

Last Things

Series: These Things Never Change

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Intro – Selected Passages

We are bringing to conclusion today our doctrinal series, *These Things Never Change*. And the title of the message is: **Last Things**

If you study theology, you know this study of last things goes by the name, “eschatology” – “ecshatos” is the Greek word, meaning last. And its appropriate that we end this series by talking about the end of time.

Illus. Vacation – My family and I just drove back from Colorado this weekend...we had a great time at a family camp we go to every year. And after nearly 17 hours in the car with them on the way home, I was thinking about this message and about three hours into the trip I was ready for Jesus to return!

It would have been just fine by me had he come back and delivered me! I was crying out, “Maranatha”, which means “Our Lord Come” several times throughout the drive! Ha!

Here’s what I want us to do today as we get going and talk about last things – remember, we are talking about the essential doctrines ALL Christians believe.

We haven’t been getting into details regarding secondary or tertiary issues that are debated amongst Christians and held to by different groups of people within Christianity – we’ve covered the absolutes in this series...this has been our focus! We’ve talked about:

- Theology Proper – the study of God, the Father
- The Trinity – one God, in three distinct persons
- The Bible – how it’s the Word of God and authoritative and sufficient for life
- Salvation – how one is saved and why there is even a need for salvation
- The Church – what it means to belong to the body of Christ...to be the Bride of Christ
- I preached a message on the invisible world and the reality of angels, demons and spiritual warfare

And today, we conclude by talking about a final absolute...a last essential. If you name the name of Jesus, you will believe in what we are talking about today.

Now, some of you may be disappointed because when it comes to end times, you LOVE talking timelines and charts...end time prophecy is something you really get into.

Well, staying in step with what we've done this entire series we're going to stay big picture today. We're not going to get in the weeds, on the 1,000 year reign of Christ (Rev. 20) - whether or not it's symbolic and figurative or a literal 1,000 years. We're not going to talk about or speculate on the Rapture and if it is a separate and distinct event of the second coming or one in the same.

The things within many end time discussions we see and read about is totally up for debate and there are solid theologians on each side of the issue.

What's not up for debate is what we read even in the earliest Christian creed, **The Apostles' Creed**. Let's read it together, and in it we will read of four events that will serve as our outline for this "last things" message. I've underlined those so that you know them when we read.

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of the saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting. Amen.

Let's get started. The first essential of last things theology is a belief in:

1. The Return of Jesus

It is a basic, fundamental Christian belief that Jesus will return to the earth for a second time. And his return will be sudden...it will be literal...it will be visible, and it will be at a time that only God, the Father knows.

Now, as always, I want to give you scripture for this, so you don't think I'm making it up. But, before I do let me just share with you in a broad stroke kind of way the enormous amount of prophecy that is mentioned in the Bible as it relates to the return of Christ.

In the Old Testament, there are over 1500 verses that speak to the second coming of Jesus. In the New Testament, one out of every 25 verses speak to it. For every one time the Bible mentions the first coming of Jesus (humble and lowly), the second coming is mentioned eight times (victorious and mighty).

Jesus speaks directly about his second coming 21 times in the gospels and 23 of the 27 New Testament books speak to his return. Jesus is coming again. It's been referred to as "the central hope of the New Testament".

Acts 1:8-11 – "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

So, notice: his return is literal and physical. He will come again in the same way as you saw him go! Listen to:

Rev. 1:7a – “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...”

Paul in 1 Cor. said it would be in the “twinkling of an eye” (we’ll look at that in just a moment) in 1 Thess. he wrote that Jesus’s coming would be like a thief in the night!

1 Thess. 5:1-2 – “Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

So, the return of Jesus will be sudden. It will be literal. It will be physical. And check this out...NO ONE knows when it’s going to take place. Jesus himself doesn’t even know.

Matt. 24:36 – “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

Matthew 24-25 is what we know of as the Olivet Discourse. Jesus gave this teaching to his disciples on the Tuesday of Holy Week. It’s the lengthiest teaching we have from Jesus as it relates last things, and in this teaching while he shares with them, he doesn’t know when his return will be, he gives them/us some signs that point TO his return.

It's interesting, Jesus did NOT want us to be in the dark on his return. Even if we don’t know exactly WHEN it will happen, Jesus wanted us to be aware that it WILL happen and that we are to be ready!

I’ll talk more about this in the application part of this message, but 50x in the New Testament, we’re told to be ready for his return...be on the “look out”! And he gave us some signs that will point to his coming!

Let’s look at a few of them. Know that Matt. 24 parallels with Mark 13 and Luke 21. We can’t stay here long, but let’s briefly look at some of the signs Jesus says we can look for that will precede his return.

Matt. 24:3-8 – “As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many

astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

Pastor and DTS professor, Mark Hitchcock calls the first three groupings listed here: Heresy, Rivalry, and Calamity. Jesus warns that the first sign of his return...a tipping of the hat if you will is when “false Christs” rise up!

Sign #1 - Heresy. Plenty of that going around!

Sign #2 - Rivalry (v. 6) is wars and rumors of wars – check that off the list. But even in this he says, “don’t be alarmed.” And then he gives:

Sign #3 – Calamity - “famines and earthquakes” in various places (v. 7) – and then he says these are but the “beginning of birth pains”.

You know what happens with birth pains, don’t you? As the pregnancy goes on, the pain of giving birth gets more frequent and more intense until the baby is delivered!

Now, important to know that the “last days” started when Jesus ascended back to God, the Father – Acts 1. And the clock on the return of Christ has been ticking since that time...and the birth pains have been going and have been getting more frequent and more and more intense.

Jesus gives us other signs in the Matt. 24 passage. We have:

Sign #4 – Persecution

Matt. 24:9-10 – “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.”

Track Christian history...from the stoning of Stephen to the beheading of James to names like Huss, Tyndale and Elliot. Christian persecution continues today!

In fact, *Open Doors* is a ministry that is designed to provide information, prayer and support for the persecuted church. According to their statistics, and I’m quoting here: “Last year (2022) more Christians were detained or killed for their faith and more churches were attacked or closed than the year before...360 million Christians, or 1 in 7 believers around the world, suffered significant persecution for their faith. Every day in 2021, an average of more than 16 believers were killed for following Jesus.”

Again, intensity and frequency.

Sign #5 – Lawlessness

Matt. 24:12 – “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”

Paul wrote to Timothy an exhaustive list of what lawlessness looks like...what the “love growing cold” looks like.

2 Tim. 3:1-5 – “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

Can we put a check by this sign? You better believe we can! It defines our day. Then look at:

Sign #6 – Worldwide Evangelism

Matt. 24:14 – “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Jesus says the end will come when all the nations – it’s the word “ethne” – it refers to ethnic groupings...people groups. Don’t think nations as it relates to geographical boundaries, but instead people groups from all over the world that share certain customs, languages and dialects.

According to the *Joshua Project* which is an organization that tracks people groups and works with mission organizations to track those that are reached and unreached...that are engaged or unengaged.

Did you know there are 3100 unengaged people groups representing nearly 300 million people – this means they have no evangelical witness...never heard the name of Christ – never seen a Bible! 7300 unreached people groups – represents over 3 billion people that have less than a 2% evangelical witness!

Our job is to get the gospel to them and check this out, we live in a day and time where it’s possible! It’s happening!

Groups like *Finishing the Task* and *The Gideons* and mission organizations from all over are starting to work together and many believe reaching these unengaged groups is closer to happening than ever before!

Think about travel...think about the internet...think about the global church being on mission. Right now, Korea and China and India are raising up and starting more church planting movements and sending out more missionaries than at any other time in history.

Illus. SBC – next week – Sending Ceremony with IMB – our own, Alba Mosquera will be commissioned...she retired from teaching in the Cypress School district and will be going to

Verona, Italy to serve with the International Mission Board. She speaks, three languages – English, Spanish and Italian.

And it's because of people like Alba that GO and because of people like us that give and pray that we can accomplish this. It's happening!

Jesus is returning. It's soon. And maybe you are saying, "Pastor, I've been hearing that for years!" Well, think about it...it's closer to happening now than it was last week...the clock is ticking!

Remember what Jesus said in **2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9** – **"knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation... But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."**

The only thing holding up the return of Jesus is his love and patience for those that have not come to know him yet. Let's go to the second event that will happen as a part of the "last things".

2. The Resurrection and Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

After Jesus returns, the Bible teaches there will be a resurrection – a resurrection of the just (the saved) and the unjust (the unsaved).

John 5:25-29 – **"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."**

Paul in 1 Cor. 15 spends essentially an entire chapter speaking of a physical resurrection and it culminates in:

1 Cor. 15:51-53 – **"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality."**

In eternity, we will be raised and will have physical bodies of some sort. Those that are saved will have bodies that are "imperishable" – no longer impeded or cursed by sin. The Bible doesn't

mention what the body of an unbeliever will be like, but it does tell us what this judgment will be like.

If you are taking notes write down Matt. 25:31-46 – that's from the Olivet Discourse. It's vivid imagery of God at the end of time separating people on the right and on the left as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matt. 25:31-33 – “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.”

Now, some see these “judgments” happening at different times and being totally distinct judgments which is probably the case.

To be clear, a Christian will NOT be judged in the same sense as the unbeliever.

The unbeliever is being judged for their unbelief and will be condemned in it. Believers are not being judged in that sense because in faith, we have hidden ourselves in Christ. Our judgment for sin was taken on at Calvary. We are judged for our life – how we stewarded what God gave and entrusted to us.

Let me give you a few verses that describe this “judgment”. The bible teaches, we'll be judged off our works, our words and our motives.

2 Cor. 5:10 – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

Matt. 12:36 – “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak (or type out).”

Rom. 14:12 – “but they will give an account to him is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

1 Cor. 3:11-15 – “or no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

For believers, we inherit eternal life because of faith in Christ, but we will also receive rewards...and crowns...based off how we live our life on this earth! Did we live for ourselves or did we deny self, take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. (separation in Matt 25)

How we live matters! Are you storing up for yourself treasure in heaven OR are you living for the pleasures of today! Those things will burn on the day of judgment.

Rev. 22:12 – “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.”

This judgment is VERY different than what is referred to as the White Throne Judgement where unbelievers will one day appear and stand before God.

Rev. 20:11-15 – “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is the third event regarding “last things” and that is:

3. Eternal Destinies are Sealed

We just read that those who die in their sins, whose names are not written in the book of life go to a place called the “lake of fire”.

Back to the Olivet Discourse! **Matt. 25:34, 41, 46 – “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

Hades...hell is described as a place of “eternal punishment”. Jesus gives a parable in Luke’s gospel and listen to how the eternal destiny of those who die in their sins going to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (deep regret).

In Mark’s gospel Jesus says hell is a place (Mark 9:48) where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. We know that there is a second death for the unbeliever that it is final. One’s eternal destiny is sealed forever.

For the believer in Jesus, you, as Jesus stated in Matt 25 have a kingdom prepared for you where you will live forever ruling and reigning with Christ. Serving and working for his glory forever and ever. And this leads to the 4th event of last things:

4. The Creation of a New Heaven and New Earth

I won't stay here long, just want to say this...in the closing chapters of the Bible, John is given a revelation of this new heaven and new earth.

Rev. 21:1-5a – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new...”

Think about how incredible this earth is...I just got back from CO. Amazing! The beauty was breathtaking. And heaven – right now what we would consider the presence of God – Paul was caught up there and couldn't even speak of the things he saw.

And yet we are told that God is going to create a new heaven and new earth for us to live in and to serve him forever. And he will dwell with us forever – no separation...no sin... (sea represented separation and chaos – none of that!)

THIS is what we have to look forward to! Paul said, “eye hasn't seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9).

It's going to happen...and it ALL starts when Jesus returns! Are you ready? This is the application part of the message. We've talked about what we believe. Let's close by talking about why it matters!

Why does it matter to me or to you? In light of what we talked about today, what should we be doing as followers of Jesus as we await his return? How should we be living?

1. Be Watchful

I wish I had time to read you a parable Jesus gives in Luke's gospel. Write down Luke 12:35-48 and read it in your time alone with the Lord this week.

It talks about a master who goes away and puts his servants in charge and they don't know when he is going to return. And the whole parable is about faithful servants staying ready! Being on the “lookout” for the master to return. Twice in the passage it mentions the servant “being awake” when the master returns. (Be working!)

1 Thess. 5:2-6 – “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”

Illus. Motel 6 Christians – We'll leave the light on for you!

Illus. Dogs getting home!

Charles Spurgeon used the picture of us waiting for the return of Christ like a dog waiting for its owner to return home. He said, **“Oh, if we loved our Lord as dogs love their masters, how we should catch the first sound of his Coming, and be waiting, always waiting, and never happy until at last we should see him! Pardon me for using a dog as a picture of what you ought to be, but when you have attained to a state above that, I will find another illustration to explain my meaning.”**

Be watchful!

2. Be Holy

2 Peter 3:10-13 – “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The return of Christ should propel us to holiness because if he could return at any minute, we better be prepared and engaged and doing what he's called us to do and NOT be doing what we know we shouldn't!

1 Thess. 5:7-11 – “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

3. Be Encouraged

1 Thess. 4:13-18 – “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Illus. Coach Coker – life is tough! It’s not fair! But he’s our “blessed hope” and the fact that he is returning to right all wrongs...to execute his justice and righteousness...that should encourage us to no end!

The fact is none of us have arrived...we all struggle with sin...our hearts go astray, but it’s the promise that one day upon his return:

1 John 3:2-3 – “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

We are going to be like him one day...finally and fully perfect and complete in him. No more tears...no more sin...no more struggles...no more death!

This should encourage us to live for him...to work for him...as we pray every day, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.