Doctrine

The Last Days

Fairview Missionary Church| Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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How much time in your life have you spent studying eschatology? Some of you are thinking, "I don't even know what eschatology is," right? Well, eschatology is just a big word that really means" studying the last things," or" the last days." It is studying about the end times, and generally speaking, as I talk with individuals, I find that most people are in one of two camps when it comes to eschatology: they either love it and they want to talk about it all the time, they want to know every detail, they want to try to figure everything out, or they're on the other side of the spectrum and they just stay away from it.

They don't want to talk about it, they don't want to know about it, they just try to ignore it. Today, my hope and my prayer is to get us to come more towards the middle and really create a third camp: those who are interested in the last days, but not overly obsessed or worried about them. It's okay to talk about them, it's okay to study them, but I'm not going to be anxious about it, I'm not going to worry about it.

And so I hope, in my prayer, is to help you find a healthy balance without going to either extreme, because I believe either extreme can be shaky ground for us. I believe that it's unhealthy to completely ignore the prophetic and apocalyptic literature of the Bible-- things like Revelation, parts of Daniel, and Zechariah-- but I also think it's unhealthy to obsess over trying to interpret every single detail.

This is our final week in a series that we have been doing called "Doctrine." And for the last eight weeks, we have been sharing with you the core foundations of the Christian faith: what do we believe, what is important to us. And so we spent an entire week talking about God the Father, then we spent an entire week talking about God the Son, and then God the Spirit. We took a week to talk about the Trinity, then we took a week to talk about the Bible: where did it come from, can it be trusted?

Then we took a week to talk about humanity and our sin. Two weeks ago, we talked about salvation, and then last week, we talked about what it meant to be the church. And at the beginning of every one of those messages, we took time to read the missionary church's statement on those particular doctrines: what do we believe. And then for the next few minutes, we unpacked that statement: what is that statement truly saying we believe to be true? And today, we are going to do the same thing.

We're going to read the missionary church's statement on the last days. And again, just as I have said with every other statement, our statement in the missionary church is not any different or hugely different than most evangelical churches, so it's just our statement that we have come with. But what is going to be different today is that our statement on the last times, or eschatology, is going to be a little more vague than previous weeks.

Because as a denomination, we don't feel the need to hold too strongly to a specific idea, a specific interpretation of how the last days are going to play out, because theologians, those that have studied scriptures, studied all of the prophecies, have been debating for many years as to what this is going to look like, and I highly doubt we are going to agree on it today, right?

And so we just say, "Okay, let's talk about it ." We don't believe that one specific interpretation is necessary to list as a core doctrine because it isn't relevant to salvation. How you interpret the end times is not relevant to your salvation, but don't confuse that for somehow meaning it isn't important, right? It is important. It's good for us to study, it's good for us to read about and have conversations with others about.

But I don't know about you, I like to learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before me. I do this in my life, and I do this in my faith. If somebody next to me has to learn a life lesson the hard way, I try to learn from them without having to experience the consequences, right? I say," You go ahead and do that, and I'll see what happens ." And in my faith, I do the same thing. I try to learn from those who have gone before me.

And when I read the New Testament, I find it very interesting that the religious leaders of that time so badly misinterpreted the prophecies about Jesus that they missed the Messiah. It was the religious leaders, it was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the teachers of the religious law that missed Jesus. And let me just give you one example of how they missed Jesus as the Messiah. There are people that are arguing over who Jesus might be in John chapter 7.

And in John chapter 7, one of them says, "He is the Messiah." But still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not the scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" And I read this, and I think they obviously haven't read Luke chapter 2 yet, right? Because in Luke 2, we see that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but they only know that Jesus came from Galilee, and so they completely missed it.

Therefore, I believe for us as a people, it would be wise to hold our views on eschatology, the end times, with an open hand. With an open hand. So we're going to pray, and then we're going to take some time to talk about these last days, but I'm not going to explain to you all of the different theories that exist. I think it would be better for us to look at some cautions, things to beware of when we are talking or reading about the end days.

So let's pray, and then we'll jump in. Heavenly Father, I know that the topic of the last days, or the end times, for some it brings excitement, and for others they may think to themselves, "I chose the wrong day to come to church ." Father, we understand that. I think it's important for us to talk about, but certainly not to cause worry or anxiety. Because as we are going to see today from the scriptures, Lord, we don't have anything to fear.

We know the end of the story. We know what's going to happen, we don't necessarily know how it's going to happen, but we know that in the end, You win. And Jesus, we know that You are going to return. And so may we put our faith and our hope in that as we discuss what the end times may look like and what that means for us. And so we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So let me begin by reading together the missionary church's statement on the last days.

And again, it's going to be purposefully vague and not choose some specific line to go down. "We believe that the final years of human history will be characterized by worldwide persecution and divine judgment. We believe that the return of Jesus will be personal, bodily, visible, and glorious.

His second coming, the blessed hope for which we must be constantly prepared, is to be a source of encouragement and comfort, a motive for holy living, and an inspiration for ministry and mission. We believe that when Jesus does return, He will subdue His enemies, and He will establish His kingdom on earth, and will reign in perfect righteousness.

For those in Christ, for those who have received Him as their Savior, death is gain, because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. At the resurrection, we believe that every person, every person that's ever existed, will face one of two eternal destinies. We believe that no condemnation awaits those who are in Christ, because their sins were forgiven at the cross.

They will have their lives and works judged, but only for reward. And they will enjoy an eternal, embodied life in the presence of God and His angels forever, while those who are not in Christ will be raised to appear before God for a final, irrevocable judgment. They will be consigned to a place of eternal, conscious punishment, separated from God in hell with Satan and his angels.

We believe in the coming restoration of all things, where God, in accordance with His power and promises, will one day bring His purposes for all of creation to their glorious fulfillment. Here, God's handiwork, though disfigured by sin and subject to decay, the world we live in, will be fully restored in a new heaven and a new earth.

We believe that all of God's redemptive purposes will come to fruition, and death will be swallowed up in victory." Amen. Notice in that statement, we don't talk about how it's going to happen or what it's going to look like. This is just what scripture teaches is going to be the end. This is what it's going to look like. This is what's going to happen. So let's now take the next few minutes to just have some cautions that as we talk about eschatology, or as we try to understand the end times, what are some cautions that we should have as we do this ourselves and as we interact with others.

Let's start with number one. Caution number one is not being Christ - centered. Eschatology, the study of end times, is first and foremost about Jesus. That's what it's about. And all too often, you and I can get caught up in all of the details. It's easy to get caught up in trying to interpret what the mark of the beast is going to be, or the exact timing of the events, or to try to figure out who the Antichrist is.

People love to predict what the mark of the beast is going to be and how it's going to come. And you know what? During election season, the internet is full of individuals who believe they know who the Antichrist is, right? It's one of the candidates, or both of them, right? People are always sending me emails and messages, "I think so - and - so is the Antichrist ." And I'm like, "I don't know," you know? It's important as we study eschatology to remember the goal is to get a better understanding of who Jesus is and to be excited about His return, not necessarily figure everything out.

When we study eschatology as believers in Jesus, we study it with a hope and with a joy, because Christ has already paid the price for sin, and He has risen from the dead. We know the end of the story. So when we study eschatology, it shouldn't bring fear. It shouldn't bring anxiety. We know what is going to happen. And so make sure when we are studying Christ, studying the eschatology, that Christ is the center of that study.

Caution number two is failing to continue missions and gospel urgency. Sometimes people will get so focused on the end times that they can get to the point where they say," You know what? Jesus is coming back so soon, I don't need to share the gospel anymore." That couldn't be further from the truth. Jesus told us that we would not know the times or dates. We will not know the exact times or dates, but He does command us instead to go into all the world and make disciples.

There is no end for that command that He has given to us. There's no end date to say, "Okay, do that until this point and then stop ." No. Until He returns, we are supposed to love others and point others toward Jesus to the best of our ability. And who needs more motivation to do that than to hear what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 24, verse 14, when He said, "And this gospel, the good news of Jesus, of the kingdom, will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." So Jesus told us the end is not going to come until everyone has heard the good news of Jesus.

So if you want the end to come sooner, get out and tell everybody you know about Jesus, right? That's what He is saying. Share the good news. Share with others. Let us not fall into the mindset that there's an end date to that command. We are to love others till the end. Caution number three, trying to look for secret codes as a way to unlock scripture's meaning.

With the internet available now, and anybody can post anything, I can just tell you as a pastor of a church, I have been sent way too many videos of people on the internet who claim to have this new Bible code - breaking scheme, right? Some way to read the Bible that gives us a secret meaning. You know, if you take the fifth letter of every third word in the second paragraph of the odd chapters in the book of John, it spells Donald Trump.

It doesn't, by the way. Okay? It doesn't. Don't look that up. Some of you are going to try to figure that out, okay? I just made that up, but that's how crazy it is sometimes, all right? They just do whatever they have to do to see what they want to see. And the latest one that many of you have probably heard, this secret biblical meaning is centered around finding artificial intelligence in revelation. Some of you may have read this online that John obviously didn't know what robots looked like or artificial intelligence, and so all of the visions and things that he saw had to be artificial intelligence.

It may be, it may not be, I have no clue, but that's not my goal in life, to discover what that is. Martin Lloyd Jones said it this way, "The great doctrine of the second advent has, in a sense, fallen into disrepute because of this tendency on the part of some to be more interested in the how and when of the second coming rather than in the fact of the second coming." That's where our focus should be. He is coming back.

How and when, I don't know. Let's talk about it. Let's read about it. But we don't know. All we know is that He is going to come. Let's not focus on finding secret codes. Caution number four for us is missing the connection between the garden or creation and the new earth. I think for whatever reason, whether it's because of media, cartoons, maybe it's medieval art, Renaissance art, we have this idea in our minds of heaven, of we are in the clouds playing a harp with a halo on our head, right?

We have this vision of what heaven is going to be like in this metaphysical world, when in reality, that is not what scripture teaches us about the end times or about heaven or about what it is going to look like. And let me just also clarify something else that I hear often, and it's okay. I'll go to a funeral service, and I'll hear even a pastor, I'll hear somebody make the comment of, "Oh, God just needed another angel." You guys have heard someone say this. Can I just tell you the Bible doesn't teach that?

You do realize that when we die, we don't turn into angels, all right? Angels are a different created being in God's order. We are human beings that have been created in the image of God. When you and I die, we don't turn into angels. We don't have harps and halos and wings, and who knows what the new body is going to look like that scripture talks about. But it is important for you and I to understand that God has created us as physical beings. And nowhere in scripture is it wrong to understand that the new heavens and the new earth is going to be physical.

There's going to be a physical part to it. Much of the imagery that describes this new heaven and new earth that is going to come is found right, really just this symbolism from the story in the garden in Genesis. A lot of this imagery that John uses and other writers are using is imagery of the garden, because remember, in Genesis chapter 1, when God created the garden and He placed Adam and Eve there, there was no sin.

Therefore, the garden was a perfect world. It was a perfect place. And this idea of the new heavens and new earth is going back to that time before sin had corrupted even nature and the world as we know it. How do we know this? Paul says in Romans chapter 8, verse 21, that the creation itself, everything you see, will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

All of creation is going to be liberated from sin. Sin is going to be removed from creation. And so let us not miss the fact that we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth that reminded John, as he is writing revelation of the garden in Genesis chapter 1. Caution number five, making a particular view of eschatology a test of orthodoxy. Now, I know that there's some big words there.

Really, it just means I think it is wrong for a church or a denomination to say, "This is how we believe the end is going to happen," and they spell everything out, and if you don't believe that, you can't be part of us, right? It's

saying we have to look at this idea of end times and hold our idea of what we maybe think it is going to look like with an open hand, saying," You know what?

We're not 100 % sure." It's good for us to study the scriptures to try to gain clarity, but we should be cautious of holding positions about Jesus' millennial reign and what the end is going to look like, and to try to hold that truth with the same tenacity as we do the virgin birth of Jesus. The virgin birth is foundational to what we believe. The resurrection is foundational to what we believe. It is of utmost importance.

But when it comes to eschatology and how we interpret the end times, we shouldn't make that a doctrine that we stand or fall on. It's open to debate. Let's talk about this. If God wanted us to know with 100 % certainty what the end was going to look like and the exact timing, I believe He would have told us. But He didn't. We don't have those specifics of how the end is going to unravel. What we do have is the fact that God is going to win and Jesus is going to return.

That is without a shadow of a doubt. So let's not make eschatology a test of our faith or of our orthodoxy. Caution number six is failing to remember that Jesus did describe the signs of the age. If it is unhealthy to set dates based on wars and rumors of wars, it's also a mistake to be unsettled by those signs, because Jesus warned us ahead of time.

2, 000 years ago, in Matthew chapter 24, verse 6, we know that Jesus said," You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are what? Not alarmed. For such things must happen, but the end is still to come." Jesus said, "Don't be alarmed by wars and rumors of wars in the world in which you live. It's okay. That is going to happen. I am telling you ahead of time." He also told us that terrible things are going to happen in the end, but we should not be alarmed or fearful of that.

He has prepared us for that. Look at what the apostle Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. "But mark this," Paul says, "There will be terrible times in the last days." There's going to be some hard things that are coming. There's going to be a world that's difficult to live in. Now, before I read the next few verses, I want you to think about the world in which we live, and I want you to tell me whether you think we're living in this time.

Paul says, "People will be lovers of themselves. They will be lovers of money. They will be boastful. They will be proud. They will be abusive. They will be disobedient to their parents. They will be ungrateful, unholy." Paul says they will be without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self - control. They will be brutal, not lovers of the good.

They will be treacherous and rash and conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Could that define our world today? Absolutely it can. Some of you, even as we read that, you had pictures of people in your mind that you know, and please don't say those names out loud, right? People that could fall into this category. But do you think that we could have said this about the world 1, 000 years ago? I have a sneeze coming.

Of course we could. We could have said that 1, 000 years ago. We have lived in this world where this has been true because by our sinful nature, this is what we lean towards. If you don't have God as your Savior, if you have not invited the Holy Spirit to live inside of you, every single one of us, this would describe our life. And so it's important for us not to worry about what the end is going to look like, because again, Jesus said, scripture says, "When did the last days begin?" 2, 000 years ago, when Jesus came.

That was the beginning of the last days. We've been in the last days for 2, 000 years. We continue to be there. Caution number seven, embracing either extreme optimism or extreme pessimism about current events. Although I don't have the same eschatological view as Anthony Hocama, some of you may be familiar with him, I can agree with what he says in this.

Since we know that the victory of Christ over evil was decisive and that Christ is now on the throne, the dominant mood of our millennial eschatology, which is what I I don't necessarily follow that, is optimism,

Christian optimism. I agree with him. This means that we view no world crisis as totally beyond help and no social trend as absolutely irreversible.

It means that you and I, as followers of Jesus, live in hope, a hope that is built on faith and that expresses itself in love. He is simply saying, "My worldview about the end times tells me in no way am I going to live in a world where I say,' You know what? It can't be helped. It's too far gone.'" Have you ever felt that sometimes? Sometimes it's easy to go," You know what? It's just too far gone. We can't bring it back ." But he says, and I agree, that we should never give up.

Nothing is beyond God's ability to call people back. You see, living in this biblical tension of restlessness and patience is a challenge for every Christian. But maybe even more so for those of us who live in the West, those of us who generally live life in comfort. You and I, most of us, if not all of us, live a life of comfort where entertainment is abundant.

And yes, we have hurts and pains and we go through ups and downs in life, but really, compared to other people in the world, we truly don't know how difficult it could be. I can only speak of myself in this next statement, but I believe it to be true of a lot of us. We have become so enamored with our current lives that we can come to the point where we cease to lean forward with reckless abandon toward our much greater future, meaning that there is probably a time in your life where you said, "Hey, God, if you could wait to send Jesus back for a little bit, that'd be great.

I have some things that I want to experience." Whether it's marriage, whether it's having children, whether it's traveling, whatever it is, you are so looking forward to that that you say, "God, could you just wait a moment before you come back? Just give me a minute. I want to experience this." Now, I know I've told you this before. As I continue to age and as I get older, I can tell you with absolute certainty that my prayer now today is, "God, whenever you want to come back, I'm ready.

I'm ready," because there's nothing in this world that is going to compare with what heaven is like. Living in a world with sin and hurt and death and pain and suffering, I am willing to trade all of that for the glories of heaven. But again, we can get so comfortable in our lives that we think about the here and now above and beyond what we think about the future. When was the last time you actually longed for the new creation?

And finally, caution number eight is reading revelation as nonfiction prose instead of as apocalyptic literature, which is what it is. Now, let me define some of that. Some of you that love reading will recognize this, but the writing style of the book of Revelation, again, as I said, some of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, are known specifically as apocalyptic literature, which has very specific features to it, and it is to be read a certain way.

So let me give you the definition. I've been making you wait the whole service for this, all right? Apocalyptic literature is a literary genre that uses visions, symbols, and metaphor to reveal hidden or divine truths, typically offering hope and perspective during times of crisis and oppression. If you didn't get that and you want it, just Google it. That's where I got it from, all right?

Apocalyptic literature, meaning when you read apocalyptic literature, books like Revelation, it is not meant to be taken literally. It's not meant that way, while at the same time, it is possible in apocalyptic literature that the author could be using well-known images and objects of his readers to offer a hope and a perspective of something that previously he did not have knowledge of.

Meaning, some people describe this as going to a tribe in Africa that has no idea what electricity is and trying to study their language and use the words that they know and the things that they know and try to explain to them what electricity is. You would have to say things like, "Well, there's this power that travels through vines that are connected to your huts, and then it goes into a box, and then once you connect to that box, then you get power and you light up these things." You try to explain it.

It can be difficult. And so, yes, it is possible that as John is describing these images, he's using only language that he knows and using analogies and metaphors that people would understand. One pastor put it this way as we're trying to describe God, that there is inherent difficulty in talking about God the closer you get to Him. It's difficult to use language that we can understand. And so apocalyptic literature then, precisely because it is apocalyptic literature, is full of symbols.

And this is one of the tools that God has given to us to grant us wisdom and insight into who He is and to give us an image into the throne room of God because our experience of Him is so beneathed that we do not have categories to understand it any other way. But one day we will. Now, I told you I'm not going to take time today to go into detail concerning all the theories of the last days and how that might play out. I have done that in the past.

So if you're here today and this just kind of piqued your interest and you say, "Well, pastor, I want to know what are some of the theories out there," I would encourage you to look online. You can use our app. And I talked about this in a message on April 27th, 2025, in a series called Tough Questions. Some of you remember this? Somebody asked a question about the end times, and so I took a large part of that message, April 27th, 2025, to talk about the different theories about the end times.

So if you want to know about amillennialism, postmillennialism, or dispensational premillennialism, look up that message and we talk about all those things. If you don't care about any of those words, just go home and read Revelation, all right? But with all the difference that there are ideas about the end times, here is what nearly all Christians can agree upon. Jesus is coming back. Jesus is coming back.

Scripture is very clear that God wins, Satan loses, and our eternity is determined upon our relationship with Jesus Christ. So as we move forward and as we begin to live every day like it could be our last day, my encouragement to you today is try to avoid the extremes in the conversations about the last days. Don't avoid Jesus' words concerning the last days in Scripture or the apocalyptic literature. In Revelation, it tells us that just by reading it, you will be blessed.

And so it's good to read it. Understand that Jesus does prepare us and tell us to be ready for the last days. We should recognize the signs and continue pointing people towards Him. We should continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ, but be encouraged that Jesus wins. The caution, don't dive so deep into this topic that it's all you think about while trying to interpret every little detail and exactly what it's going to look like. Why am I encouraging you not to do that?

Because it can cause you panic and to lose heart. I've had people come into my office just all worked up about the last days. It can cause you to get depressed, experience unnecessary anxiety in your life. It can cause you to stop making Jesus the main thing because you're so focused on how things are going to play out. And it can lead you down a rabbit hole. All of you have probably experienced this where you're just I think they call it doom scrolling on the internet, and the algorithms just keep sending you videos and videos, and you can go really deep down this.

Can I encourage you just to stop at some point, all right? Just stop and turn it off. The goal truly is just to keep a level head about you when it concerns this. If it excites you, study it, talk about it. That's great. Let's have conversations. But don't go so deep that it becomes everything that you think about, that it causes anxiety, that you feel that you know all of the answers and you've got to explain it to everybody else. That's a good way to turn people away.

It really is. There's enough people on the internet already doing that, okay? We don't need any more. Keep a level head and be excited that we know the end of the story, that Jesus wins. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunity we've had today to just dive into Your Word, to try to understand these last days, the study of the end times.

Lord, my prayer and my desire is that even in just talking about things, that it would not bring anxiety or stress or concern. But it certainly is my prayer that every single person that can hear my voice today, whether they're here with us watching online, listening on the radio, that every single person would have made that commitment to proclaim You as their Lord and Savior, that they would have repented of their sins and turn to You and put their faith and their hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we also can be resurrected and live with You eternally in this new creation that You have promised to us.

And so, Lord, I pray that Your Spirit would continue to speak today. Draw people to You. And if there's somebody that has anxiety, if there's somebody that's depressed, that is so concerned with what is going on in the world, Father, I pray that they would receive the peace from You that Scripture says surpasses understanding, that they would look to You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.