

Daniel 9:24-27 and Matthew 24:9-31

“It’s the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine.”

When you think of your future, what emotions come to mind? Are you excited? Are you nervous, or afraid or anxious? I know, it is such a broad large question, but are you looking forward to your future and what will be happening in your life over the next few months, over the next few years? If you knew that the end of the world was coming, and that is was just right around the corner, how would you feel about that? Maybe a relief because all of that shopping that coming up for Christmas you don’t have to worry about?

The sermon title comes from a song that came out when I had just graduated from high school, called, it’s the end of the world as we know, and I feel fine. I always liked that song and we danced to it in college and in seminary, even though the lyrics between the chorus made absolutely no sense, there was an affinity that I felt to the repeated chorus of: “It’s the end of the world as we know, and I feel fine.” It takes a lot of faith to feel fine as you are facing the end of the world, and so that was my objective, was to face the future without fear, without limitation, to looking forward to what comes next because I know that God is in the middle of it and I can’t wait to see what God is going to do in my life, in my family’s life, the life of the church.

So how do we feel fine with the end of the world as we know it? Why are we emphasizing the end of the world so much these days. Full disclosure, it is simply because these Scriptures in Matthew point to it over and over again, and not because I believe that some kind of mysterious prophecy has just been fulfilled and now here we go, Jesus is coming back tomorrow at noon. No, Jesus is coming back, and today we are one day closer to him coming back than we were yesterday, but no, I don’t have any insight as to when that is, like I mentioned last week, everyone wants to know when that is.

Every generation faces these events that we are facing today and every generation, including ours, has to discern how we feel about it. Both Scriptures today describe the end of the world and Jesus the Messiah coming back, and show suffering and pain as the road that leads to the second coming. But both also show a victorious God at the end of the day, and it is nestled in that truth where we can hang our hat on feeling fine as we face the end of the world. Let’s read.

## **READ**

So between high school and college I went to Philadelphia College of the Bible, Cairn University now, for one year to do an intensive year of study and discernment. I had discovered



Jesus' presence in my life as a senior in high school and I wanted to try to figure out more of what that meant before I went to real college at Swarthmore. At PCB and probably many other Bible College a dispensationalist approach to Scripture was prevalent and students and faculty spent a lot of time trying to figure out the timeline of when the end of the world was going to be coming about. I thought, and I continue to think, that it was silly because Scripture was so clear over and over again that we don't know when the end times are going to be.

But for some people creating a timeline of the end times gives them a sense of control and assuages their fears and so they are able to approach the present easier if they know when or how the end times are going to look. They feel fine as they approach the end of the world because they have figured out how it is going to and when it is going to come about. Yeah, we don't believe that. For example some worry about the rapture and being left behind, we don't need to worry about that because that word is not found in Scripture and certainly not something that is helpful to us as we try to figure out how to live today so that people can know Jesus personally as Lord and Savior right now.

When Jesus comes back it is the end of the world. There is nothing after that, nothing, except living with Christ forever. But he has not come back yet, so we should feel fine knowing that we didn't miss it. Matthew states that it is going to be so obvious when Jesus comes back, we don't have to figure it out, it will be like when lightning flashes in the dark sky, and everyone from the east to the west see it, everyone will know when Jesus comes back. Or the more morbid example is that when you see vultures circling, when then everyone knows that right there is where the dead animal is. So, everyone will know when Jesus comes as lighting lights up the sky and as vultures are the sign of a dead animal.

Daniel describes the most consequential event in his time which marked for him the imminent coming of the Messiah, who happened to be Jesus. He talks about in vs.7 this abomination that desolates, which links this Scripture with Matthew and you'll see why later. In 167 BC an image of Zeus was erected in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes and it was a sacrilege. Like we saw last week when the temple is upended this was clearly through the generations a sign that the Messiah was coming. Well, Daniel was living through it and he describes that even in the most painful and difficult moments in history, God will have victory, complete victory.



We had a really long reading in Matthew today, and it describes what Jesus' generation was going through as it tried to discern the signs of the end. Every single Christian generation since then has been trying to figure out how they feel about the end of the world and Jesus' return. In 40AD, so right around the time that the Gospel of Matthew would have been written, Caligula, the Roman Ruler, tried to set up an image of himself in the temple in Jerusalem and so what Jesus describes here is probably Matthew's warning to his community that the more things change, the more they stay the same. This is our Zeus, this is our time to recognize that the church, the people of God, are being tested and how will we feel about our future?

Every generation faces what Jesus describes in vs.23-26 what he calls both antiChrist's and he also uses the term only seen here in Scripture as Pseudo or fake Messiah's. Literally the translation is pseudochrist. Those who claim to be followers of Jesus but gather people around them for causes that are other than righteousness as we have seen Jesus describe over and over again. Our generation's false idol, our generation's sign of the end of the world coming near is a church that has so aligned itself with causes and issues and politics that it is hard to discern what is Gospel and what is syncretism with culture and society.

But I feel fine, because I know that Jesus has not come back yet, so I don't have to follow people who tell me that the Gospel is about financial security, or national security, or any other security that isn't tied to a relationship with our Savior Jesus. I know because the Bible tells me so that I will be fully aware of when Jesus comes back, as if he were lightning or a vulture.

There is one aspect of the end of the world that probably bothers me more than any other and you can find that in vs.12 that describes as a result of the lawlessness a love growing cold. I think this is in reference to the church, the body of Christ, His bride. Is there anything more tragic than a church whose love has grown cold? Love for God which has grown cold, love for each other, which has grown cold, or even worse, love for the community and the world that has grown cold. There is nothing more important to me about the life of this church than we love God, love each other, and love the community in which we find ourselves. But that would be another sign of the end of the world, when the love of the church grows cold.

For Jesus our disobedience and a cold love is a far more serious threat than any outside persecution. The persecutions that some feel like we face as a church, and really in this country we don't face it at all. It is still a distinct advantage on so many fronts to be associated with Jesus and to have the title of Christian next to your name. But the persecution that Christians



face in the world, like some of the missionaries that we support who could not only be kicked out of the country where they are living but also arrested, this is not an eschatological sign, a sign that the end of the world is coming, but rather part of the history of the church ever since Jesus was crucified as political prisoner.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is coming back, it is the end of the world and our generation is seeing the signs which past generations have seen, and trying to figure out how we feel about it. Everything else is just a distraction that tries to get us to follow something other than Jesus. Rest in the assurance of the presence of Jesus and the victory of Jesus now and in the time to come. Amen.