus was going to come back, but this whole, like, two-part coming, secret coming, public coming, brand new idea in 1830, and it got publicized in something called the Schofield Reference Bible, and it was a very, very popular study Bible, where people made the mistake, and I think this actually still happens today, they thought that the study notes held the same level of authority as the Bible verses.

Don't read your study Bibles that way. I think they do a better job now of making that clear. But it took on a life of its own, and that's where we get things like left behind and lots of rapture theology churches.

[5 : 23] Now, churches always believed in the return of Jesus, but even in the rapture kind of belief heyday in, like, the 90s and early 2000s, it was never actually all that popular.

There were really loud voices. Like, in 1988, when that book came out, the Christian Broadcasting Network actually would have, like, breaking news, like, interruptions to their normal broadcasting about rapture preparation, about what you needed to do to make sure you were rapture ready, and all the things that you needed to have prepared just in case you happened to be in a car when that rapture happened, or an airplane when the rapture happened, those kinds of things.

But the large majority of the church, and Christians in the church in North and South America, and Africa, and Eurasia, and all of that, it never really caught on.

And again, it was a kind of a historical accident that anybody ever believed in the rapture. We do believe that Jesus is coming back. Christians have historically believed that.

But it would be, all at once, there would be some big event, not like a secret thing and a scooping up where we all go to heaven and the world is left to burn. Question number three.

[6 : 30] What will heaven be like? I got a couple questions like that. So when you talk about the end of the world, people want to know, like, so then what? Do we get sent to heaven? What's heaven like?

And there's all sorts of anxieties about clouds and harps and getting bored and heaven just being like a 24-7 Hillsong concert, and we all kind of shudder at that.

So what do we mean by heaven? That's the first thing we got to figure out. The good news of Jesus Christ has collapsed into merely fire insurance.

Meaning if you believe in Jesus, you have that banner that you put over top of yourself. I believe in Jesus. You're saved. You get to go to heaven when you die, not hell. Whew. Thank God.

Okay? But that's not really what Jesus spent his time talking about when he was preaching in Palestine and Galilee and Judea. Jesus actually talked about the afterlife very little.

[7 : 28] And let me come as a surprise to you. I remember realizing this and being taught this when I was in college, that the primary message of Jesus was the kingdom of God, or in the book of Matthew, it's called the kingdom of heaven.

And so I always read that thinking like, oh, Jesus spent a lot of time talking about heaven, the afterlife, where we go when our bodies die. But the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven is not about the afterlife.

There's a story in Luke chapter 17 where it says the Pharisees straight up asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. And so Jesus says, listen, the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed.

Like people will say, here it is or there it is. Rather, the kingdom of God is in your midst. This is the primary message of Jesus during his earthly ministry.

When Jesus shows up on the scene and starts preaching, his message is, repent, the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is here.

[8 : 28] It's arrived. It's shown up. And Jesus is actually making the very, very radical, revolutionary claim that the kingdom of God has shown up in him. God in the flesh showing up on the scene.

So, does that mean that the afterlife doesn't exist? No, I don't. I think it does. I think it is real. I think we have some good philosophical reasons to believe it as well as good biblical reasons to believe it as well.

But the afterlife, going to heaven when you die, it's not the goal. It's not the main event. It's not the thing that Jesus told people to like repent for. Repent so you can go to heaven when you die.

No, it's repent because God's rule and reign and God's will happening on earth as it is in heaven is showing up right now in Jesus. This idea that we're just going to have like disembodied souls playing harps in clouds and listening to Joel Houston for 24-7, like that's more like Plato and Socrates and Greek philosophy of the idea of the ideals and our bodies are just kind of like these evil things that we need to shuffle off and get to our real selves, which is our souls, and we can be somewhere else for eternity.

That's not Jewish thinking. That's not Christian thinking. That's Platonism. That's Greek thinking. So, questions like, will there be dogs in heaven? I got one of those on Instagram.

[9 : 43] Of course. If by heaven you mean earth and creation and the cosmos, the universe, restored, all creation is included. It's not just disembodied souls.

It's the world. It's the physical world. God created the world, declared it is good. Our physicality, our bodies, and creation, and dogs and trees, and even cats, I'll admit.

God called them good. To me, I think the more interesting question is like, what about the, what about the, the things that have gone extinct? Will there be dinosaurs in the new heavens and the new earth?

That's a great question. Or will there be like, like a Neanderthals and Australopithecus? Like all of the things that came before like Homo sapiens, will they be in the new heavens and the new earth? Like, I don't know.

Or does like, does the fact that these things went extinct and we killed some of them all from meteors killed, like, did that, does that have permanent effects? We're in deep into speculation land now.

[10 : 41] But I do know that the heavens and the earth, the message of Jesus, the message of the New Testament, the message of the Christian church has been the heavens and earth will be restored. So, will I know who my loved ones are?

I have every reason to believe, yeah. When Jesus was resurrected, his body was the model of what a resurrected body is like. It's not like Lazarus' resurrection. Lazarus was brought back to life by Jesus, but then he died again.

Jesus came back to life and stayed alive. And Jesus knew who his disciples were. He knew his loved ones were. He knew who Mary Magdalene was. Jesus, so I have every reason to believe that we will too.

Remember the analogy from last week of the caterpillar going into the cocoon and being transformed into a butterfly. And that butterfly has memories of its caterpillar life. I don't think we're going to be all that different.

Someone also asked, like, in this whole what is heaven like question, will I mourn my loved ones who, for some reason, have opted out of the restored heavens and earth?

[11 : 42] And I think, yeah, I believe so. We see in scripture that God is capable of mourning and of heartbreak, and I think we'll be capable of the same things as well. Now, I'm very aware of the verse in Revelation that actually is quoting a verse in Isaiah that says that there will be no more crying, no more tears, no more pain, no more mourning.

But I've always taken that to mean that there'll be no new things to mourn, no new things to break our hearts. Just because God has restored the heavens and the earth doesn't delete, it doesn't erase all the pain that happened before.

I think that would actually make us subhuman to just pretend like all of that pain never existed. God is making all things new, but that doesn't erase the memories of all things old.

So, question number four. will I still be myself? So, this is still related to the what will heaven or what will the renewed heavens and earth be like? And I got this question on Instagram.

I thought it was so thoughtful. This person asked, sin has been a big part of my life. If it's gone, will I still be myself? There's this verse in 1 John.

[12 : 53] It says, when we see Jesus, we will become like Jesus. There will be some transformation of our bodies and our souls that will make us in some way perfect, sinless.

And I feel like my friend's question is incredibly insightful because it admits that everything shapes us. Even our pain and our trauma and our brokenness and our hurt and our sinfulness shapes us in some way.

It makes us, us. So, if new creation comes along, God restores everything, including us, are we still actually ourselves? Our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters, they often compare sin and the brokenness of the world as a sickness, a chronic illness.

And they, think about when you're, think about when you're sick. You get a cold and you realize you're sick. You don't feel like yourself. But then that cold lingers and you stay sick and you have that thought, at least I do every time I have a cold that just keeps on going.

Like, am I ever, do I, am I ever going to feel good again? And then you stay sick even longer and you actually forget what feeling good felt like. I had my tonsils out as a, as a, an adult.

[14 : 06] I was like 29 or 30 and it took me about five weeks to recover from my tonsillectomy. I'd lost the sense of taste. Everything just hurt when I swallowed.

I went to like a little like month-long depression just because like it took so long to feel better. And then eventually I did begin to feel better and I had forgotten what it felt like to feel good.

Any one of you watching who has a chronic illness, you know what I'm talking about. I think when we receive our recreated, our renewed, our restored resurrection bodies without traumas or with our traumas healed, with our forgiveness of God settled deep into our bones, with our sin sickness removed, I think we will feel more like ourselves than we have ever felt before.

We will feel the most human, the most us that we have ever felt. I think when our sin and our brokenness and our trauma is healed, we will feel like, oh, this is, this is who I've been all along.

This is how Romans chapter 8 puts it. The sufferings we go through in the present time aren't even worth putting in the scale alongside the glory that is awaiting us. Yes, creation itself, the cosmos, is on tiptoe with expectation, eagerly awaiting the moment when God's children, it's you and me, friends, will be revealed.

[15 : 33] Creation, you see, was subjected to pointless futility, not by its own choice, but because of the one who placed it into this subjection. But it's in hope that creation itself would be freed from slavery to decay to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified, when God makes all things new.

We know that the entire creation is growing together and going through the labor pains together up until right now. Not only so, this is again Romans chapter 8 continuing, we too, who have the first fruits of the Spirit's life within us, we're groaning within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body.

We were saved, you see, in hope. But hope isn't hope if you can see it. Who hopes for what they can see already? If we hope for what we don't see, we await for it eagerly, but also patiently.

Which brings us to question number five. So, if Jesus is coming back and going to make everything right, we just need to sit back and wait and do nothing in the meantime, right?

No, okay? Nobody actually asked this question. I don't think anybody's that silly. Now, this goes back to the last sermon. The world is not disposable. There is some sort of connection between what we do today and what the new heavens and the new earth will look like tomorrow.

[16 : 53] This is why Peter says, hasten, speed up, the Lord's, coming. Our actions have something to do with the recreation and the restoration of all things.

As many have said before, hope is not magic, it's work. Just because scripture says that we hope for the new creation, that therefore doesn't mean that we just sit around and wait and do nothing.

Hope has to inspire action, otherwise it's not hope. Hope ought to inspire preparation, otherwise it's not hope. Hope ought to inspire us to get off our butts and do something because of the things that we hope for.

Like, let's do some examples. Let's say I really hope that climate change doesn't burn us all up and destroy us all. And then I refuse to change my consumption habits.

Do I actually hope in anything? Let's say I really hope that transphobia, homophobia, stops being a thing, and then I make fun of a man wearing a dress. Let's say I really hope that poor people would just stop being poor, there'd be no more poverty, and then I refuse to advocate for a more just tax policy.

[18 : 04] Let's say I really hope that systemic racism baked into the American system stops being baked into the American system and then I get offended whenever someone points out my biases and the racism baked into my bones.

Let's say I really hope that the church becomes a more welcoming and healing and inclusive place that represents Jesus and then I abandon the church and let somebody else do the work. Hope isn't magic.

It's work. Listen to 1 Corinthians 15. Paul says, When our dying bodies have been transformed into the bodies that will never die, scripture will be fulfilled.

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Thank God, 1 Corinthians 15 says, He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Great, wonderful. Jesus comes back. Everything is better. We have the victory. But listen to the last verse. It's the last verse of 1 Corinthians 15. So, my brothers and sisters, my friends, my compatriots, be strong and immovable.

[19 : 07] Always work enthusiastically for the Lord for you know that nothing that you do for the Lord is ever useless. Now wait a second, what? W-U-U-T exclamation point, what?

Because Jesus is going to come back and set everything right, we need to work enthusiastically? Because Jesus is going to come back and set everything right, nothing that we do is useless?

Let me give you another example, 2 Corinthians 5. The opening of the chapter says that we are awaiting, nice biblical term, our heavenly tent, which means our new bodies, our resurrection bodies that are fit for the new creation.

And so what do we do while we wait? Listen, this is 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old is gone, the new is here.

Remember, the old world is passing away, we're in the shaded part of the Venn diagram. All of this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry, the work, the action, the duty of reconciliation that God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

[20 : 11] And he has committed to us this message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. Because of what Christ is going to do and has done and is declaring done, we therefore have a job to do as ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

So we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become God's righteousness, God's justice.

We embody in flesh the justice of God here on planet Earth. Now listen, as God's co-workers, colleagues, water cooler share is down at the office, as God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Today is the day of salvation. So again, because the old is gone, the old world is passing away, because the new has shown up, we are agents of reconciliation today.

We are co-workers with God today. Which brings us to question number six, what work do we need to get involved in? So, a little bit behind the scenes, it's typical for the table church and lots of churches to do some sort of stewardship or giving series, usually around November before Christmas or like January after Christmas.

[21 : 27] Churches run on your donations. I've met quite a few people, not here, but some other people who think churches still get like income from the government, we get some tax benefits, but we don't get money from the government.

We get money from people like you who donate to the church. So typically churches do a stewardship series and I was reminded of that and I was really hesitant to do it. It's 2020, like times are weird and I didn't feel super great about going up on a platform or behind a camera and saying like, hey, give us money.

times are tough for some of you and like it's just kind of felt a little skeezy and honestly, the church is in a wonderful financial position right now because of your generosity and your kindness and your faithfulness and because we haven't been paying rent for a while.

That's really helpful. Now, I would be remiss to not mention personal finances in some way when it comes to the end of the world and how we participate in God's healing in the world.

I'll put my cards on the table. I am not a big believer in tithing to the church and before our executive pastor and our treasurer like reach through the screen and throttle me, let me explain a little bit.

[22 : 44] The primary purpose of tithing in the Old Testament was to support a temple and a priestly system that we just do not have anymore. Israelite priests which were from one twelfth of Israel, the tribe of Levi, they had no inheritance of their own, no land of their own, no other income other than a tithe.

There was roughly in an ideal world one Levite for every 11 Israelites. So imagine if the table church had one full-time pastor for every 11 table churchites.

Okay? This is not the system we have today. If people gave 10% of their income to their local church, that would be an absolutely nutso amount of money for us to have control and say so over.

Let me give you some numbers. Over the past 12 months, we've had 165 people or families give money to the table church in the past year. If each of them tithed on an income that was half of DC's median income, we would get \$8.5 million, which is 20 times the size of our current budget.

So if 165 people or families gave tithe, gave 10% of their income based off of half of DC's median income, we would have \$8.5 million. We'd have \$17 million if they're based off of median income in DC.

[24 : 06] We do not need that much money. So that's why I'm not asking you to tithe to the church. We just don't need that much money. Now, I will also say that the trustees, our board of trustees, just passed a 2021 budget of about \$410,000.

So that means if everything were equal, those 165 people or families would each give \$210 a month and we would hit our budget. We would be able to pay for salaries and all those kinds of things.

Now, I am going to ask you to support that because I deeply believe in the mission and the purpose and the vision of the Table Church. Yes, I admit, your donations pay for my salary and Pastor Jessica and our halftime worship director, Jordan, and all of our salaries are below the median income of DC.

But your donations also pay for rent when it happens and cameras and a website. It also pays for hospitality and our care ministry and our children's ministry and our food pantry and appreciation gifts to our amazing leaders and volunteers.

It means that your donations help make a church exist that proclaims the gospel and excludes no one. It's where people can heal from their spiritual traumas and grow into their spiritual giants.

[25 : 22] So, yes, please, give to that. And then, figure out other places for your money to go. No, the table church doesn't need an \$8.5 million budget, at least not yet.

But there are other great organizations in the world that do need your financial support. I think the issue with tithing, the reason why I'm not a huge preacher on tithing, I think it tricks us to thinking that if we give a certain amount, a certain percentage, that we get to keep the rest for ourselves.

And that's not really how we're meant to look at our resources. Jesus made it clear that all of what we have belongs to God. I think we're far better off trying to figure out what we can live on and then giving the rest away, which I recognize is really, really hard.

But there are folks who do things like a reverse tithe. They keep 10% and they give away 90%. Now, I'm not there yet and I imagine not very many of you are there yet. But I think the goal ought to be that we are so unattached to our resources and our money that I'd rather than be used by others to maximize the well-being in my neighborhood and my city and my world than I would be to advocate for keeping them to myself to maximize my own well-being.

Question seven, what work do we need to be involved in? Part two. If we want to hasten, speed up the return of Jesus, it can't merely be about focusing on external problems and issues.

[26 : 48] Now, it's part of it. The church has to be a colony of heaven and a culture of death. We need to be the vanguards of what justice and righteousness looks like in the world. But we also need to be willing to have God work inside of us.

Our inner world is in need just as much of transformation as the outer world. If I only ever focus on the outer world, on other people's problems, on the systems of brokenness and oppression, and never on my own need for healing and repentance and redemption and reconciliation, then I will myself become a contributor and a builder of the brokenness of the world.

And that's why you will keep hearing me preach on unpopular spiritual disciplines like confession and prayer and needing to submit ourselves to the authority of God as revealed in Scripture and relationships of invitation and challenge and that icky word accountability.

If we ever come to a place of thinking, I'm good, I'm done, I'm arrived, I'm perfect the way I am, then we're sicker than we've ever been. The world only gets better not only when we work for the sake of others, but when we also are submitting ourselves to God's transformation in our life.

So last question, question eight, now what? The Table Church's vision is that we are calling people to become thoughtful and authentic followers of Jesus and we join God in the renewal of all things.

[28 : 26] In other words, we are hastening the day of Jesus' return. This Sunday, right now, if you're watching on Sunday, is on the church calendar the last Sunday of the year.

Believe it or not, next week is the first week of Advent, the countdown to Christmas when we celebrate Christ's return, Christ's birth, Christ's arrival.

And so my invitation to you as we turn the church calendar at least from one year to the next, my invitation is to ponder how you will fulfill your own apocalypse how to guide.

Is it through giving to your local church? Do you believe in the vision and the values and the purpose of the Table Church to the point where you could give to it? Again, if 165 people gave 200 bucks a month, we could fit our budget.

Is it through giving of your money to another charity, another charity that's up to something good in the world and whether they know it or not, they're joining with God in his up to something good in the world?

[29 : 31] Is it giving of your time, your attention, your resources? Is it through taking on a spiritual discipline like prayer or scripture reading, confession?

My encouragement is this, join God in the renewal somehow, some way. We're not merely about ourselves, but we are joining God in his work to make all things new.

If you need help, figuring that out, drop me a line and we'll figure it out together. Thank you.