

February 19, 2023

The story of Reality: Finale (Week 3) The Second Coming

Author Doug Mendenhall shares a brief parable that should cause all of us to pause and reflect:

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us.

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate.

I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ...

My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain ~~Jon & Kate Plus 8~~ [that show] to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put Christianity Today on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go.

I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway?

I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it. Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much ~~on-line~~ shopping we do.

I ran back in and picked up a bunch of shoes left by the door. Tried to stuff them in the front closet, but it was overflowing with heavy coats and work coats and snow coats and pretty coats and raincoats and extra coats. We live in the South; why'd we buy so many coats? I squeezed the shoes in with two minutes to go.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.

We start this morning with Jesus' shocking statement in Matthew 24

Matthew 24:1–2 (NIV) 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.”

What a shock to hear this. The temple was the pride of all Jews. It represented the center of their faith. To throw down such huge stones was hard to even imagine. The Temple stones were not like small building blocks, manageable by a mason. They would not even be manageable by a modern crane. Surely such stones could withstand any attack or calamity. The disciples were shocked...But they believed Jesus.

Jesus' was 100 % accurate by the way. In AD 70, every stone was thrown down, and the temple destroyed when the Roman commander Titus and his army came and destroyed the city. Although Titus told his soldiers not to destroy the temple, which was a wonder of the ancient world, one of the soldiers set fire to it. The heavy gold plates that decorated its sides and roof melted between the stones. The soldiers heard that gold was hidden between the stones. So they tore down the walls and pried all the stones apart.

Jesus' shocking statement leads to the disciples' question.

Matthew 24:3 (NIV) As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen [referring to the destruction of the temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

First of all, what do you make of this question? He's standing with them right there. What do they mean by “**your coming**”?

Jesus had all along been referring to himself as the Son of Man. I wonder if at some point they had discussed Daniel's prophecy about the coming Son of Man?

Daniel 7:13–14 (NIV) “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached

the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus quoted this Daniel prophecy a few days later at his trial, and they crucified him for it!

Of course, this was NOT the end of the story. He rose from the dead as predicted, ascended into heaven before their watching eyes and we can be certain he is coming back in glory!! How's that for a finale!?

This teaching in Matthew 24 is also recorded in Mark, and Luke. It is difficult to figure out which parts belong to the events surrounding AD 70 and which to his second coming. As confusing as it is, I'm glad the teaching about the destruction of the Temple comes with teaching about the second coming for this reason. Jesus' accuracy will be seen quickly in history which gives everyone increased confidence as we continue to wait during a more lengthy delay. If Jesus' was so accurate about the Temple, and his resurrection, why wouldn't we believe his accuracy about his return?

I. **Signs of the BEGINNING of the END**

*Matthew 24:4–8 (NIV) Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive 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.***

These signs do not answer the “when question”.

II. **BRACE yourself and STAND FIRM**

Matthew 24:9-13 (NIV) ⁹ “Then 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 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.

What would you do in such a cold dark world to keep your love for God (and people) warm and bright?

Coming to the public reading of revelation will help you “brace yourself”.

Cold Faith, Cold Love

As those who live in the North know, when temperatures plunge well below zero, few cars left outside will start. Unused batteries freeze.

Unused spiritual batteries also die in the cold of unbelief. Only by regular use and by receiving power from an outside source can spiritual power be maintained. A warm spiritual life is charged with power by God.

Two questions:

1. How **STEEPED** are you in Jesus? (John 15: abiding in Jesus and having Jesus’ words abide in us).
2. How **DEVOTED** are you to the fellowship of believers?

III. Stay on MISSION

Matthew 24:14 (NIV) 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.

3rd Question: How committed are you to his mission?

Do you **Love God Wholeheartedly?** How does it show?

Do First Things First

Don’t do Life Alone

Saved People Serve People

Followers say ‘Follow Me’

There are a few good reasons why Jesus did not tell us how long he would delay. **First:**

Matthew 24:36 (NIV) “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Second: by not telling us, we are more likely to...

IV. Be READY EVERY DAY

*Matthew 24:42, 44 (NIV) “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ... ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because **the Son of Man will come** at an hour when you do not expect him.*

Robby Robins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war. After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately pull his crew together and fly his plane home. They flew across the ocean to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania. They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—"Welcome Home Dad!"

How did they know? No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn't expected to leave so quickly. Robins relates, "When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, 'Daddy!' Susan came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, and a crisp yellow dress. 'How did you know?' I asked.

'I didn't,' she answered through tears of joy. 'Once we knew the war was over, we knew you'd be home one of these days. We knew you'd try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.'"

Let's live like we are ready every day! What would that look like for you? What would happen in the Verde Valley if we lived this way? Let's find out!

From 3-5PM this afternoon, right here, is the REVELATION EVENT....

Do you want to be blessed?

Revelation 1:3 (NIV) Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

PRAYER:

Next week we start a new series called "FAITH that WORKS."

The Story of Reality-FINALE
(Week 3)
The Second Coming

SMALL TALK

1. If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Matthew 24.** What bombshell did Jesus drop? (1:2) What questions prompt this lesson from Jesus? (1:3)
3. What events might mislead the disciples into thinking the end has come?
4. Which parts of the lesson do you think relate to the question about the Temple, and which parts relate to the question about his coming? Do you think Jesus' answer is chronological?
5. What must the church continue doing? What has to happen before the end will come? (24:14)

GETTING PERSONAL

6. Do you see some of these signs being fulfilled today? Which ones? How do you feel about this?
7. Specifically, how are you preparing for the Second Coming?
8. How would you explain the end times and the Second Coming to a seeker?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

9. What steps do you need to take today to be ready for Christ's return?