

335: June 2; Apocalypse Then and Now (New Testament Week 22)

Reading: Mark 12-13; JST-Matthew; Matt 25; Luke 21

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Framing: As we've discussed before, the Second Coming is the blockbuster, action movie, most exciting gospel topic. The end of the world as we know it, right? My patriarchal blessing said that I would be instrumental in finishing the work before the Second Coming, and I know that has captivated me. My guess was 2000 years after Jesus' death! 2030 here we come... All that said, I think we can get a bit carried away with our excitement, and there is a way to believe responsibly :)

Housekeeping

Lisa Salisbury designed our logo; check out her work: www.wellwithlisa.com and <https://www.facebook.com/wellwithlisa>

WordPress currently caps feeds at 150 episodes, so they are working on a solution to that. I will be putting up a page with links to all the episodes, will make navigation easier:

We are about \$100-200/month short of my minimum for continuing the podcast, so if subscriptions remain below \$1000/month I will end the podcast this year, though there is the possibility that December donations will sustain the podcast. I'll keep everyone up to date! We have been hovering about \$800-900/month. What it would take to bring back discussion: Double the support, since it about triples the workload, I would probably do a Youth Sunday School discussion. But really don't have the time or energy for that, so I will keep linking the old discussions so we can all appreciate them.

My approach and the gospel target: Some people seem to be thinking that my approach is deflection, moving beyond the usual interpretation. I see it as a practical, win-win approach, and I have been blessed and am a better person for applying this approach in my life.

Let's take the Second Coming, a high stakes gospel topic.

Approach 1: Count on the Second Coming during your lifetime (I have been in this camp when I was younger, as I imagine many have). Worst case, this can prevent us from living our lives responsibly, because we believe Jesus will bail us out.

Approach 2: Be concerned about whether the Second Coming is coming soon. This causes unnecessary anxiety, directs our attention in less productive ways, and nearly guarantees inaccurate interpretation (false positives), because there is always tumult and disorder in the world.

Approach 3: Seek to understand what the scriptures and doctrine about the Second Coming can teach us, and live in a way that it doesn't matter when Jesus returns.

My podcast consistently takes approach #3. I think it is a healthy, win-win approach, and you can be the judge whether I succeed. I deeply believe there is a way to live that works no matter what happens. This is what the gospel means to me.

Let's unpack the elements of belief in the Second Coming (which in the time of Jesus is called Apocalypticism):

- 1) Things are bad
- 2) Things are really bad
- 3) Things are going to get worse
- 4) Worse than you think
- 5) Be ready for things to get worse

- 6) Just when you think you can't handle any more, Jesus is going to return and make everything better.

Now let's look at how these elements function:

- 1) Life is hard
- 2) Sometimes even though life is hard, it gets worse
- 3) Disaster and tragedy happen
- 4) Be ready for life to be hard, get worse, and for disaster and tragedy to happen
- 5) Often when you think you can't handle any more, something comes into your life that makes it better, or you realize you can handle more than you think.

Why this approach works so well is that it helps us BOTH to prepare for the Second Coming, and also deal with life as it already is! Win-win.

Now that we've laid out that groundwork, we can dig into the lesson. I would suggest a question something like "How can preparing for the Second Coming also help us in our day to day life?"

Prayer. Might as well share a prayer that came to me last week:

Dear Mother Goddess, Gaia Earth. We still ourselves and connect to you in awestruck, anguished wonder. We are grateful to exist. We are pained by our existence. We wrestle, mind, body, soul, for alignment. We marvel at the watery womb that birthed life, those billions of years ago. We are struck silent by the improbability of our ability to wonder and rage at it all. We know we don't deserve forgiveness, as our toxic systems choke and poison you into a feverdream. We do pray for compassion. Compassion for ourselves, and each other. Compassion and hope, that we will wake up. That one by one and dozens by dozens we will wake up, pay the price of pain and effort to wake and stay wake, to become stronger, so that as the points of decision multiply, we can show up to them, show up to each other, show up to life.

Devotion: Prepare for the future; live in the moment. (Check in at least once a week with your trajectory and progress. And moment to moment, remind yourself what you are doing (like my drive home)).

Reading Review

Mark 12

Wicked Tenants, question about taxes, resurrection.

Greatest commandment (in this it is the wise scribe who says “”).
David’s son, widow’s mite

Mark 13

Disciples admire the temple and Jesus predicts its destruction

Size of temple: A modest temple was built after the Jews returned from Babylon, and then Herod completely overhauled it

Temple complex

Currently the “dome of the rock” or Al-Aqsa mosque sits where the temple was built. The temple was completely destroyed as Jesus said, but one wall of the temple complex still exists.... Yes, the Western Wall.

Shaye I.D. Cohen of Brown University told PBS: “The crucial thing to remember is that nowadays, there are temples and synagogues everywhere you go. There is not a Jewish community in the world that doesn't have a synagogue, and many of them are called temples. In this period, however, we should always remember that there is only one Temple and that's the one Temple in Jerusalem. The building itself was very small. The actual building of the Temple could fit inside the infield of any baseball stadium. However, the large structure all around it, the large plaza, the porticos, the columns, the staircases, all of that, were built up by Herod the Great on a monumental scale, filling up, I think something like ten football fields... So we have then a very large, very conspicuous, grandiose, grand... structure in the center of Jerusalem which attracted pilgrims from near and far, both Jews and gentile. [Source:Shaye I.D. Cohen, Samuel Ungerleider Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies Brown University, Frontline, PBS, April 1998 <>]

Wayment notes (that he repeats in each reading) “Scholars have struggled to make sense of the meaning of this generation and whether Jesus was indicating that the fulfillment of these things would take place in the lives of the disciples or in the future”

Be watchful; persecutions

“When you see the desolating sacrilege standing where it should not (let the reader understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains...” (13:14) This is a HUGE deal because the author breaks character and addresses the readers! (Marcus’ theory about authorship)

You will know summer is near/birth pains (I like this idea; we don’t know exact timeline, but we know the sequence of events, when the event is near) “Transition” in both birth and death.

Be watchful/watch/be watchful (“Stay awake”)

[Matt 24]

Destruction of temple

Persecution

“Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath” (24:20)

Tribulation, apocalyptic turning of the age (sun darkened, stars fall etc, from prophetic texts)

“It is near, even at the doors” This generation will not pass away

There will be two; one will be taken

Faithful servant (do what you are supposed to while the master is away)

Oxford Bible Commentary

“One must be ever prepared for what may come at any time”

The ones taken are those who are prepared/righteous and the others are left behind (similar to wise/foolish maidens)

Mt 25 (One of the most important, memorable chapters in all scripture)

Ten maidens: I like the idea that the “oil” is our personal preparation, which explains why we can’t share it, however generous and well-meaning we might be

Sheep and goats

Read 25:31-46

Helping our fellow human beings IS worshipping God.

Luke 21

Widow’s mite, destruction of temple, persecution, coming of son of man, fig tree, be watchful

Not a hair of your head will perish, some more detail about Jerusalem’s destruction

JST-Mt 1

This rearrangement becomes very significant when it is realized that the Prophet Joseph Smith rearranged the verses so that those signs that apply to the destruction of the temple, Jerusalem, and the Jews following the death of Jesus are placed in the first portion of Matthew 24, while those verses concerning the second coming of Christ are placed together at the end of the chapter.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/joseph-smith-translation-restoration-plain-and-precious-things/12-jst-second-coming-christ>

(Keith Perkins)

Lesson

Apocalypse then

What do we make of Jesus' statements that "this generation will not pass away"? (Repeated in Paul in 1 Thessalonians, the earliest book of the New Testament) Well, take it seriously, then put it in perspective.

We have the ambiguous phrasing of D&C 130:14-17, admirable transparency and humility.

14 I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following: **15** Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter. **16** I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or to some previous appearing, or whether I should die and thus see his face. **17** I believe the coming of the Son of Man will not be any sooner than that time.

Apocalypse now

Second Coming seems to be less emphasized than when I was young.

President Packer (Counsel to Youth, 2011)

Sometimes you might be tempted to think as I did from time to time in my youth: "The way things are going, the world's going to be over with. The end of the world is going to come before I get to where I should be." Not so! You can look forward to doing it right—getting married, having a family, seeing your children and grandchildren, maybe even great-grandchildren. (Which maps a normal life as much as is predicts Second Coming)

Elder Evans

https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-neitzel-holzapfel_glass-half-full-second-coming-lord-jesus-christ/

I recall a reported statement, attributed, as I remember it, to President Wilford Woodruff. Some of the brethren of his time are said to have approached him (they had their troubles also) and to have inquired of him as to when he felt the end would be—when would be the coming of the Master? These, I think, are not his exact words, but they convey the spirit of his reported reply: “I would live as if it were to be tomorrow—but I am still planting cherry trees!” I think we may well take this as a page for our own book and live as if the end might be tomorrow—and still plant cherry trees! [Richard L. Evans, CR, April 1950, 105–6] (I recall President Hinckley reading this)

Here’s the crazy thing. Apocalypse IS coming. Not the zombie apocalypse certainly, and we don’t know about the Second Coming. But each of us will face tragedy and disaster in our lives, and global disasters are increasing.

The United Nations Environment Programme released a report in 2016 that is worth reading carefully.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/05/rate-of-environmental-damage-increasing-across-planet-but-still-time-to-reverse-worst-impacts/>

Rate of Environmental Damage Increasing Across the Planet but There Is Still Time to Reverse Worst Impacts if Governments Act Now, UNEP Assessment Says

The environmental change sweeping the world is occurring at a faster pace than previously thought, making it imperative that governments act now to reverse the damage being done to the planet, says the most authoritative study that UNEP has ever published on the state of the global environment.

In almost every region, population growth, rapid urbanization, rising levels of consumption, desertification, land degradation and climate change have combined to leave countries suffering from severe water scarcity. These worrying trends are also making it increasingly hard for the world to feed itself, warn the reports, which involved 1,203 scientists, hundreds of scientific institutions and more than 160 governments.

The Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner, said: “Today, thanks to this report, we now know more about the state of the world’s environment than ever before. With these assessments, UNEP has presented the world with the very latest evidence on the state of the world’s environment,

providing them with the tools they need anticipate and avoid the damage that is being done to our planet.

“If current trends continue and the world fails to enact solutions that improve current patterns of production and consumption, if we fail to use natural resources sustainably, then the state of the world’s environment will continue to decline. It is essential that we understand the pace of environmental change that is upon us and that we start to work with nature instead of against it to tackle the array of environmental threats that face us.”

The assessments, which are based on scientific data and peer reviewed literature, find that there is still time to tackle many of the worst impacts of environmental change, such as the damage to marine ecosystems and the rising level of air pollution, which has become one of the world’s most widespread environmental health risks.

Across the world, climate change, the loss of biodiversity, land degradation and water scarcity are growing problems that need to be urgently addressed if the world is to achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the reports state.

Regional priorities and key findings:

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The future of the region’s economies, as well as the ability of countries to fight poverty and reverse inequality, depends heavily on harnessing the region’s natural capital sustainably while mitigating and adapting to climate change, and decoupling economic growth from resource consumption.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Air pollution

More than 100 million people already live in areas where they are at risk from air pollution.

Climate Change

Andean glaciers, which provide vital water resources for millions of people, are shrinking and an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events are affecting economies, the report notes.

Asia and the Pacific

Unprecedented economic growth, which has lifted millions out of poverty in Asia and the Pacific, is putting heavy pressure on ecosystems. Increasing unsustainable consumption patterns have led to worsening air pollution, water scarcity and waste generation, threatening human and environmental health. Increased demand for fossil fuels and natural resources – extensive agriculture, palm oil and rubber plantations, aquaculture and the illegal trade in wildlife – are causing environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

Natural disasters

Last year, the Asia Pacific region continued to be the world's most disaster prone region. About 41 per cent of all natural disasters reported over the last two decades occurred in the Asia-Pacific region, which also accounted for 91 per cent of the world's deaths attributable to natural disasters in the last century.

The number of record-breaking rainfall events increased by 56 per cent over the 1981 – 2010 period. By the 2070s the top Asian cities in terms of population exposure to coastal flooding will be Bangkok, Dhaka, Guangzhou, Kolkata, Mumbai and Shanghai, threatening hundreds of millions of people with displacement.

Deforestation

In Southeast Asia, the average area deforested annually is more than 1 million hectares, resulting in the release of hundreds of millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide every year between 2005 and 2015.

Water

The contamination of water sources by human and industrial waste, including pharmaceutical and personal care products, is a major problem in the region, the GEO-6 reports state. It is estimated that about 30 per cent of the population uses drinking water contaminated by human feces.

Water-related diseases and unsafe water contribute to 1.8 million deaths annually and 24.8 million disability-adjusted life years in the region.

Unsafe sanitation, disposal of untreated wastewater and runoff of agrochemicals are responsible for a rise in water-borne diseases, especially in Asia's population-dense urban areas.

Waste

Uncontrolled dumping, which is still the main waste disposal method in the region, is also a major source of disease. In Mumbai, for example, about 12 per cent of total municipal solid waste is burned either openly on the streets or in landfills, a practice that releases black carbon, dioxins and carcinogenic furans.

Population growth, a growing middle class and urbanization have led to higher emissions and growing amounts of ill-managed waste, the report states. Rapid economic growth and intensified industrialization has also led to increasingly unhealthy, polluting and carbon-intensive lifestyles.

Growing consumption

The main driver for accelerating domestic material consumption is the expanding middle class (from 21 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent in 2008).

West Asia

A rise in the amount of degraded land and the spread of desertification – the “most critical challenges” in West Asia – are having profound economic and environmental impacts on the region, the UNEP report on the region states. West Asia is suffering from an increase in water demand, overexploitation of groundwater resources and deteriorating water quality, as well as unsustainable patterns of consumption that threaten the region's ability to secure its sources of food, water and energy.

Water

The scarcity of the region's renewable water resources also poses a major challenge in the region, denting West Asia's ability to produce enough food to meet the growing population's needs. High population growth and rolling conflicts mean that the carrying capacity of the land has become too low to support people with freshwater and food, the report says.

Water demand in the region is increasing while water quality is deteriorating. Ground water resources are being overexploited. As a result, only four out of 12 countries in West Asia are above the water scarcity limit of 1000 cubic metres per person per year.

Conflict and displacement

Continuous conflict and the mass displacement of people throughout the region are also triggering severe environmental impacts that are endangering the health of people. Heavy metals from explosive munitions and radiation from missiles have leached into the environment as a result of the region's conflicts. The 2.97 million refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and Iraq are placing an immense environmental burden on the region, producing about 1,440 tonnes of waste per day in 2015, overwhelming governments and increasing the risk of disease outbreaks.

Health

The top environmental risk factors for human health in the region are air pollution; lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation; climate change; exposure to hazardous chemicals and wastes; emergencies and disasters; and exposure to radiation.

Other top issues in the region are climate change, which will exacerbate water stress in the region, and biodiversity, which is under threat from urban expansion, pollution, the overconsumption of biological resources and changes in habitat.

Africa

Land degradation, air pollution, and the provision of sanitation and safe drinking water are among the main problems on the continent. Many of the region's fisheries, both inland and marine, face overexploitation from illegal, under-reported and unregulated fishing. The continent has an opportunity to use its large young population to drive its growth. Low-carbon, climate-resilient choices can develop the continent's infrastructure, accelerate industrialization, increase energy and food production, and promote sustainable natural resource governance.

Indoor Air pollution

Indoor air pollution is responsible for 600,000 premature deaths every year in Africa. The continent's reliance on the use of biomass for cooking, lighting and heating means that 90 per cent of the region's population is exposed to this health threat.

Water and sanitation

More than half of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still does not have any access to improved sanitation, compared to 90 per cent coverage in North Africa, with a vast difference between urban and rural areas.

Land, forests and food

In Africa, which is the second largest continent in the world, land is the most prized asset for food production, nutritional health and economic development. Worryingly, about 500 000 square meters of land in Africa is being degraded due to soil erosion, salinization, pollution and deforestation. This land degradation can damage agricultural productivity, nutrition and human health.

North America

However, environmental challenges have emerged in recent years. Climate change is generating impacts across the region, and aggressive hydrocarbon extraction methods bring the possibility of increased emissions, water use and induced seismicity. The coastal and marine environment is under increasing threat from nutrient loads, ocean acidification, ocean warming, sea level rise, and new forms of marine debris.

Air and Water Quality

Climate change

Climate change is damaging the environment, human health and well-being and, in some cases, human security in the region.

The Arctic

The Arctic is experiencing a profound transformation that is having important impacts on North America and the world as a whole. These rapid changes in the Arctic are driven largely by interacting forces of climate change and increased human activities. As one of the first areas of the world to

experience the impacts of climate change, the Arctic region serves as a barometer for change in the rest of the world.

Warming in the Arctic has increased at twice the global average since 1980. There are other worrying trends. Over the past twenty years, for example, there has been a progressive and dramatic decrease in summer sea ice extent, which has led to an increased surface area of blue water during the summer months.

The melting of sea ice has also created new expanses of open ocean, allowing large populations of phytoplankton to bloom and alter the marine food chain.

Overall Recommendations

- Strengthen intergovernmental coordination at the regional and sub-regional level will improve governance issues that are of regional priority.
- Improve gathering, processing and sharing of data and information to inform decision-making.
- Enhance sustainable consumption and production to reduce environmental pressures by addressing drivers associated with manufacturing processes and consumer demand
- Harness natural capital in a way that does not damage ecosystems.
- Implement measures to reduce pollution and other environmental pressures.
- Invest in urban planning, such as through the better use of environmentally sound infrastructure and clean transport, which can turn the urban challenge into opportunities for sustainable development.
- Governments will likely need to find innovative solutions to allow for the decoupling of economic growth and resource consumption.
- Reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and diversify energy sources.
- Greater investments are needed in environmental accounting systems to ensure external costs are addressed, and in foresight processes to identify possible future risks, opportunities and conflicts.
- Enhance international cooperation on climate, air quality and other environmental issues.
- Respond to environmental health risks.
- Build resilience to natural hazards and extreme climate events.
- Low-carbon, climate-resilient choices in infrastructure, energy and food production coupled with effective and sustainable natural resource governance are key to protecting the ecological assets that underpin a healthy society.

Kind of makes you think of a super sciency version of Jesus' discourse, doesn't it?!

Apocalypse how

What does that have to do with us? We can't change the world, can we? I do think we can be awake and prepare, and contribute to larger solutions as we have opportunity (Disaster response is one of the things the Church is the very best at!!)

Wake/Watch

Be Ready

Linked questions:

Are we ready for Jesus

Are we ready to die

Are we ready to live

Challenge: Pick one area in your life where you can be better prepared for a disaster/instability, then implement it. I'm going to download a finance app so I can keep better track of my finances and work toward goals. I joke/not joke that in the second half of my life I'm going to prepare the kids to be "Apocalypse Ninjas"

Preview 336: Week 23 John 13-17 (Home Study) Farewell Discourse)

337: Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 18 (Arrest/Gethsemane)

Reading:

Conclusion: Whether or not Jesus shows up in your lifetime, show up to your life.