

Truths shared at Bible Readings section of service:

Key truths about the End...

- God alone knows the Last Day: the Day of Jesus' Return (Matt. 24:36)
- We are in the End Times: the Last Day could come at any time (Matt. 24)
- Jesus will return on the Last Day (and no other return will precede) – Hebrews 9:27-28; 1 Thes. 4:13-18
- No one will “miss” Jesus' return (Rev.1:7 & Acts 1 – every eye will see)
- The final separation of all believers and unbelievers will occur: believers to eternal life and joy, unbelievers to the pain of eternal separation from God (eternal death) – Matthew 24 & 25; Isaiah 24 & 25

Matthew 24:4 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. **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. **14** 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. ... **26** “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. **27** For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **28** Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. **29** “Immediately after the distress of those days “ ‘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.’ **30** “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. **31** And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. ... **36** “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ... **42** “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Sermon - To the Source: the Christian view of the end –

John 11:25,26 **25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies; **26** and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The story is told... There was a preacher standing at the road side holding up a sign above his head. (Have you heard this one?) It read in big letters: “The end is near.” Another sign leaned against something nearby him. It read simply: “Turn from your way.” Cars kept passing by ignoring the preacher’s message. A few moments after each one did, a crash could be heard from off a little distance. Finally, one car slowed down slightly, just enough to shout out the window to the preacher: “You nut! ‘The end is near’ Bahaha! I don’t see any end in sight!” Then the car sped up, continued on, and sure enough... soon another crash sound came wafting back from not far away! In reply, the preacher thought, “Hmmm. Maybe I should just change my sign to say, ‘Bridge out ahead.’”

You get what people thought he was talking about with ‘the end’? The End of the world.

We might laugh or smile. And that’s good; it’s just a joke (no one really went off a bridge). But another thing about jokes is: besides generating a little laughter, there is in many cases a deeper truth nestled

within them, worth exploring. This little joke about a preacher and people's response brings up an important reality.

People, as a pretty widespread norm, don't like to talk about – think about – the end. Lots of people go on in life ignoring the topic of an end to this world by God's intervention... or an end to their life in this world.

Ah!!! There is another subject people, as a common phenomenon, don't like to talk about. A news feed this past week mentioned a TV program. It's produced in a different county, but it is dedicated to something just as relevant here. The description of the show is: "Answering the questions people are afraid to ask." And one of the taboo subjects on the show's program list, which people approach with fear, is: the topic of death. So often this subject goes untouched.

We, as Christians, have a different view of this, or at least we can. We are empowered to talk about the topic of the end of life – whether that be the end of this present world, or the end of *our* life in this present world. When we have and know God's truth, we can approach these matters of "the end" not just reluctantly, but understanding the good/the wholesome benefit of talking about this topic – even with some intentional regularity.

Let me give you an example: here is what is found as the closing pages of one of the Bible Study lessons I've taught... **[show]** "Funeral Arrangements for _____" ... and you fill in your name, and on you go from there. Someone might react: "Whoa, what a way to end a gathering!"

But actually think about it! When we talk about the end – end of the world or end of life - you've got a topic that is so practical, and important. No one can say this topic doesn't apply for them. If you want a Bible teaching that applies to people with a 100% relevancy, there are others. But "the end" topic that we're exploring today is one among the list. To prove it? What's the death rate that has remained intact for thousands of years? Not how many end up dying of cancer, or other diseases. Not how many die in traffic related accidents, or other sudden traumas. But how many of us end up dying? All.

The only exceptions in the world's history are: 1) of course, Jesus who died and came back to life never to die again, and 2) two others whom God took straight to heaven without dying. If you call them out right now, you'll earn a high five. [pause for answer: Enoch & Elijah.]

Along with the relevancy of dying, keep in mind: God in His Word, the Bible, has a 100% track record of keeping His promises. He has stated this present world will end.

So the approach of an end is a reality. Some ignore death, or the reality of a Last Day. Some face such truths with denial or defiance. Some fall for ideas that are false, lies that are faulty. But we, Christians, have a different view. We don't deny death or sugarcoat it. We can talk about the end of the world and the end of our individual lives. We are given the truth that - once we have it – changes things. Fear and uncertainty are removed for us by God's truth.

Our Lord Jesus gives us the truth that brings peace and confidence about the end. Listen again to Jesus' words in John ch.11...

- "I am the resurrection and the life."
- "The one who believes in me will live even though he dies."
- "And each one who lives in me – that's the same thing as each one who believes in me - will certainly not die into the age" (meaning "you will have eternal life").

So an end to life in this present world is coming, and could come at any moment. That will happen either at Jesus' return or at the end of each of your and my individual lives.

Please note, though, with either one of those ending scenarios: It is not the 'end of your existence.' And so the question that matters above all others in the end – for each individual – is: Will my existence from that point on be ongoing life, or ongoing death?

- Am I prepared for the day I'll meet God face-to-face? Will He take me to be with Him – to enjoy life eternal?
- The way to answer that is to answer this other question: what and who do I trust in?

You know the answer to that, yes? Jesus, God the Son, who came to save sinners.

Imagine being Peter, or one of the other disciples, who day after day stood face to face with Jesus. Think of what you would have been feeling the moment the Holy Spirit first brought you to the realization: "the One standing in front of me knows everything about me - my every evil, self-serving action – every nasty, dirty thought that I've ever thunk." Look up the beginning of Luke ch.5 if you want to see Peter's reaction to realizing: "I'm face to face with my Lord."

But Jesus didn't respond by calling down fire or turning his back on those men. He doesn't do that at the sight of our sin either. Instead, He faced the wrath and fire from heaven himself. God doled out the penalty for sin. And God –God the Son- suffered it in our place. He suffered hell.

The only reason you'd have to still fear God's judgment of hell, his justice over sin, is if you don't trust in Jesus' life, suffering, death and resurrection as your basis for God welcoming you to eternal life.

Are you prepared to meet God face-to-face? Well, answer this and you'll know: What and who do you trust in? Answer: "In Jesus, who became my sin – who took my punishment – and who gifts me His righteousness. And so life – life with God, life eternal – is mine in Him, for He has said, 'Whoever lives and believes in me will live even though he dies.'"

I read this week something I want to share with you: "One of the most comforting aspects of Christ's work for us is that he has gone through pain, dying, and death in advance of us. He didn't eliminate it from the human experience. He transformed it into our Home-coming. The transition now holds no terror, no sting. Our last moment on earth is instantly transformed into our first moment with Jesus." [Pastor Jeske, ToG]

With that in mind, and the rest of what we've heard today... I'll encourage you to take one of these sheets home with you today [Funeral arrangements for ____]. Think it through. Fill it out. Especially the parts about Bible Readings and Hymns. Use the Bible passages you search through to be strengthened and encouraged by God's truth about life, death and the end. Then don't leave the topic to sit on paper on a shelf. Have conversations in your family, even beyond that among friends as opportunities arise, about the topic of "the end."

Last week came word of man from our WELS church in Crete IL who lost his wife, 3 sons and yet-to-born child. We prayed for him last Sunday. As I was at convention, one of the other delegates – a pastor – received the word his father had died. This week I got the text from one of you that a friend's husband had died unexpectedly.

You see why I'm sharing this list? We should – we want to – be thinking about the end that could come at any moment. To be prepared for that: our own death, our loved ones' death, or Jesus' return at the End of this world.

Remain ready. Soak in these truths we've talked about today – all God's truths –, so that they sink deep in. You say, "I've heard them, pastor. Why spend more time on them?" Here's what I want you to think of. What might happen to your emotional and mental state when you go through the loss of a loved one or loved ones? Especially if that happens suddenly. You may feel in a whirl. Disoriented. Sadness may weigh

on you heavy. Uncertainty and other feelings may creep up when you're in the depths of mourning. And in whatever mix of what you're going through, you might not feel clear minded enough or clear eyed enough to find your Bible. It may just be a practical fact that you may not have it with you at the moment. But if you have the truths of God so planted and beating here (heart) by the Holy Spirit's working, they are ready to be drawn on. Recall them and receive strength and encouragement.

So keep watch. Remain ready. No man knows the length of his days. But we do see the writing on the wall of the truth made completely clear by God's Word: "Each man is destiny to die once, and after that face judgment."

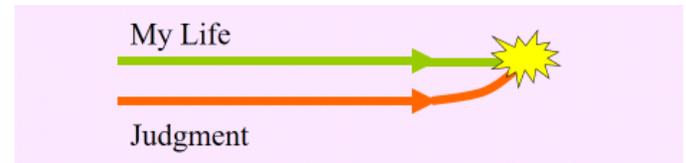
As you are prepared for that... Here's a helpful shift in perspective from the way many maybe picture the end's approach. Whether thinking of the end of this present world and age, or if it is about the end of my individual life, either of those is the day we'll meet God face-to-face.

We might think of that day as being an event off in the future some distance (image). And so we might picture it like this.



But do you see a danger that might creep up with such a view? We might not take home the urgency of being prepared if we just view it like this.

Perhaps a better way to think of the end approaching – either Jesus' return, or the day of our death - is like this: think of it as running parallel to us, (next image) like being in a lane of traffic next to us and we never know when it will cross our path. God, of course, only knows that (Illustration from 2002 Meditations devotion).



This brings out how important being prepared at all times is.

As you look at that, I want you to think how we need not anticipate this event with fear. Since it is the Lord Jesus who will be there to meet us at that moment, and since our faith is in Him and what He has done to save us, then we have nothing to fear about that day. As long as you know and trust Jesus. He says: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die." If you answer "yes" to "do you believe this?", then say "Amen."

Lord, preserve us in this faith in you until the end. Amen.