

MATTHEW 24:35
GOD'S ENDURING WORD

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”¹

Among the many comforting words spoken by the Master for the encouragement of His people, the words of this text must assuredly rank among the most precious. Many Christians consider them seminal assurance. The comfort derived from these words may prove false, however. What I mean is that whereas we focus on the need to be comforted through the immediate words of Him in whom we have believed, the context dictates something different, though equally important.

There is great comfort in our Lord's glorious promise that His people have not been forgotten. “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” [JOHN 14:3-6]. The promise is iterated in another form when the Lord promised that He would not leave us as orphans [JOHN 14:18].

One other, especially comforting, promise has been recorded in JOHN 10:27-30. That promise, beloved as it is and familiar to the people of God, testifies, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.” Surely, you will agree with me that these are comforting words. They give believers confidence in the world and courage to stand when every foundation seems to turn to dust.

Recognise that each of these statements expressing Christ's concern for His people is an eschatological statement. His promise that we cannot be snatched from the Father's hand is a statement of the eternal power of the Father, even throughout eternity. His promise that we will not be left as orphans is an eschatological statement that during His physical absence His Spirit is with us. His promise that He is “the way, the truth and the life” is an eschatological statement based upon the promise that He is coming again. Just so, the promise of the certainty of His words is an eschatological statement.

THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE WILL NOT ENDURE — “Heaven and earth will pass away.” Even were true the material universe to continue indefinitely, it is certain that none of us will endure in this present condition. However, the Second Law of Thermodynamics dictates that this present material universe, of necessity, must end. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is a universal law with application to every facet of the material world. Though the Law does not predict when the end of all things will occur, it does point to the certainty of the end of all things. Every indicator received through the five senses warns of the impermanence of this material universe; and our own inexorable march toward eternity testifies to the dissolution of all that we know and now observe.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Peter testified to that truth when he wrote, “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” [2 PETER 3:10].

Speaking through Isaiah, God makes a similar affirmation.

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner.”

[ISAIAH 51:6]

The Psalmist, in the 102nd PSALM, addresses God, saying:

“Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe,
and they will pass away.”

[PSALM 102:25, 26]

Likewise, God asserts that the heavens will be destroyed.

“All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree.”

[ISAIAH 34:4]

The Word of God identifies created things—the universe and all that is in it—as the “things that are shaken” [see HEBREWS 12:27], and by implication, “the things that cannot be shaken” are those things that are eternal—God and Heaven itself. This imagery helps to sift through what is valued by man and what should be valued. Anything you can handle, taste, see or smell, everything that creates a sound, is doomed for dust. Only that which is of the Spirit is eternal. Of course, the things that are created, that which can be shaken, may be used for God’s purpose—for His glory—but we must be cautious not to become too attached to the things of this dying earth. Christians must learn this valuable lesson to distinguish between permanent and transient.

We are given a fascinating revelation that teaches us that [Christ] “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” The passage concludes by testifying, “In [Christ] all things hold together” [COLOSSIANS 1:17].

Not only has Christ created all things [see **HEBREWS 1:2; JOHN 1:3**], but all things have been made for Him [see **ROMANS 11:36**]. Between the beginning and the end, all that now exists is held together by Him. Gravity and the stabilising forces that hold together molecular and atomic particles are but the power of Christ. When He ceases to give His consent for all things to “hold together,” then all created things will end.

When Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away,” He makes an eschatological statement. Nor is this the only time the Lord employed this eschatological imagery. During the message we know as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus referred to the Law. “Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” [**MATTHEW 5:18**].

Jesus’ assertion that “heaven and earth will pass away” is focused on an event that is yet future. Unfortunately, modern Christendom seems uninformed and uninterested in future events. We have become so caught up in the *now* and we have lost sight of the *not yet*. It was not always this way among the churches, however. At the time I came to faith, evangelical Christians lived in anticipation of the imminent return of the Saviour.

Perhaps I am showing my age, but in the year I came to faith, one of the bestselling books was “The Late Great Planet Earth.” The Jesus movement was in full swing. One of popular songs in the budding CCM movement was sung by a young hippie named Larry Norman. The lyrics of that song included these words these:

Two men walking up a hill,
One disappears
And one’s left standing still.
I wish we’d all been ready.²

Christian literature of the late sixties and the early seventies focused on the proximity of Christ’s return, and urged evangelism growing out of concern for the lost.

Contrast that era to this present day when the emphasis of literature and music is upon self-esteem. Much of the literature promotes the concept of “self-esteem,” and even much of the music dedicated to worship is focused on how the “worshipper” feels. Somehow, what is felt is considered to be of greater value than is exaltation of the Lord; it is an extension of the emphasis on self-esteem. As an aside of great significance: when one meets the Living God, that one will not feel “good” about himself or herself, but that one will hold the True and Living God in awe.

What else can the words Isaiah wrote mean?

“Thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
‘I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

[**ISAIAH 57:15**]

This is also the intent of **ISAIAH 66:2**:

² Words and Music by Larry Norman on **Only Visiting This Planet**, © 1969

“This is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.”

I have established the impermanence of the physical creation. Now, focus on Jesus’ eschatological statement that “Heaven and earth will pass away.” I remind you that the end of all that we know of this physical universe is destined shortly to pass away. The great cities of the world, lands and houses, automobiles and toys, all the goods we accumulate—all that man treasures and esteems will be utterly destroyed.

The timing of the Lord’s return is not known [MATTHEW 24:36], but His return is certain [MATTHEW 24:44]. Jesus was a pretribulational premillennialist. He taught that the next great event on the Father’s schedule is the Rapture [MATTHEW 24:31, 37-41], when all believers will be gathered to His side. After this, unprecedented judgements will be unleashed on an unbelieving populace as God reveals His wrath [see MATTHEW 24:21, 22]. At the conclusion of those awesome days of judgement, Christ Jesus our Lord will return in great power and glory, and every eye will see Him [MATTHEW 24:27, 29-31]. Upon His return, He will judge the nations [MATTHEW 25:31-46]. After judging the nations, the saved will enter into the millennial reign of Christ the Lord; and for one thousand years, we who are His people now will reign with Him [REVELATION 20:6].

The depravity of man is a dreadful truth that is not often openly discussed today. The popular message among the churches today stresses feeling good about ourselves, but frightful truth is that the heart of all mankind is “deceitful” and “desperately sick” [JEREMIAH 17:9]. Even while enjoying the bountiful goodness of Christ during His earthly rule, people will plot the overthrow of the Son of God. Though only saved people will enter into the Millennium, of those born during that thousand-year reign of Messiah many will reveal the rebel heart, uniting in a wicked effort to overthrow His Millennial Kingdom. Listen to a brief passage pointing forward to that time.

“When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” [REVELATION 20:7-10].

Isn’t that the most astounding action imaginable? People born under the perfect reign of the Son of God will rebel against His rule and attempt to depose Him! What else can this be but demonstration of the wicked nature that infects and pollutes each heart? Except for the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord taking our sin upon Himself and His transforming power, we each would rebel against Him.

However, He has taken our sin away, giving His life as a sacrifice in our place. Dying because of our sin, He has risen from the dead to declare us justified before the Father. This is our message of life. By the grace of God, Christ Jesus our Lord tasted death for everyone [see HEBREWS 2:9]. Because He has provided this sacrifice, Christ Jesus is “the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe” [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:10].

THE WORD OF CHRIST WILL ENDURE — “My words will not pass away.” Precisely what are the “words” of Christ? Are they only those words that He spoke while in the flesh? Are they restricted to what is recorded as words He spoke during the days of His flesh? Or is it possible that since He is author of Scripture that what is in view is the whole of Scripture? Undoubtedly, Scripture itself is the Word of Christ.

When Peter writes about our salvation, he makes the following statement that is perhaps overlooked in our haste to celebrate what we possess. “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look” [1 PETER 1:10-12].

When the prophets of the Old Testament wrote of Christ and His suffering, they were guided by and energised by the *Spirit of Christ*. Certainly, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote what the *Spirit of Christ* directed them to write concerning His suffering and concerning His glorious reign. No less did Hosea, Joel, Amos and all the Minor Prophets fulfil the will of Christ when they wrote what the *Spirit of Christ* directed them to write.

Whenever we speak of the prophets, we are prone to neglect others who were motivated by the *Spirit of Christ* to speak of His sacrifice and of His glories. David, moved by the *Spirit of Christ*, spoke of the suffering of the Christ and wrote of His glorious reign. Solomon, also, spoke of the coming Messiah, and He was carried along by the *Spirit of Christ*. The same is true of Moses, and of Abraham, and of all who submitted to the *Spirit of Christ* to ensure this written Word would be available to us.

Earlier, we discovered that the things that can be shaken refer to the material elements of God’s creation. Therefore, things that cannot be shaken must be the spiritual elements; and the spiritual elements assuredly include this Word. The Word of God remains forever. Have you ever noticed the importance God seems to attach to the permanence of His Word? Let me provide just a few examples of God’s statement concerning the eternal nature of His Word.

David, writing of God’s Word, testifies to the eternal nature of that Word.

“Forever, O LORD, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

[PSALM 119:89]

“Long have I known from your testimonies
that you have founded [your commandments] forever.”

[PSALM 119:152]

“The sum of your word is truth,
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”

[PSALM 119:160]

Isaiah, with words that are echoed by Peter, writes of the Word of the Living God,

“The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.”

[ISAIAH 40:8; cf. 1 PETER 1:24, 25]

Because the words of Christ will never pass away, we who have believed in Him, receive His salvation live in confidence. Peter teaches that the redeemed are “born again ... through the living and abiding Word of God” [1 PETER 1:23]. Therefore, any who have rejected Him as Lord of life shall assuredly face judgement. Here is a sobering thought; our words have repercussions because they persist. The Master has warned, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” [MATTHEW 12:36, 37]. Why, then should it be thought surprising that the words of Christ persists and the impact of those words likewise continue forever and ever?

Though I have spoken generally about the Saviour’s words, join me in focusing on the specific intent of His words. The Master spoke of the Great Tribulation and its conclusion [MATTHEW 24:29-31]. He said that at the end of those days of divine judgement He would return. The entire world will see Him at His return as He comes to judge and to reign. At His return, the Lord will gather all who have waited patiently for His return during those days of the Tribulation, and the wicked—all who attempted to save themselves by submitting to the reign of the antichrist—will mourn.

Jesus then pointed to a common occurrence in Palestine—the leafing of a fig tree. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near” [MATTHEW 24:32]. We are astute people. When leaves appear on the trees, we know that summer is near; we discern the seasons by the response of all nature. Thus, Jesus says, “When you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates” [MATTHEW 24:33].

What things did Jesus have in view? Immediately preceding the Tribulation, the Master said the world would witness false messiahs appearing, civil rebellions, international wars, widespread earthquakes, famines and pestilences [MATTHEW 24:5-8]. During the seven years of the Tribulation, the Lord warned that those seeking deliverance through faith in Him as the Messiah can anticipate persecution, imprisonment and trials, betrayal by family and friends, martyrdom, and irrational hatred because of their faith [MATTHEW 24:9-28; see also LUKE 21:12-19], as they live in the hope of His imminent return!

The Word seems to indicate that opposition to the Faith and natural disasters will figure prominently in days leading up to the Great Tribulation! Have you read the newspapers or watched the evening news recently? Newscasts and newspapers are filled with stories of people claiming to possess great powers and people claiming divinity. There is a plethora of stories concerning civil rebellions (Egypt, Libya, Iran, Bahrain, Tunisia) and conflicts throughout the world (Afghanistan, Korea and Mexico), earthquakes, famines, strange new diseases (a new strain of Marburg virus in Angola) for which there is no cure, and dreadful events that startle the complacent. All that seems lacking are the atmospheric cataclysms that seem to be implied in His words. Increasingly, we witness growing hostility to righteousness, a growing number of Christians martyred for their faith, and division of families because of the Faith.

Now, stay with me. The generation living when the events begin that Jesus has just described will see it through to the conclusion. Jesus uses the same word translated “pass away” in **VERSE 34** as He uses in **VERSE 35**. “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” [**MATTHEW 24:34, 35**]. The generation that witnesses the beginning of the Tribulation will also see the initiation of the millennial reign of Jesus. Though believers will be removed as the Great Tribulation is ushered in, those who have yet to believe will enter into that period and events will move so swiftly that the entire generation will also see the conclusion.

Either you will turn to Christ before He removes His people and are thus spared those awful days of testing, or you will witness those awful days up close and personal. In those days, one will either suffer because he chose to believe in the Christ he refused to trust before the Rapture, or he will temporarily avoid suffering through compromise. If one chooses to live in hope of Christ's return, she will share in His glory at His return, though she will experience great trials. If you save your life, you will lose your soul.

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S WORDS DEMANDS VIGILANCE — Disciples are warned to be alert. “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” [**MATTHEW 24:36-44**].

I do not know when Jesus will return; but I am certain that He is coming again. Perhaps no one can truly know what it means should we fail to be ready, but some things are apparent. If we are not ready, we will be shamed at His coming. John encourages disciples, “Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming” [**1 JOHN 2:28**]. I have no idea what being shamed before Him entails, nor do I wish to discover what it might mean.

If we should be unprepared for His return, we will be exposed before the eyes of all the redeemed of God. Paul writes, “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” [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:10**].

Paul cautions against laxity in service: “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. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” [**1 CORINTHIANS 3:13-15**]. None of us can possibly know all that this means, but we do know that God has cursed slackers. The Lord has warned, “Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness” [**JEREMIAH 48:10**].

I know that should I fail to be prepared, loved ones and friends may well be condemned through my negligence. Those are indeed sobering words that Ezekiel wrote. “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.

“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul”

[EZEKIEL 33:2-9].

Christian, this is the reason Jesus warned us to “stay awake” [MATTHEW 24:42]! We have grown casual concerning the Faith. We live as though Jesus is not coming again. We have little concern for the eternal welfare of others. Wake up! Hear the Living Son of God, who urges us to anticipate His return. “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:26].

Jesus is coming, signs or no signs. However, no one should ignore the signs preceding His return. And that warning includes you, dear unsaved friend. You are enjoying the benefits of past righteousness, but all these blessings will shortly be taken away. Even now, God warns as He pleads with you to believe. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

‘In a favourable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’”

This call to life concludes by warning, “Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:2]. Believe and be saved. Accept His gift of life now. Do it today. Do it now. Amen.