

## **5 Days to Calvary: Holy Week Devotions**

### **Tuesday**

#### **The Way We Wait On The End**

I've never run a marathon and there's a good chance I never will. But long-distance running continues to fascinate me and something that took place at the 2023 London Marathon has further fueled that fascination. A video was shared of a competitor doubling over near the home stretch of the 26-mile race. As he was being passed by other runners, on the verge of collapsing, suddenly another runner came in behind him and grabbed his arm. With this assistance the exhausted athlete was able to stumble forward a little further. Shortly after this, someone else came along to the struggling man's other side and then connected, arm in arm, the three made it across the finish line.<sup>1</sup> None of these men won the London Marathon, but the three of them have been seen by far more people than the winner because finishing together is much more inspiring than finishing first.

Looking back at the Gospels' account of Jesus' final week, after a whirlwind of donkey rides, cursed trees and flipped tables Matthew tells us the next day Jesus sat down on the Mount of Olives. It was at this moment His disciples sat down with Him and asked about "the end." Except the disciples, who had walked with Jesus for about three years by this point, weren't thinking about taking a nap. No, they wanted to know when this "kingdom" Jesus had been going on and on about was finally going to come into its own. They wanted to hear about the "sign" of His coming and "the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3). This scene is made even more intriguing considering the very mountain Jesus sat down on to answer their question was referred to by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah as the place where God would stand and split the mountain in two (Zech. 1:4)!

After speaking in apocalyptic language, telling stories of tribulation, execution, abomination and escape routes through the mountains, Jesus settles the real question: what are we supposed to do while we're waiting? Jesus' talk spans across chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew's writing, and centers around three illustrations that all speak to some aspect of finishing well. For Jesus the end was a matter to know about and look for, but it wasn't something that could be changed or affected. The end was on heaven's time, but the way they chose to finish the race was something

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Barnes, "Struggling London Marathon Runner Gets Help From Fellow Athletes To Finish the Race," *My Modern Met* (5-11-23)

everyone on that hill, and all of us who have come after them, must choose to embrace or reject.

The three stories Jesus tells are certainly worth looking at individually and in depth, but there is also something common to each story. The parable of the servants in the household (Matt. 24:45-51), the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) and the story of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) all reveal “the end” not as something we will experience in isolation, but in community. If we want to finish well, Jesus says we need to remember that we are finishing together. In a world where we frequently hear predictions and prophecies about the end times, how often are they accompanied by a sermon like Jesus’ on the mountain that day?

Servants in the household of God must be as gracious in serving each other as we are in serving the Master of the house. As we await the bridegroom our purity is not the only thing that matters, but our preparedness is just as important because all of us together need oil for our lamps. And as we see others investing the gifts, talents and treasures God has given them, we are to join as stewards and investors ourselves so what we’ve been given is multiplied! None of the stories Jesus told to help us understand how to be faithful until the end was focused on a single person, they were always about a group, a community, a household. There is no “lone wolf” walk to the end of the race when Jesus teaches it.

In the garden, Jesus went out and prayed alone. During His trial, Jesus stood condemned alone. At the cross Jesus hung and died alone. As He took our place in punishment, Jesus not only bore our sorrows and sins but also our isolation. Which means He carried the weight of loneliness so we could walk in the freedom of community. Just like the marathoners knew that finishing the race was only part of the community they’d entered when they began training, Jesus tells us the way we walk confidently toward “the end” is to walk connected and gathered. Getting to the end first isn’t nearly as important as getting there together.