

Called according to His purpose

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[0 : 00] So we turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24, Matthew's Gospel, chapter 24 and verse 13.

He who stands firm to the end will be saved. He who perseveres to the end or he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

So, tonight we come to our last service in the congregation of 1980. The first year of the 80s is almost over and on Wednesday it will have passed into history, never to recur again.

Be reminded at such a time as this that life is a straight line, it's not a circle. We are constantly passing points of no return on our pilgrimage.

And it is surely a solemn thought that we come to a service tonight which none of us will ever experience again.

[1 : 20] The last Lord's Day of 1980. We come to a milestone. We pass it tonight. And we'll never, ever see it again.

Surely we are reminded at this time of year that we here upon this earth are pilgrims. At the end of an old year and the beginning of a new act as milestones on our pilgrimage.

Reminding us that we are moving more quickly than we realize. And that we are speeding across the journey of life.

And as we come to the end of a year, I thought it would be appropriate tonight that we should consider what the Bible says about the end of things. Because you and I have been made, created by God, for a purpose.

God has a goal. God has an end. God has a purpose in creating you, in keeping you and sustaining you. What is that purpose?

[2 : 34] What is his purpose for the creation? What will happen at the end of the line? Later on tonight we will be seeing something of the influence of Buddhism in Thailand.

Because Thailand is a Buddhist country. Now, a Buddhist believes that life is a circle. And that when he dies, he will be reincarnated in someone else. But the word of the living God tells us that life is not a circle.

That life is a straight line. And that this life is the only life you have. Here upon earth. And that this life is the only opportunity you have.

To decide as to your eternal destiny in the next. So this life, the life that we are living tonight. Is a crucial period of your whole existence.

What then does the Bible say about the end of things? First of all, what does it say about the end of life? You remember that rather bizarre figure in the Old Testament? The prophet Balaam who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the people of Israel and found that he could not.

[3 : 47] He could not curse a people that God had decided to bless. And at the end of his first oracle, he makes a remarkable statement. He says, Oh, that I would die the death of the righteous.

And that my end would be like theirs. Oh, that I would die the death of the righteous. And that my end would be like his.

Or perhaps more correctly, theirs. There, the last end, is used as another word for death. And we are reminded by Balaam, who in that utterance was a true prophet, that life has a terminus.

It is appointed to men once to die. And after that, the judgment. A bus route has a terminus. In some cities in this country and in all cities in America, you can get a flat bus fare, flat rate.

You can go anywhere, but you must get off at the terminus. Your ticket will take you any distance, as long as you don't go beyond the terminus. And unless you buy a new ticket, you've got to get off.

[5 : 03] And that's what life is like. Life has a terminus. And you've got to get off. And the terminus is death. Now, we live in an age in which death is a great unmentionable.

It is true that death is mentioned. Deaths are reported in the newspaper and on television and on the radio. But they report in a very clinical way. There's very little analysis of the meaning of death. The reason being that people don't want to talk about it. People want to pretend, really, that death is not there. People don't want to face up to the fact that life has a terminus.

That the day will come and they've got to leave the bus. Or life. Surely the prayer of the psalmist, which we sang in Psalm 39, is a prayer which we need to learn to pray today.

Lord, he said, make me to know my end. And what is the extent of my days? Let me know how transient I am. That's the New American Standard Version's rendering of verse 4 of Psalm 39.

[6 : 12] Make me to know my end. And what is the extent of my days? Let me know how transient I am. Now that prayer is in marked contrast with the spirit of our age.

A spirit which encourages us to think that life will go on and on and on. A spirit which discourages us to think of our end. To think in this way is to be morbid, we are told.

The Bible encourages us to realize that we have an end. That we have a terminus. And it encourages us to pray as the psalmist prayed.

Lord, make me to know my end. And what is the extent of my days? Let me know how transient I am. What is your life?

Said James, the brother of our Lord. What is your life? It is but a cloud, a vapor that appears for a little time. And then vanishes away as the sun rises.

[7 : 14] And the morning mist is dispelled in the heat of the day. That, says James, is your life. And my life. And yet that short life is a life which is crucial.

Because during this life, your eternal destiny is decided. And so let us, as we draw near the end of this year and the beginning of a new year, make this our prayer.

Lord, let me know how transient I am. Let us beware of the great illusion of worldliness. That life is limited to this world.

That life, this life is the only life that matters. Let us realize that there is an end. And that that end may be nearer than many of us think.

Secondly, let us notice what the Bible says about the end of the world. We read in Matthew chapter 24 at verse 14, the words of our Lord, Then will the end come.

[8 : 20] The end will come. This world seems to have survived for many centuries. Many people believe that somehow, in some way, it will survive almost forever.

But no, said Jesus. At a certain point which God has fixed, the end will come. There will be a terminus not only for you and for me as individuals, but also for human history, for the human race. The end will come. The end of all things is at hand, said Peter in his first epistle, verse chapter 4, verse 7. The end of all things is at hand.

Be therefore sober and watch and to prayer. These words, as they are rendered in the New International Version, are as follows. First Peter 4, verse 7.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

[9 : 22] Now, we live in a society which seems to have almost a conspiracy of silence not to be clear-minded about the end of things. We live in a society in which we're encouraged to believe that somehow, in some way, the world will survive.

Not so, says Peter. Not so, says the Scriptures. Not so, says Jesus. The end will come. Remember how in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the last day.

And he does this several times. And I just want to quote one or two of these. In John chapter 6, verse 39. And this is the will of him who sent me, says Jesus, that I should lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. And I will raise him up at the last day. Again in verse 44 of that same chapter.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. Again in verse 54.

[10 : 38] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Here is Jesus associating the last day with the resurrection.

I will raise him up. Those who believe in him, I will raise them up, he says, at the last day. But in the teaching of Jesus, the last day is also associated with judgment as well as with resurrection.

In the same Gospel, the Gospel of John chapter 12, verse 48, Jesus says, As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world but to save it.

There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words. That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

And so Jesus teaches us that there will be a last day. Just as there is a last day in each month, a last day in each year, so also there will be a last day at the end of our era.

[11 : 45] A day of resurrection and a day of judgment. A day when Jesus Christ himself shall return in power and in glory. A day in which, as Peter tells us in the second letter, the earth will be destroyed and the elements will melt with fervent heat.

This order will vanish away. Jesus will create a new heavens and a new earth. I wonder, do you and I live as if this will be the case?

Do you and I live as if the world has an end? Do we live as men and women whose eyes, whose vision is focused upon that day?

Is this the perspective that you have of life? That I have of life tonight as we come to the last Sunday of 1980?

Do we realize that there will be a last day in the history of the world? A day when Jesus Christ will come again.

[12 : 48] A day of resurrection. A day of judgment. The end of life. The end of the world. Thirdly, let us notice what the Bible says about the end of the wicked.

And this is a very solemn word and yet one which is so prominent in the teaching of Jesus that we would be utterly unfaithful to him if we were to neglect mention of it.

The end of the wicked. For the time has come, says Peter, to quote him again, the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God.

And if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

The end here is used in the sense of outcome, fate, or destiny. The rhetorical question of Peter was answered centuries before by the psalmist.

[13 : 51] He said in Psalm 37, another psalm which we sung tonight, the end of the wicked shall be cut off. And again in Psalm 9 when he said, the wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God.

Or as Paul said, writing to the Philippians, the end, the destiny of the enemies of the cross of Christ, he said, is destruction. No one in the whole history of redemption as it is recorded in the scriptures spoke more clearly or more vividly of the end of the wicked than did Jesus of Nazareth.

He said, many whom we consider to be respectable are wicked in God's sight because we fall so far short of his glory.

All of us are wicked. And therefore, all of us are on the broad way. All of us deserve the end of the wicked. God in his infinite mercy and grace has come and offers to rescue us.

And so he warns us concerning the end of the wicked. He reminds us that there is such a place as hell, that there will be such a place as the lake of fire after the judgment, into which the devil and the beast and all those who follow them will be cast and will be held in torment forever and ever.

[15 : 51] The end of the wicked will be cut off. I wonder, is there something that worries you? If it doesn't worry you, then I want to suggest to you that your soul has become so desensitized by the spirit of the age in which we live and that you need to worry about this before God.

And you need to come to God and to ask him to help you to see life as he sees it. And you need to cry out to God and ask him to give you this perspective of the end of life, of the end of the world, and of the end of the wicked.

There is a sharp contrast drawn in the teaching of Jesus between the destiny of the end of the wicked and of the righteous. The parable of the sheep and the goats, which Jesus tells at the end of Matthew chapter 25.

He says, And these, referring to the goats, shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. Now the problem, the predicament, the crisis that you and I and the whole human race face is this, is that we, however respectable, however sincere, yes, however religious we may be, are wicked in the sight of God.

And the crucial question for you and for me is this, how can we who are wicked become righteous in God's sight? The gospel tells us that this is possible, gloriously possible, by God's grace, as an act of his love and of his mercy.

[17 : 33] And this brings us to the fourth use of the word end in the Bible. And the Bible speaks of the end of the law. Romans 10 verse 4, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now what Paul means there is that the law, the ten commandments, have ceased to be a way of salvation. God has given us these commandments to help us to realize that we are wicked. God has given us these commandments to help us to realize that we are sinners. And we have tended to misuse these commandments and thinking that we can, as it were, use them as a ladder to climb up to heaven, a ladder with ten rungs.

And we imagine that if we could keep each and all of these commandments, then we could get to heaven. And of course, that is true. And the problem is that we don't keep them, that we can't keep them. And the great illusion is that we can keep them.

The Bible tells us that there is none righteous, no, not one. But none of us, none of us has any hope. If our only hope of heaven is to climb up the ladder of the ten commandments, no, says Paul, the end of the law is Christ.

[18 : 49] And the law, when we realize this, and when we realize the commandments cannot save us, it is then that Christ comes in. It is then that we're ready to be saved by Christ.

It is then that we're ready to ask Christ to save us. Christ has come down from heaven to rescue us. It is not a question of you or of me climbing up to heaven, but of Christ coming down to lift us. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

It is when we believe in Jesus Christ that God credits to our account the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He accepts us not because of what we are or who we are, but because of what Jesus is and because of who he is and because of what he has done on our behalf.

He accepts us on the basis of the righteousness, the goodness, the law abidingness of Jesus Christ. Jesus has kept the law for us.

[19 : 50] He is the only one who has kept it perfectly. He is the only one whose life is utterly sinless. And the purpose of the law, the purpose of the Ten Commandments, Paul says, is to bring us to Christ.

And yet, again and again, we misuse these commandments. You speak to the average person that you may meet, that you may work with, that you live with, and you ask them how they hope to get to heaven.

And they say, I hope to get to heaven by keeping the commandments. Wrong, says Paul. That is to misuse the commandments. The commandments will never get you to heaven, not because there's anything wrong with them, but because you and I lack the goodness and the moral force and integrity to obey them perfectly.

And we've got to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. God has given us the commandments to bring us to Christ, to help us to realize our need of Him, to cast us upon Him. The end of the law is Christ. I wonder, have you come to the end of the law? Have you come to an end of thinking and of believing that somehow or other by obeying the commandments you can save yourself?

[21 : 10] You see, most people's spiritual experience can be summed up in two phases. Or at least most Christians' spiritual experience can be summed up in two phases. There was a period when they believed that they could be saved by the law.

And then they come to realize that, no, they need Christ. Have you come to the end of the law? Have you committed your life to Christ?

Have you given yourself to the one who has come down into earth, who has come down into history, who has come down into human life, who has come to your very door and has offered an offer to save you?

Have you committed your life to Him? Are you willing tonight and this last Sunday of 1980 to cast your life upon Him, to commit your destiny into His hands?

He is the one who is able and mighty to save. As Paul said to the Corinthians, He will keep you strong to the end. He will keep you to the end.

[22 : 20] I am persuaded, Paul said, that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day. And as we read in John's Gospel, He loves His disciples to the end.

He has loved His own who were in the world and He loved them utterly to the end. He will keep them to the end, He will love them to the end, and He will be with them to the end.

Lo, I am with you always, even to the end. of the age. And it is when we come to the end of the law and begin to trust in Jesus Christ that we discover the purpose for which God has made us, the purpose for which He rescues His people.

He who has began a good work in you, says Paul, writing to the Philippine Christians, will perform it. He will finish it. of those whom the Father has given me, said Jesus, I have lost none.

No one can pluck them out of my hand. The end of the law is Christ. Christ. This brings us finally and very briefly to consider the end of faith.

[23 : 39] We are called to live by faith and not by sight, said Paul to the Corinthians in the second letter. We walk or we live by faith and not by sight. And that is why I am not commissioned or any other creature of the gospel commissioned to perform a miracle before you in order to persuade you to believe.

You are asked to believe by faith. You are asked to take God as His word. There is the element, there is the option of doubt left open to you.

We are called to live by faith. But the day will come when we shall no longer live by faith but by sight. That's what Paul says by implication.

And you remember what John says in his first epistle? Then he said we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. Then the people of God will live in the immediate presence of their Father and of their Saviour serving him forever and ever.

The end of faith, the beginning of sight. Entering into a new order which is an order which we can only imperfectly comprehend and understand at this particular stage.

[25 : 02] And yet an order in which we shall see the Lord, an order in which we shall serve the Lord forever and ever, an order which shall have no end but will never ever be boring because it is an order in which he makes all things new and every moment will be different.

and God's grace and God's love will become ever fresh and ever new and ever deeper. Do you remember what the Archangel Gabriel said to Mary concerning the one who was to be born of her in the stable at Bethlehem?

Of his kingdom he said, there will be no end. There will be an end to life. There will be an end to the world.

There will be an end of the wicked. There will be an end of the law. There will even be an end of faith. But of the kingdom of Christ, there will be no end.

And that is the kingdom into which he invites you and me to enter tonight. He came into this world to seek and to save those who are lost.

[26 : 21] And apart from Christ you are lost. But he offers to find you. He offers to draw you into his kingdom. He offers to bring you into this new order which he has begun and which he will establish when he comes again.

A new order, a new rule, a new kingdom. which will have no end. I wonder as we come to the end of this year, are we sufficiently conscious of the end of life, of the end of the world, of the end of the wicked?

Are we willing tonight to come to the end of the law and begin, begin, believing in Christ? Because when you begin to follow Christ, you enter into a kingdom which will never end, which will carry you right through death, right through the last judgment, right through the end of the world, and into the new world, the new heavens, and the new earth.

of his kingdom, there will be no end. May God grant that each and all of us might tonight begin with Christ, if we have not already begun, and beginning with Christ never, ever, end.

Why? Because he will keep us, and he loves us, and he will be with us, and he will never, ever, leave us.