



THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

Part 87 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 21:20-28 | August 21, 2011

Luke 21:20–28

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

FOREKNOWLEDGE, PROPHECY, AND SOVEREIGNTY

The big questions, “Where do we come from? Why are we here? When we die, where are we going?” help to interpret our lives individually, and human history collectively. It all depends on how you answer those questions.

If you're, let's say, an atheistic evolutionist, you don't believe we came from God, but from chance, we're here then not for any particular reason and, when dead, we're not necessarily going anywhere. Others will tell you that history is just a series of repeated cycles, that everything continues to move along in a series of repetitive mistakes and errors and learnings. And then you hear, well, if you don't learn from history you're doomed to repeat it, which is partially true.

How are we to view human history on the earth and our place in it? What's going on? Why are we here? How do we fit? Again, where did we come from? And upon dying, where are we going? And that's where the Bible comes into play, and it gives us the big story of God. And the Bible is not primarily about us, but it's for us. The Bible is primarily about God.

It says that we, and human history, and life on the earth as we know it comes from God. And that we are here under the sovereignty of God, and that ultimately we will die and stand before God. That we come from God, we're here for God, and we will die and give an account to God. And so all of history, including our individual lives in the midst of history, are to be interpreted in light of these facts. And the Bible then gives us a unique perspective on why we're here and what is happening next and how what we're experiencing today is connected to the past and prepares us for the future.

So I want to give you three words in starting: foreknowledge, prophecy, and sovereignty. Foreknowledge is the fact that God foreknows the future. He knows what is going to happen before it happens.

Now, this is a mind-blowing concept for us because we don't know the future. In fact, so much of life on the earth is spent trying to predict and anticipate the future. When will the economy turn around? When will the real estate market hit the bottom and start to bounce back? When could the next terrorist strike happen and how will we prevent it? What's the next big idea that we could invest in and see our portfolio increase? What's the next big marketing strategy that would help us get the word out? Where are the opportunities? Where is culture going? Who has the wisdom for the future?

And quite frankly, no one knows the future. Some people will have confidence, some have the occasional right guess, but none of us has full foreknowledge of the future. None of us knows in detail what's going to happen. But God does. God has foreknowledge. God foreknows what will happen. God is without beginning or end. God is over time, he works in time, but because he is apart from time, he sees time—inasmuch as we're able to consider it—as a completed whole. So God has foreknowledge of the future.

That leads to number two, prophecy. And prophecy is where God tells us the future. So God, who knows the future, reveals the future. And roughly 25 percent of the Bible at the time of its writing was prophetic in nature. God telling us, “Here's what's going to happen in the future.” Much, if not most of that, around the coming life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hero of history, the story around which every story finds its meaning.

So there is foreknowledge, where God knows the future; prophecy, where God tells us the future; and then sovereignty, where God orchestrates history and the future to fulfill all of his prophecy to bring to pass all of his foreknowledge. And the Bible uses this language in various ways and places.

What we're going to see today is Jesus Christ using all three of these in Luke 21:20–28 when he speaks of the times of the Gentiles. And this is the fulfillment of last week's sermon. There's so much in Luke 21 that we couldn't deal with it all in one setting, but here we're going to conclude this unit of thought.

We will see Jesus here as God in human flesh on the earth, demonstrating foreknowledge. He knows in great detail exactly what's going to happen within the next roughly forty years, as well as into the future. He prophesies it; he tells us exactly what's going to happen. And he is sovereign. And it all happens just like he says and not just the Bible confirms that, but history and historians who are not Christians, they confirm this as well.

THREE EPOCHS OF HUMAN HISTORY

So here we go. Three big ideas on how to see history. I'll give you a bit of a precursor. He's going to tell us that the temple would be destroyed and Jewish belief and practice, as was common in that day, was coming to an end. Number two, that God was going to do something new, and it would be the times of the Gentiles. Gentiles, non-Jews, would be saved. And then number three, that Jesus will return.

So these are the three seasons, epochs, of human history. There was Judaism, and then it came to an end. And then there's the time of the Gentiles, where non-Jews start following and worshiping Jesus as the God of the Bible and the fulfillment of prophecy. And then everything ends with the Second Coming of Jesus. And that's how we're to see history. That's how we're to see history and live our lives in light of it.

1. THE TEMPLE WILL BE DESTROYED

So number one, Jesus tells us the temple will be destroyed. Luke 21:20–23, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath [or judgment] against this people."

Now, a lot of discussion thus far in Luke has been around the temple. Jesus was first brought to the temple to be dedicated by his parents as a young boy. Jesus, perhaps, ventured to the temple in his growing-up years with his family; that was customary, as they were financially and physically able, among the worshipers of God.

The temple was created based upon God's decree hundreds of years prior. It ultimately was destroyed, and then a second temple was built during the reign of the godless king, Herod. And that temple was magnificent, one of the great wonders of the world. And the temple was, for the people of God, really the holiest place on earth. It was the place between God and man. It was the connection point between heaven and earth. It is where sacrifice would be offered for sin. High priests would intercede between people and God. It is where the nation would find its collective identity and community.

People would spend so much of their life praying for Jerusalem, and pilgrimaging to Jerusalem. And if you can imagine it, it was the city of hope, and the temple was the place of peace. And as a child, you would venture there with your parents, and they would tell you about their going there as a child and your grandparents and your great-grandparents, and they would take you back to the Old Testament and your people, your heritage, your history, your lineage, your family, all the way back hundreds and hundreds of years. "This is our God. This is our place of worship. This is our pilgrimage. This is our love and devotion and adoration of the God of the Bible. This is who he is and this is what he's done." And so your heart was for that city and for that temple. And Jesus comes along and says it's all going to be destroyed.

As I've told you in previous sermons, this was something hard to fathom. I mean, Jerusalem is a big city and it's up on a hill, and so it's defensible. It's surrounded with walls and gates. It's enormous. The foundation stones are the size of boxcars. I told you previously, slabs of marble that help to construct the foundation of the temple weighed upwards of one hundred tons. Massive.

The second temple wasn't even done being constructed at this time. It was still concluding construction. People had given generously and waited expectantly. And every year they would go for the high holy days and the feasts and the celebrations like Passover, which is in this season here in Luke 21, and they would be excited to see what other work has been done on the temple, and how much more glorious has it become. It was the biggest thing they'd seen. Simple, common people living in small huts and homes, going to this massive temple that was constructed on top, literally, of rock at a high point, visible for all, shining in glory, a city on a hill.

And Jesus says it's all coming down. It's all going to be destroyed. This would have been shocking. What does that mean? How could that possibly happen? And it signaled the end of Judaism as was practiced, and the fulfillment of Judaism in the Jewish Savior-God-Messiah, Jesus Christ. So this isn't anti-Judaism; it's fulfilled Judaism. It's not anti-Jew; Jesus, himself, is Jewish. So this is the fulfillment of Judaism by Jesus, who himself is God among us, as our Jewish Messiah Savior.

What he says is very specific, that the city of Jerusalem was going to be surrounded by enemies. And that they were going to lay siege to the city. And that for those who lived in the city, they should flee into the mountains and the hillside and the country. And for those who lived away from the city, they should not enter into the city of Jerusalem, or come near the temple when that day of judgment and vengeance and wrath occurred.

JUDGMENT AND WRATH

Here's the big idea: God is a God of love, grace, and mercy. He's also a God of holiness, justice, and wrath. He's both. We can't just take the parts of

the Bible that we like and ignore the others. In fact, the wrath of God is spoken of more than the love of God, in terms of numerous appearances. The wrath of God appears more frequently than the love of God in the Bible. God is love, God is holy, God does love, God does judge, God is love, God does pour out wrath, and love requires it. You can't love without also hating. You can't love holiness without hating sin. You can't love life without hating death. You can't love God without hating all that is against God.

So there is wrath here. And the destruction of Jerusalem, the city, and the temple which was its centerpiece, was judgment or wrath from God. Because God had come to the city of Jerusalem in the person of Jesus Christ, and though not all the city had rejected him—some had become Christians, had converted, had become worshipers of Jesus, they became the writers of Scripture and the messengers of Jesus on the earth—there were, however, many who rejected Jesus.

Not only did they put him to death, they then started putting to death his followers. Ten of the eleven disciples died a martyr's death. They tried to kill John, but he was boiled alive and exiled out to Patmos. Paul himself, Luke's dear friend and traveling companion, who penned much of the New Testament, was beheaded. This was a violent time for the followers of Jesus. That God had come to fulfill all of his prophecies and promises in the person and work, the life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus. And though some received Jesus, some rejected him.

So there was judgment on Jerusalem, and there was judgment on the temple, just like there will be judgment on nations and cities and families and religions and cults and ideologies that reject Jesus. And this wasn't something that happened instantly because, like the Bible says, God is patient and he's slow to anger. And so from the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, was nearly, roughly, forty years, plenty of time for people to have a change of heart and mind.

Just like God now has been patient for a few thousand years. We're still awaiting the Second Coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the sentencing to heaven or hell, and the eternal destiny of all of mankind. God is being very patient. The reason that some of you are still alive and breathing, even though you've rejected Jesus, is 'cause he loves you and he's patient with you and he's giving you an opportunity to avoid the wrath of God by turning from sin and trusting in him as your Savior and your Lord and your God.

So Jesus gives a specific prophecy and he is saying there is a day of wrath, there is a day of judgment, there is a day of consequence. It is coming. This is foreknowledge, prophecy, sovereignty. He knows the future, he's telling the future, and he is going to guarantee that the future will come to pass just as he has promised. And this is true for all of Scripture, and this is one example.

Jesus says, "When you see the city sieged—" That means that Roman soldiers would come and surround it. And it happened around AD 70. For some months the Romans sieged the city of Jerusalem and surrounded the temple. As a result, food, water, supplies could not come into the city. This was a military tactic to literally starve people to death. Josephus, who is an ancient historian outside of the Bible, and Tacitus, who is another historian outside of the Bible—not necessarily Christians, they just tell history—they confirm that all of this happened just like Jesus promised. The people in the city literally starting starving to death and dehydrating. Just like Jesus said, it was a horrible day for nursing mothers because they themselves were so malnourished that they could not feed their newborn children. Josephus indicates that people became cannibals; that it became anarchy; that there were those who were just literally eating the dust of the ground to curb the hunger in their stomach.

This went on for months. As I told you previously in another sermon, Josephus records that upwards of a million people died. Tacitus says that perhaps that number was 500,000. Whatever it is, it was a holocaust in that day and people died. And by the time the Romans decided that they would actually take the city and the temple, there was no resistance. People were dead, they were malnourished, they were starving, they were dying, they were grieving, they were hopeless.

And the city was besieged. And the command was given to not destroy the temple, but there was, according to history, an "accidental"—again, the sovereignty of God—an accidental fire was started by a soldier that destroyed a certain portion of the city and temple. And so then the order was given to literally raze the city, to take it all to the ground. And the city of Jerusalem was laid waste. And the temple was literally torn apart stone by stone.

I can tell you that's the way that it is. I've been there. We've seen it. There is no temple. It has been destroyed since 70 AD. People don't go to the temple. They don't have a priest. They don't have a sacrifice. They don't go there for the holy days. It's over. I say this with all love and respect. Some Jews love Jesus, some don't. But Judaism is over. Judaism is over. Judaism was about the temple, the priests, the sacrifices for sin. That has not existed since AD 70. It's over.

When I was there talking to some devout Jews, very sweet, very nice, nothing personal, just a very important disagreement. They would say, "Oh, but one day Messiah will come and he will rebuild the temple and we'll have sacrifices." It's been two thousand years. Furthermore, that area of the temple is now controlled by the Muslims. And the vast majority of people who live in the old city of Jerusalem in the walls are Muslims.

This is not going to be the revival of Judaism. It's over. Why? Because we don't need it. We don't need the temple, we don't need the priests, we don't need the sacrifices. We have Jesus. He is our Holy of Holies. He our Great High Priest. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And so the center of our faith today is not a place, it's a person. We don't go to Jerusalem. We don't go to Mecca. We don't go anywhere. We go to Jesus. He says he would never leave us, nor forsake us; that he would be with us always to the end of the age. We don't go to be with God, but God has come to be with us in Jesus Christ Immanuel, which means "God is with us."

And so sure, as friends, we can go to Jerusalem and we can look at the places that the Bible records, but that doesn't get us any closer to God; you can't be any closer to God than Jesus. It even broke my heart when I went there, seeing people, some even Christians, taking prayers and putting them in the Wailing Wall. Why? "Because now my prayer is closer to God." No it's not. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Son of God, to the

God the Father. There's one mediator between us and God, the man Christ Jesus. You cannot get any closer to God than Jesus. He is the one who reconciles us to the Father.

It's not about a place; it's about a person. And the whole purpose of the place was to prepare people for the coming of the person. And once the person is here, the place is no longer necessary. And so yes, we love Jerusalem, and yes, we love Israel, and yes, we want the gospel to spread there, and yes, we want people to meet Jesus; but no, we do not believe that the non-Christians who live there worship the same God that we do. We worship Jesus as God, they don't. The center of their faith is a place. The center of our faith is a person. They are worshipping a shadow; we worship the risen Christ.

And this was a judgment on Judaism. This was a judgment on their way of religion. And this was God forcing their way of life, though for some it was faithful and obedient to the teaching of the Bible up until that point, and then it was time for it to end—this was God's way of ensuring that everything would change with the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, and that our faith would move from a place to a person. And it would be all about Jesus forever.

Jesus says when that day comes, when judgment comes, when life as you know it comes to an end, flee from the cities. And that was counsel that was counterintuitive because in that day you would flee to a city for refuge. But Jesus tells them, "When that day comes, flee to the mountains and the countryside and the hills."

And so just like Jesus promised, it all happened. The Romans came, they laid siege, the Christians, the followers of Jesus fled, they left. They did exactly what Jesus said and they lived. Why? Because Jesus has foreknowledge, he knows the future; he prophesies, he tells the future; he's sovereign, he brings the future to pass.

See, this is where Jesus is different than everyone and everything. He knows the future in great detail. So within roughly forty years of him saying this, it all happened and the followers of Jesus did exactly what he told them to do, and they lived while others died.

2. GENTILES WILL BE SAVED

So number one, the temple will be destroyed. The way of worship, the way of life that had been practiced, was brought to an end by God himself as a judgment on those who had rejected Jesus, the Son of God.

Number two, the Gentiles will be saved. Alright, these are the three big epochs in human history that Jesus is talking about. This Jewish way of life is now fulfilled, come to an end. Now God is moving from Jerusalem to the nations.

We read it this way in Luke 21:24, "They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles—" that was ultimately the Romans, "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Jesus says, "The way it was is over, and now we're going to go global."

Now, truth be told, there are people, Gentiles—that means non-Jews, you and I who are not physical descendants of Abraham, that we would become spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith. When the Bible talks about Gentiles, it's talking about non-Jews. Now, the truth is, and this might shock some of you, Abraham himself was not Jewish. He was Gentile. He was part of a pagan family; he was from a pagan area. And the Bible says in Genesis, and then it echoes through the whole Bible, it's said repeatedly, Abraham—or Abram was his original name—believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. So Abraham started as a Gentile who trusted in the God of the Bible and the coming of Jesus Christ, and he was saved by faith through grace in the God of the Bible. That's the story of Abraham.

He then circumcised himself, he became the father of the nation of Israel, and he has both physical and spiritual descendants. Those who are physical descendants are, by birth, Jewish. Those who are his spiritual descendants are, by new birth, born again, faith in Jesus, Christians, worshipers of the God of Abraham. And so for you and I, that's how Gentiles come into the family of God. It's not by birth, but by new birth. It's not by who our father is, but it is by where our faith resides, if it's in Jesus. Abraham was trusting in the coming of Jesus. We're trusting in the Second Coming of Jesus. It's all the same.

And so when Jesus is talking here about the time of the Gentiles, he is saying what began with Abraham, a Gentile coming to faith, is something as well that happened in other places in the Bible. So I'll give you some examples. There's a girl named Ruth in the Old Testament. She was from a Moabite line, Gentile. By faith she worshiped the God of the Bible, she was converted. Also, Rahab, a prostitute, was a Gentile. She became a worshiper of the God of the Bible; by faith she was saved. There are examples of people who were Gentile and they worship the Jewish God. As, for example, in the days of the Exodus in the Old Testament, as God's people were leaving Egypt, it says that some of the Egyptians went with them, that they had joined the people of God and they were worshipping the God of the Jews.

It's said early on in Luke's Gospel that Jesus had come for the nations; that he had come, not just for one nation, but all nations; not just one race, but all races; not just one tribe, but all tribes; not just one language, but all languages; not just one culture, but all cultures; not just one people, but all people. That he went to the Jews first, and then the Gentiles; that he went to the physical descendants of Abraham first to invite them to become the spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith, and then from there the news about Jesus was supposed to go global. This is what Jesus said after he died, after he rose, he gathered his disciples in Acts and he says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, you'll receive power, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth."

So that's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened in part because of the destruction of the temple. God's people were forced to flee and scatter. And so they did, they scattered among the nations of the earth. And today we find ourselves in a period of human history that Jesus calls the

times of the Gentiles. This is where this story from Jerusalem, about this Jewish God, Savior become man, named Jesus, where his death, burial, resurrection occurred, where all of that truth and salvation and fulfillment of prophecy and Scripture and history, it is finished, like he said on the cross, and now is the season where the news of Jesus' death for sin and resurrection as Savior is to go out to the Gentiles, all the nations of the earth. That's the time of the Gentiles. This is the time that we live in. That's why we're here, quite frankly.

Jesus said the temple would be destroyed. Was that true or false? It was true. Jesus said then there would be the time of the Gentiles, time when non-Jewish people would worship the God of the Bible, Jesus Christ. Is that true or false? It's true. Right now on the earth, a few billion people worship the God of Abraham, Jesus Christ. There are Christians scattered among the nations of the earth, all kinds of nations, languages, tribes, and peoples.

That's why there are Bible translations, bringing the Scriptures and the story of Jesus to a few thousand languages. That's why the Bible is the most translated of all documents in the history of the world. There's no book been translated as much as the Bible. Why? 'Cause it's the times of the Gentiles. It's why missionaries are sent around the world to unreached people groups and tribes. Why? Because it's the times of the Gentiles.

That's why we started Mars Hill Church, because it's the times of the Gentiles. Until Jesus comes back, yes, he is to be made much of in Jerusalem, hopeful that people will meet him, even those who are Jewish. We want Jewish people to love Jesus, too. Jesus, himself, was Jewish. It shouldn't be that hard to show that that is a good idea for those who are Jewish, and beyond, to the nations of the earth. We want every nation to know about Jesus. We want every language, every people, every tongue, every tribe to know about Jesus. That's exactly what Jesus told us to do: be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

This is why money is spent on missions. This is why organizations are started: to take the news of Jesus around the world. You see, as soon as you become a Christian, you are part of a global movement, led by the Holy Spirit, to bring the news of Jesus to everyone and anyone, everywhere and anywhere. That's the heart of God. And so salvation is for us, and it is a message through us, so that others would be worshipers of him. And it all culminates in Revelation, where it talks about at the end of the age around Jesus and the kingdom of God will be every language and tribe and tongue and nation of people. That's amazing.

See, there's something in us that wants global harmony and unity and racial reconciliation and cultural reconciliation and gender reconciliation and economic reconciliation. Well, his name is Jesus. And the only reconciliation that is really possible is when we live for something bigger than our nation, bigger than our race, bigger than our gender. We live for the glory of God. We live as the people of God. We live as the church of God. And as Jesus is central among us, and exalted by us, then we become a people that don't have anything in common other than the God we worship and the one who brings us together.

So even at Mars Hill, what a weird tribe we are. Young and old and black and white and brown and rich and poor and educated and simple—this crazy diversity. Different generations and life stages. So what brings you all together? How did you become a people? How did you become a community? Ah, Jesus. He loved us all, he pursued us all, he served us all, he saved us all. As a result, he is the center that brings us together, and we gather not around a place, but a person, and as a result we become a people finding our identity in the love of our Savior. That's all that is meant by the times of the Gentiles. That's exactly what God is doing.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH AND THE END OF THE BLOCK

And so it's been amazing. I've had the privilege of traveling and just seeing what God is doing, what God the Holy Spirit is doing through people. I've been in Greece, Israel, Turkey, Haiti, South Africa, Scotland, London, Ireland, India. I've been all over the world—I can't even remember all the places that I've been—as well as all over the U.S. and all over Canada. What I see is people coming to Jesus. Yeah, things could be better, but it's amazing what is happening. Churches are being planted and new people groups are being reached, and it's wonderful because the whole world needs Jesus.

And so that you know our participation in this, we believe that this leads to church planting. You don't just tell people about Jesus, but when they meet him you bring them together as the church and you give them pastors who love them and leaders who serve them and you guard them from false teaching and help instruct them in the ways of Jesus and help them to develop whatever gifts they have so that their life might be part of God's kingdom purposes for the earth.

Some of you may not be familiar with this, but we have a few ways of doing that. We have The Resurgence, which is a ministry of Mars Hill to equip and serve missional leaders all around the world. We give away ebooks and we give away blogs and training and put all of our conferences up there and we're publishing books and it's now the most trafficked Christian leadership blog on the whole Internet. The most trafficked Christian leadership website on the whole Internet is theresurgence.com, and it's our way of saying, for anyone who's helping get the news about Jesus out, if there's any way we could serve and help and provide some instruction and encouragement, we want to do that.

And God has really blessed that. We get reports from literally the nations of the earth. I mean, the list of nations that download us—I recently got the report—it is page after page after page after page after page of very small font, all the nations of the earth where Christian leaders who are serving the times of the Gentiles are downloading information and we're helping to serve them in the field, which is a great honor. So thank you for giving to that.

Also, we have Acts 29. There are 28 chapters in Acts, and Acts 29 is our way of saying we're just going to keep doing what they're doing until Jesus comes back. It's the times of the Gentiles, which means go out, tell everybody about Jesus, focus a lot of your efforts on Gentiles, non-Jews, without neglecting those who are Jewish in heritage. And the result has been staggering. We don't take credit for it; it's a work of God. Furthermore, other churches are giving and serving and making it happen, so it's not just us, but we give 10 percent of our dollars to Acts 29.

Acts 29 now, we recently had our annual retreat, where we get the pastors and their wives together. There are now, just in the U.S., about four hundred

Acts 29 churches, with about 175,000 people altogether on Easter, which is amazing. There are now about five hundred potential church planters in the queue being assessed, and it just keeps going. Why? Because it's the times of the Gentiles.

In addition, we're working in thirteen different nations, just helping to find nationals who love Jesus, and to get behind them and support them and fund them and encourage them. So that what? They can tell people about Jesus, many of whom have never heard; so that they can start churches that serve Jesus. Why? Because it's the times of the Gentiles.

And that includes friends like—I've got a dear friend named Arjuna Chiguluri from East India, they've planted hundreds of churches, and they have an orphanage, and he's spread into Nepal, and he's spread up into Pakistan, and the work is extending and expanding and they've got a Bible college that's now matured into a seminary. And Vision Nationals is a great ministry. And his church planters can be very inexpensively funded. They're all Hindu converts that have met Jesus. It's the times of the Gentiles. Indian Hindus meeting Jesus as Lord, God, Savior, and Christ, and they get a bicycle or they get a scooter, depending upon how much funding they receive, and it's like \$30, \$40, \$50 a month, depending upon what area you're funding in.

He's got a vision to plant ten thousand churches, and we pray that that would come to pass. In Acts 29 we have a vision that thousands of churches would be planted in the U.S. and beyond, and we pray that would come to pass. And for him, Arjuna is sending his church planters, and we've been working with him for over a decade. Many years ago you gave the money to buy the orphanage land where now there are hundreds of orphans being cared for.

And what's amazing is as he sends his pastors out for the times of the Gentiles, many of them are going to small rural villages that have never heard the name of Jesus in their whole life. And so a guy will roll in on his bicycle or his scooter, and he'll pull that village together. And we're talking ox carts and thatched huts and old-school way of life, pre-electricity with dirt floors. I've been there, it's amazing. And people meet Jesus and a church gets planted and each of these church planters ends up planting three churches in three villages, and the bike or scooter is used so that they can travel between the three.

Some of you ask, "Why do that?" It's the times of the Gentiles. What happened in Jerusalem was for the whole world and all people. The death, burial, resurrection of Jesus is real. That he is God, Lord, Savior, King, and Christ. And that now in the times of the Gentiles, we get to be part of telling the good news about Jesus, starting in our city and our region, out to our nation, out to the nations of the earth, helping also to take our dollars and our opportunities, and to give it to those who love and serve Jesus so that as long as this window of opportunity's open—and the times of the Gentiles, friends, it doesn't last forever. Right now it's been a few thousand years. It could be a few more minutes, a few more hours, a few more days, weeks, months, years, decades, or millennia—we do not know.

We don't know when Jesus is coming back. But until he does, it's the times of the Gentiles. It's this open window of opportunity, and so we want to have a sense of urgency. We want to have a sense of urgency that includes Mars Hill campuses. It's why we're relocating some of our campuses to bigger spaces; more people can meet Jesus. It's why we're opening campuses in Everett and we prayerfully hope, eventually next year, in Rainier Valley. And we're pushing, as well, for January, in addition to Everett and North Seattle, Orange County and Portland. Be in prayer; we're looking at real estate and mobilizing leaders and raising dollars.

And it feels like at Mars Hill, the treadmill's always going a hundred miles an hour. You know why? It's the times of the Gentiles. There's an opportunity. And if there's an opportunity, we want to avail ourselves to it. Jesus is alive, the Holy Spirit has been poured out, and the whole world needs Jesus. And that means we want to send people to the end of the earth and across the globe. We also want to send people to the end of the block and across the street, because people need Jesus there too.

And one of the reasons we focus many of our efforts in and around cities is because the nations pass through cities. And so as we're able to reach cities, we're also able to reach people who will then relocate, travel, and move back to other nations. This is why campuses in and near city centers are so important. This is why Mars Hill churches in and near university campuses are so important. Students come in, workers come in, tourists come in, travelers come in. If they meet Jesus and then they take the news of Jesus back with them, then all of a sudden the times of the Gentiles multiplies, increases, and the good news about Jesus goes viral and global.

All of this, for us, is very strategic. It's why we do church planting. It's why we use the Internet. It's why we give a lot of things away online and digitally. It's why we position ourselves, not exclusively, but firstly, in and around urban centers. It's why we also have a heart for young people and college students and those who have an opportunity to relocate or travel to other nations. You say, "Why is this?" I need you to know this, Mars Hill. It's all very missional. We are missionary people. We are part of a missionary movement. And this is missiological thinking because the window of opportunity is open, Jesus is alive, he's not come back yet to judge the living and the dead, it's the times of the Gentiles. It's the times of the Gentiles.

And for those of you who are interested in church planting or becoming someone who starts a Mars Hill church, coming up this fall, I believe the tentative date is in November, we're looking at a boot camp here in Seattle. This is where we talk about church planting and evangelism and missional work. And we assess people to see whether or not they meet the biblical criteria to go ahead and be someone who is sent out for the times of the Gentiles. And we want you to be thinking and praying about that. You men to be thinking and praying about that.

3. JESUS WILL RETURN

Number one, the temple will be destroyed; things are going to change. Number two, the times of the Gentiles. Number three, history ends because Jesus will return. Luke 21:25--28, "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be

shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man,” the great title of Jesus from Daniel, “coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

There will be a day when history as we know it ends. That will be when Jesus returns. Jesus promised the temple would be destroyed, it happened. Jesus promised there would be the times of the Gentiles, it’s happening. Jesus promised he will return, it will happen. It will happen. This world does not endure forever. Sin, injustice, tyranny, evil, oppression, and death do not continue forever. Jesus returns. He will bring human history to an end. History is beginning, middle, end, new beginning, new heaven, new earth, New Jerusalem, resurrection of the dead, new glorified body, that is God’s pattern and plan for human history.

Here’s the truth, friends: We don’t know when Jesus is coming. But we want to live faithfully, humbly, by the power of God, until we see him face-to-face. Here’s what the Bible says, a few things. That the world as we know it will end. That Jesus will return. That the dead will rise, just as Jesus rose from death. That there will be a final judgment, that no one is getting away with anything. That heaven and hell will be occupied by people forever. And that the kingdom of God, ruled over by Jesus Christ, the King of kings, will cover all of the earth, all people, for all eternity. That’s what the Bible says.

And so as Christians, we now understand where we come from: God. Why we’re here: God. Where we’re going: God. We understand why the world is not as we would want it to be, because of human sin and folly and rebellion. We know that, though we want to labor for justice and for love and mercy and grace on the earth, that ultimately those longings will not be completely fulfilled until the Prince of Peace returns, and he brings peace on the earth and prosperity and provision and protection as God is present with us in the living Jesus forever.

In closing, I really want you to live your life in light of eternity. I want you to know that this is the times of the Gentiles. And until Jesus returns, we have kingdom work to be about, by the grace of God. And for those of you who are not Christians, I want you to know that your life will end, that you will stand before Jesus and that there is an eternal destiny of heaven or hell, of blessing or punishment. And everything hinges on whether or not you believe in Jesus or don’t. And so it’s not too late for you. The window of opportunity’s still open. The times of the Gentiles is still around us, and it is available to us.

READYING FOR JESUS’ RETURN

Now, in closing, I want to give you five thoughts regarding readying for Jesus’ return. I want you to think about these things personally. I want you to talk about them with your family. We have Community Groups that meet at various times and places to discuss the big ideas of the Bible that we cover on Sunday in the ensuing week. And these are the things I want you to talk about in your Community Group this week. And if you’re not in one, please get in one. Please get in one. Jesus saves individuals; he connects them to communities so that we are the people of God, not the individuals of God.

Number one: Do you really believe that Jesus will return? Do you really believe that? Is this something you hear and you say, “I don’t know.” Do you really believe the words of Jesus? Everything else he said has come to pass, just like he said. We want you to trust him on this as well. Faith is believing God until you’re seeing what he has done. Faith is believing in what Jesus is saying, until you’re seeing what Jesus is doing.

Number two: Are you overly concerned with the details of his return? Some of you are. And I tell you this because Mars Hill, Acts 29, what we’re a part of, tends to be, not exclusively, but in large part, a young movement of God. In the last twelve months, I’m told we baptized 1,246 people—lots of new Christians, praise God. There are still a lot of you who are not Christians, but we love you and God’s working on you, and maybe this is the day of your salvation.

But what I’ve seen happen in other movements before us—I’ll go back and use an example. There was a great outpouring and movement of the Holy Spirit in, let’s say the ‘60s and ‘70s, called the Jesus Movement. And it was amazing. And I’m not critical of it at all. It was a miracle of God. A whole generation just seemed to get captured with the love of Jesus. And en masse, hippies and drug addicts and people who were sexually wayward and completely spiritual but not in the Holy Spirit but more in the demon way, they met Jesus and there was a radical number of salvations. And a huge number of young people became Christians.

We’re not seeing that yet today. I hope we’re seeing the beginning of that, but we’re not seeing that. I hope and pray that we would see that kind of mass outpouring and revival in the times of the Gentiles. I pray for that all the time. We labor for that. We’re seeing so much to be encouraged about, but there could be so much more, and we want that, in the grace of God.

Nonetheless, what happened with the Jesus Movement, is I believe it got off track and off course. People started to get really fascinated with the rapture and the end times and the Second Coming and all of these things. All of a sudden, yeah, there was a love for Jesus, but there was more of a fascination around dates and times and events and circumstances. And all of a sudden, leaders rise up and conferences are held and people are making predictions about when Jesus will return and the signs accompanying his coming. And they’re taking the Bible and they’re taking the nightly news and they’re combining them together.

And a whole bunch of new Christians and young people, they go, “The end of the world is near. Jesus is coming back at any time.” And it led to a short-sightedness. Some people didn’t get married, and they should have. Or some people didn’t have children, and they should have. Or some people didn’t buy a home, because why buy a home if you’re going to be gone any time—you’re going to just go up to be with Jesus—and they should have. Some churches didn’t buy a building, or they didn’t make long-range plans, or they weren’t thinking generationally about a legacy. Everything was sort of a crisis sense of immediate urgency. Some key leaders, even some who love Jesus and are brothers and sisters in Christ, they started predicting the end of the world and sending their followers, their young followers, into a frenzy. None of that’s helpful.

Are you overly interested, concerned, consumed with the details of his return? Are you reading too many books about the end of the world and neglecting the needs of the world? Are you trying to predict things when Jesus says elsewhere, "No one knows the hour nor the day"? Are you overly concerned? Some of you don't believe in the Second Coming of Jesus; that's not far enough. Some of you are overly concerned and obsessed with the details and have very strong opinions about things that have not yet happened; that's going too far.

Number three: If Jesus returned today, what might you regret not having done? Are there things that you need to be obedient to? Are there issues in your life that you need to deal with? Are there sins that you need to confess? Are there dollars you need to give? Or volunteer hours you need to make available? Or whatever it is. I don't know what it is for you—the Holy Spirit will highlight that and he'll let you know.

But you may be laboring under this false sense of "there's plenty of time." We don't know when we're going to die, and/or Jesus will return. That shouldn't cause us to be panicked and have a sense of crisis, but it should encourage in us a sense of urgency. I know Christians, churches, denominations, it's like they think we have forever, and we may, and we may not. But if Jesus returned, if there's something that the Holy Spirit is already convicted us to do, we should be doing that because we don't know how long we have.

Number four: If Jesus returned today, who might you regret not having spoken to about him? Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. Right, it's the times of the Gentiles. It's the time to tell the whole world and everybody about Jesus. Who have you not talked to? Who, this week, do you need to send a letter, send an e-mail, send a text, make a call, schedule a time with, go knock on the door and sit down and talk to? "I'm sorry, I've sinned against you, please forgive me." Reconciliation. "I've not really talked to you about Jesus; I really need to do that. I've been meaning to give you this copy of the Bible for a long time. Maybe start in Luke and go forward; that's a good place to start. I've been meaning to invite you to church or Community Group and I haven't done that, so let me do that now."

And number five: How can you plan for future generations while being ready to meet Jesus every day? And this is the tension, okay? I'm a dad, I have five kids, I need to be making plans for my kids, my grandkids, my great-grandkids. I need to be thinking about legacy and lineage. What if it's another thousand years, two thousand years, ten thousand years until Jesus returns? I need to be thinking about our family and our history and our lineage and our legacy. This means, you know, investment and college fund and medical and helping our kids love Jesus and be ready to serve him as faithful adults and raise our grandkids to be part of the times of the Gentiles, right? Big legacy, generation- to-generation plan.

And also, prepared today. If he comes back today, that I wouldn't be ashamed or embarrassed, that I wouldn't be negligent, that I wouldn't be distracted with the things of the world to such a degree that I could not be faithful to the things of God.

Most theologies and most churches and most denominations and most traditions, they go one direction or the other. It's all about the future and the legacy and the lineage and long planning and long strategizing and long thinking, but they miss the present. These are families that are thinking about their kids and grandkids, but they're not reaching their neighbors. These are denominations that have a forty-year plan, but not converts and evangelism is ceasing and dying, and church planting is stalled.

Or, consumed with the present: short-sightedness, short-term thinking, short-term planning, sense of urgency, the end of the world is coming, no need to write anything down, no need to make any long-term plans, no need to get real estate and plant new churches and make curriculum and doctrine and theology and preparation because, you know what? It's all going to end really, really fast. It's like shopping on Christmas Eve. There are just a few minutes, hustle, do the best you can. And people and denominations and churches and communities that live that way, they don't have a good legacy; they tend to have a short-sightedness and they tend to get off track and they tend to waste, sometimes, their energy. Though they're well meaning, they're not well positioned.

How can you, how can we, your family, your Community Group, Mars Hill Church, you personally? How can you live in that tension? Planning for a long future of serving Jesus for generations, and being prepared for the coming of Jesus at any moment?

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for an opportunity to study the Scriptures, and we want to live in that tension. The Bible says to prepare for a thousand generations, to think about a thousand generations. So we say yes, Lord, we want to be faithful to that. The Bible also says that Jesus could return at any moment, and that we need to always be prepared. So we want to be ready for that. God, we thank you that through Jesus we see that the temple was destroyed and all of Scripture was fulfilled and that it is the time of the Gentiles. And as Gentiles, Lord God, we say thank you, that our people, non-physical descendants of Abraham, could by faith become spiritual descendants of Abraham, worshiping Jesus, the same God that he was waiting for and the same God that we're waiting for again.

God, we thank you that we're born at this time in history, after the cross and empty tomb, where we get to tell the world about Jesus. We get to do so with technology that allows us to do so in more rapid speed and greater numbers than ever. And I thank you that you started Mars Hill Church in a very technologically savvy place, at the same time that the Internet came into existence so that we might use technology to get the word about Jesus out and to see that expand to Albuquerque and Portland and Orange County and wherever else you would take it next. What a great opportunity that is. So thank you God for the times of the Gentiles, and thank you for the technology to reach the Gentiles. And we thank you, as Gentiles, that it's reached us as well.

And God, we confess, in Jesus' name, we believe in the words of Jesus, that he is going to return, that there will be a judgment, that heaven and hell will be occupied, that the dead will rise, and we'll all live somewhere forever, in weeping or rejoicing, depending upon what we've done with the

message of your Son. And so God, for those of us who are not Christians, I pray, God, that we would come to Jesus right now, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And for those of us who are Christians, that right now we would be filled with power through the Holy Spirit, to talk about Jesus to everyone and anyone, and to make our lives count for the kingdom of God. In Jesus' good name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.