

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN END TIME – LAST JUDGMENT

A Future to Look Forward To

A series of meditations on God's Word looking ahead to Judgment Day

How does knowing the end of the story affect your reading of it? Does it take away all the suspense and enjoyment? Does knowing if the character survives you don't perceive any real threat to him or her, no challenge to the obstacles he or she faces throughout the story? Does it take away the mystery or intrigue and thus become boring? Yet, I'm guessing that you have books that you reread and movies and shows that you rewatch and enjoy doing so. You already know the end, and you still enjoy them, still look forward to reading or watching.

Some people need to know the end of the story in order to keep going with it. Recently I was reading the book called "Children of Time." I got to the last week of my library loan, and I was about halfway through it. I was trying to decide if I should make a push to read it all or if I should stop, because, while I did want to know the end, I don't know that I was enjoying reading it. So, I looked up the plot summary and found out the end. It seemed very weird and off putting. Mutant spiders infected that last remaining humans with a nanovirus so that they would work and live together in harmony. So, yeah, I returned that book early and started a new one.

On the other hand, a couple of years ago I started reading "Lord of the Rings." I'd seen the movies but hadn't read the books. I had tried one other time reading the books, but, sorry to our Tolkien fans, it was really difficult to get into and I stopped reading in less than 100 pages. This time, though, I pushed through knowing that the ring would be destroyed, Sauron would be defeated, and Sam and Frodo would survive and return to the Shire. The journey against darkness would pay off. There would be a happy ending. I made it through.

The Israelites had been told by the prophet Isaiah that they would be walked all over on by their enemies, but God was now announcing that things were going to change. Instead of laying defeated in the dust of death, that there was no reason to go on because their enemies had triumphed over them, God tells them, "Wake up! Shake off your dust!" God is going to buy back, redeem, his people. They will never be trampled on by their enemies again. They would be freed from their captivity, their captors.

God tells us the same. Don't close your eyes in the dust of defeat against your sins, against the evil of this world. God has redeemed us without money, but with a different currency, a different cost. He paid for us with Jesus' righteous, perfect life and his innocent and pure blood shed in death for us. With his payment, he has freed us from our captivity to sin, death, and the power of the devil. We are clothed with God's strength and garments of splendor.

We are not defeated by our sins, and we are no longer held captive to them. This gives us hope, a certain expectation for the future. Instead of walking through life in a stupor of defeat, God tells us the end of our story: he exalts us to stand victorious with him. Knowing the ending helps us change how we live today. We have a future to look forward to. Wake up and look for it!

Isaiah 52:1-6 (NIV)

¹ Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. ² Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion, now a captive. ³ For this is what the LORD says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." ⁴ For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them." ⁵ "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock," declares the LORD. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed." ⁶ Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 206 on pages 6 & 7, "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying."

We are creatures of time. Each of us have a very specific beginning to our existence, to our lives: when we were knit together in our mothers' wombs. As your life continued, time has seemingly gotten a little wibbly wobbly timey wimey. When you're a kid, it seems like everything takes forever from the eager anticipation of summer break to the drive to the vacation destination to the wait for Christmas presents. It feels like it will never get here! Then you get older, and you swear that time is somehow speeding up. You are wondering how it's November already, that Thanksgiving is in a couple of weeks and Christmas after that and, before you know it, 2024 will be here.

Now consider a being who exists both within time and outside of time because, well, he created time for us, not for himself. That's God. No wonder it's said about his perspective of time, "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night." (verse 4) He is not bound to time, but he acts within time for our sake, for our good, to give us reasons to look forward in time, in life. Maybe with this perspective of God being both within and outside of time that we understand how Jesus could talk about his return as happening very soon, and yet here we are some 2,000 years later still waiting.

And the waiting feels agonizing. We have that same wibbly wobbly timey wimey of kids and adults. The longer we are around, the more evil we see. The more evil we see, the more we realize that we can't stop evil. In fact, we contribute to it. We recognize our sins, and we realize that it is a gigantic pile of sins, that the longer I exist, the more sins I commit. This creates a miserable existence in which our bodies and spirits moan as they are affected by evil, our evil. Can you speed up time now, God, and come just a bit sooner? Can you have compassion on us now?

This is why we join our voice with Moses' prayer to hold God to his Word that he have compassion on us, to forgive us, that he would end our suffering in this world of evil, that he would give us at least as many days of gladness as we have had days of this miserable, worn out, evil existence. Lord, give us an infinitely better time with you. Give us a future to look forward to.

Psalm 90 (NIV)

A prayer of Moses the man of God. ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." ⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. ⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: ⁶ In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. ⁷ We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. ⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. ¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. ¹² Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. ¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. ¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. ¹⁷ May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 206 on pages 6 & 7, "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying."

Even after praying with Moses, we know that we are still creatures of time. Since God tells us there is a day and hour fixed for his return, logically that means that as each day passes away we are getting closer and closer to Judgment Day. Yet, we seem to live as if the opposite is true. Since Christ didn't return in the lifetimes of the 12 apostles, since he didn't come at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, since he did come during the Crusades, since he didn't come after either of our world wars, since he didn't come with the conflict between Israel and Hamas, is he ever coming?

As each day passes without Jesus' return, we start to live as if his return grows more distant, that it's a longer way off than we realized. Are you hearing and buying into a message of "Peace and safety," that Jesus' second coming in judgment is a long way off, that we have more time? Are you being lulled into drinking the sweet poison of the message of a God who isn't going to return in our lifetimes, that he won't even bother coming to judge anyone because he's not real? Are we being children of the night and the darkness, giving up hope on this future that God promised for us?

Wake up! We don't belong to the night. God redeemed us without money but with his perfect life and his innocent suffering and death. He has clothed us with strength and garments of splendor. He has appointed us not to suffer wrath, not for a future of endless pain or nothing but defeat, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, to live with God, to enjoy the best he has to offer us. He has called us to faith in him. We belong to him. We belong to the day.

As such, we stay awake. We watch. We wait. We don't drink the sweet poison of a non-returning Jesus. He is coming to judge. And his return is sooner than it was a day ago.

So we stand ready for Judgment Day with the garments of splendor that God has robed us in. We look forward to him answering our prayers and delivering us from evil, making us glad for far more days and years than we have experienced hardship and suffering. We encourage others with the message to stay awake and keep watch since Christ is coming to deliver us, to save us, to take us to live with him. We encourage each other to drink of the water of life that is Jesus, that he gives us security to know how we will be judged on the Last Day, that because of his perfect life and his suffering and death for our sins, we will be declared not guilty. We will live with God.

Encourage one another and build each other up in this future that we have to look forward to.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 254 on pages 10-11, "The Day Full of Grace."

Reality shows like the “Great British Baking Show,” “Forged in Fire,” and “Lego Masters” all have time limits. The clocks tick quickly down to produce the best baked good, the best knife, the best Lego creation. Rarely do I ever see anyone in these reality shows just kicking back, not doing anything, not making use of the time they have. They all work right up to the last second.

Jesus tells us explicitly that we don’t know the day or hour of his return. We don’t have actual digits on a clock counting down for his return to judge the world. We don’t know how much time we have, but he tells us to be ready, to be wise, to use the time and the resources we have to be ready for that day. Even if Judgment Day doesn’t happen in our lifetimes, we will still experience our own judgment day when we die, and we aren’t able to put a day on a planner for that.

So, if Jesus returned today, would he find you the way you want to be found? Are there conversations about Jesus that you have been meaning to have with people but keep putting them off, thinking that there always is tomorrow? Is there a sinful habit or lifestyle that you have vowed to change but don’t feel the urgency to do so, that there is probably more time in your life, that you can repent later? Are you using your time, your talents, your treasures to further the kingdom of God, to get him and his message to more people so that more can be saved, or are other things constantly taking priority? Am I making use of the time ticking down to know God and what he has done for me more or do I keep punting it to another day?

We don’t know how much time we have. None of us do. So, we are wise when we look to the future, realizing that Jesus can return on any day at any time, that we live in such a way that we are ready for him, that we are basking in the garments of splendor that God has given to us, that we are encouraging each other and building each other up by forgiving as God has forgiven us, sharing how he bought us back without money, but with his holy life and death.

Lord, we don’t know how much time you give us. Keep us wise in using the resources you have entrusted to us. Keep us awake, living the truth that you can return at any minute, so that we can look forward to the future with you after Judgment Day.

Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV)

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ “ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ ¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ ¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!** We sing Hymn 216 on pages 12 & 13, “Saints, Behold! The Sight is Glorious.”