



The Living and the Dead

Part 2 – Scared to Death – No One Knows the Date or Time

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I'm here to pick up Part 2 of *The Living and the Dead* series. Today we are going to look at what it means to be *Scared to Death – No One Knows the Date or Time*. We're actually looking at the Second Coming of Jesus as we march through Matthew 24 and 25. I think Adam did an awesome job setting the stage for how relevant this message series is. If you have any questions about how relevant it is, I looked at the box office... I just kind of randomly looked at it this morning to see what the number one movie was. Sure enough, it was *Happy Death Day*. So, seemingly, our series is right on target from where our culture is at, being fascinated with death. As a body of Christ, what we are seeking to do is take God's word, to rally around it, and to ground ourselves in truth. So, are you with me on that today? We're going to search God's word for truth.

If you will, I'm going to say one more prayer and then we're going to jump in. Would you bow your heads with me? Jesus, we just invite you into this time. I want to ask, God, for your Holy Spirit to guide as we walk through somewhat of a heavy passage that's appropriate for a heavy time. I pray, God, that hope would be resounding, that it would be our banner today, that hope would envelop our hearts and that you would fill us with a new heart of love and compassion for people. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

In our culture today, we live in a lot of tension. As you watch the news, it's hard to watch it for too long because the stories that sell are the things that cause us to panic. There are wars and rumors of wars and political strife. I've got an iPhone and on my iPhone, they build in kind of like the highest trending news of the day. I'll swipe over and look at the news headlines and in those headlines, they'll have four different vendors of news and they'll all be attacking our president. Then you'll go on social media and on social media, there are very few posts that aren't filled with agenda. So, you can read through those and just feel the tension. And if you get down in the comments, you see people going back and forth at each other.

For me, a safe place has always been ESPN.com. I just want to get away from the world and enjoy some sports, a story line that isn't filled with tension and yet, now, even ESPN.com is filled with political drama. It feels like you just can't even get away from it. The reality is that is the world and the context that we are living in.

It reminds me of... Does anybody ever watch the show 24 with Jack Bauer? Do we have any fans out there? Okay, so you guys can relate to this. In the Robbins' household, we haven't had Dish or cable for a while, but we do have Netflix and so we'll usually watch a series at a time.

So, whenever a series ends, for Ashley and I, it's kind of like a big time in our life because I could end up watching a Canadian show about horses for the next three months. So, it's really important that I find something that's got a little bit of action that isn't too intense. On a couple of occasions, I've tried to get my wife into watching 24, but both of us... It's not just her, we both are filled with anxiety the entire time. It's like you see Jack Bauer and he's outside this building... For those of you who don't know the story line, it's basically 24 hours where this agent saves the world like a half dozen times. He's a really busy guy. He'll be outside the building and you'll know what's inside the building. It's filled with a hundred armed insurgents. There's no way he could possibly penetrate their ranks.

And it just so happens that the daughter of the Ambassador to Jijekastan is in there who Jack formerly dated when he was a child. And, you know, when death is on the line and you have these fond stirrings, you begin to question. "Should I have ever walked away..." So, there are all these romantic ties.

Jack calls up CTU and he says, "I need back up and I need it now." They're like, "Hold on Jack, we'll be there in 60 seconds," and he responds, "I don't have 60 seconds!" And he runs in and you're like, "NO, Jack! You're only armed with an unsharpened pencil!" And he kicks down the door and takes them all out. The whole time, your blood pressure is going through the roof. For Ashley, it's like there's no possibility of going to bed after something like that. It just doesn't work for our family.

It's so funny that as you watch a show like 24, you have so much anxiety built up from the tension, but then you realize there are ten more seasons! You know what's going to happen. Jack is going to save the day. And yet, it has a physiological effect on us.

And so it is for Christians. We're just like everybody else in a tension filled culture today. We get carried away in the story lines that surround us. Today, we're going to look at God's Word and we're going to be grounded in hope because God uses his Word to give us the truth. He gives us the end of the story so that we have a context. We know that the next season is coming. And the season that is coming will no longer have any pain, mourning, sin, death, and he'll wipe away every tear from our eyes. Amen?

When we get carried away in society, we're going to look like everyone else in society. If we stand firm in God's word and we trust in the hope that is set before us, we'll look different and we'll have something very important and powerful to offer the world around us. This is exciting stuff.

Hope Does Not Disappoint. I want to look at a passage from Romans 5. It's one of my favorite passages. Paul writes in Verse 3, *And therefore we also exalt in our tribulation, knowing that our tribulation brings about perseverance and our perseverance brings about proven character and proven character brings about hope.* Watch where Verse 5 picks up. ...*and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

Did you know that hope was given to us so we know the end of the story? No matter what's going on in your life today, you know that if you have a relationship with Jesus, when you die, heaven awaits you and an eternity spent with a perfect righteous king. That's what awaits you. The reason that he told us that is because he wants to give us hope to ground us in the adversity that we are going to encounter.

The reason that he did that is because of his love. That makes it really important for us to understand the scripture. When we run into kind of what... I deem this a heavy passage that we are getting into. You'll see in the first verse that we jump into when it talks about the abomination of desolation and you're like, "Gee whiz, what's that about?" The reason that he tells us these things and he gives us foreknowledge of what is to come is because he loves us. Isn't that encouraging?

We're going to look at three questions that we're going to answer regarding the Second Coming of Christ: **What have we seen? What is to come? What do we do?** That's our action. How do we apply it to our life?

The first question is **what have we seen?** Much of the Bible, as we study through it and we sit under teaching, is things that have already happened. As you look at the scripture, one of the awesome things about Christianity and about the Bible is there are all kinds of historical evidence that supports what we believe. Archeology supports it, the life of Jesus supports it, historical documentarians support it. We have a faith that lines up historically with what we have seen. As we read the scripture, that historical content ought give us faith in that which we can't see.

Here's what we've seen. Donyes did a great job of covering Matthew 24, so we're just going to bullet point the birth pains that he talked about, the things that we are actively seeing. I think one thing that he pointed out is really wise. As we read through these birth pains, you're thinking to yourself, *Oh my gosh, the end is upon us because we are watching so much of it play out today*. But, I do want to remind you that because we live in the information age, all of these atrocities are up in our face, but they've been happening for centuries. What we know for sure is that today we're one day closer to the second coming of Jesus; that's what we can count on.

Here are some of the things that we saw. There are **wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters**. I mean is that filling our headlines? **Nation will rise against nation**. This word *nation* in the Greek is the word *ethnos*; it's the word for ethnicities that are rising up against each other. We see the strife between Israel and Islam on a grand scale. There is a massive clash of nations. We even see it in our country; the tension between the different races within our country that are boiling back up.

The next thing we've seen. **Christians will be killed and hated**. We've seen ISIS, over the last years, killing and persecuting Christians with absolute hatred.

Then as tension builds... This is typical. As tension builds, it will sort out those who will stick by their faith and those who truly don't cling to it. As that sorting happens, **many will fall away and they'll begin to hate each other**. As people are scared and they don't stand firm in their faith, they'll fall away and ultimately, they'll take a stance of hate against those who are now judging them. So, you see a lot of tension in regard to our relationships.

Finally, **false prophets will mislead many**. We see how there are so many false religions and evil people in the church that are teaching things that are not true and they're causing many to fall away. In a time in our culture where tolerance is the big issue, and we see this social revolution taking place, people are falling away and false prophets are coming in and they are teaching people or they are telling people

things that tickle their ears, things that they want to believe. It's easy beliefism and it will draw... Ultimately, what happens is people are drawn away from Jesus. That's the work of our enemy.

Then **lawlessness is increased**. Relativism is a big thing in our society. Relativism is basically the idea that what's right for you is right for you and what's right for me is right for me. I'm not going to step on anybody's toes. With that, when there is no absolute truth, all the boundaries of society are beginning to be erased. The thought is that as those boundaries are erased, it will become peaceful and a utopia because I'm not going to step on anybody's toes. But, we see that as those boundaries are erased, lawlessness is increasing. It is not a peaceful movement; it is a movement that is out of control and it's dangerous.

Then we will see that **most people's love will grow cold**. I think one of the best examples right now is the issue over the anthem and the stuff that's going on in the NFL. If you go on social media, you'll see people taking sides because there is some kind of activism going on. Where there is activism, there will be sides and when there are sides, people's love will grow cold for each other.

I want you to hear from me right now that it is right to stand on what is true and it's okay to have an opinion, but, for Christians, the most important thing for us to do is to love people. The reason there is so much protesting going on is because people's hearts are hurt. That's our concern. That's the church's concern. So, if I see somebody doing something that I disagree with, before I draw a line in the sand and begin to point a finger, I need to go over and engage that person and learn how they feel and why they feel this way. Inevitably, when you get into those kinds of conversations, it stirs up compassion and it broadens your perspective. The most important thing for the church in this conversation is that we would love people, period. As that relationship develops, that's when truth can come into a heart that's open to hear it.

We've got a big "but" and it's good news. So, you walk through this... It is good news. **Those who endure are saved and the gospel is preached**. Here's one of the awesome things. Again, you can look at this throughout history. Whenever persecution builds up, whenever Christians are being killed, the gospel explodes. It always happens because as people become desperate, they begin to look back to their God. The encouragement to us that walk through this tense environment and this difficult day is that we would be ones who endure. Just as Paul wrote, "Not only this, but we also exalt in our tribulation." That means the hard stuff that you're going through in your life. That means the tension that you're experiencing in our culture. That even means the heartache that you get when you watch the news. Paul says, "Not only this, we also exalt in our tribulation because we know that it brings about the perseverance in the saints." According to this, do we need perseverance? We need it because those who endure are saved and the gospel is preached to all nations.

I just rejoice in the Trulove family that stood right up here a couple of weeks ago. They are answering the call for the nations. We've got to get behind young people like that who have these eyes full of life for the gospel and we need to throw fuel on their fire, whatever that means. Whether it's resources, prayer, or encouragement, we need to get behind them.

We've got some friends named the Minors who lived in Branson years ago. For the last five years, they've been missionaries in Indonesia. They shared their mission with us. Right now, the unreached people groups in the world are somewhere around 7,000. Within those groups, many have a gospel worker, but there just hasn't been a turn towards the gospel. It depends what numbers you are looking at, but there are somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 people groups that have no gospel worker at all. Our friends, the Minors, came back and showed us that just in their little neck of the woods, in their little patch of islands, there are 28 people groups that have no gospel worker. Our friends, the Minors, are going after them. Isn't that awesome? For the 28 people groups that don't have a single gospel worker, the Minors, our friends from Branson, Missouri, are going after them because their hearts haven't grown cold.

They told a story where there was a people group... They are raising up locals in Indonesia and they are sending them to these unreached people groups. They raised up a disciple and sent him to a people group. He travels hours into the wilderness and he meets this people group and he begins talking to a man. The disciple begins talking about Jesus and the man already knows Jesus.

Now, these people are all Muslim. He asks him how he knows Jesus. The man says that about five years ago, there was someone in their village that was sick and he had a dream. Jesus appeared to him in this dream and instructed him to pray in the name of Jesus. This man woke up the following morning, goes to his friend, prays healing over him in the name of Jesus, and the man is healed. Now, this is a Muslim people group that has no exposure to Jesus and for the last five years, they've been praying in the name of Jesus and people have been healed. Praise God! Now, finally, in God's divine authorship, the gospel worker brings them the knowledge of the gospel. This is the Jesus that heals the nations.

The Minors, two American kids with a dream who answered the call, are seeing the gospel rolled out in God's awesome plan.

What is to come? This is the part that gets a little more difficult. We know what we've seen. It's easy to look back on history and digest it, but when we look at what is to come, which is what we're doing today, we've got to lay hold of all the things that we've seen because they are faith building. We look forward and this is where we pick up in Matthew 24.

15 "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains."

So, in Daniel 9, Daniel is describing the tribulation, which is a seven-year period of time before Jesus comes back. In these seven years, this man who is called the abomination of desolation... Just speaking to our horror culture, abomination is a foul, stinking idolatry and desolation is horror, so it's something that is horrific. A horrific, foul, stench of idolatry. Truly, that is horror. This man will make a covenant or a treaty of peace with the people of Israel and for three and a half years, everything will be hunky dory until the middle of tribulation when the abomination of desolation, who is the antichrist, will take his seat in the holy place in the Temple and he will demand that people worship him as God. This is when things get really ugly.

17 "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.
18 Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will."

So, we're watching these birth pains grow during our lifetime and there will be a day when the antichrist takes that seat and demands worship from the world and this is when the great tribulation begins.

22 "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."

So, as we talked about before, when tribulation in our life mounts up, it causes people to look to God. But, during the Great Tribulation, people will begin to get desperate and they'll look around. Jesus is saying, "Hey, at that time, there are going to be all kinds of false prophets that show up and show these signs and wonders, but it's not me because when I come back the second time, there will be no mistaking it."

25 "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them."

Imagine a believer in the tribulation. We think many of these will be Jews that come to faith. When they find the New Testament and their eyes fall upon this, they'll know that Jesus is not in the inner room, he's not around the corner, he's not out in the wilderness. When Jesus comes back, there will be no mistaking it.

27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

This word *corpse* is talking about the Nation of Israel and how their enemies will gather around them, but God will not let them be taken under.

I want to show you this diagram just so we have some clarity on what the end times look like. So, we're living in this Church Age and in 1 Thessalonians 4, there's a scripture that talks about believers being caught up into heaven, speaking of the rapture. Then there is a seven-year period of tribulation, three and a half years under peace and then in the middle of the tribulation, the abomination of desolation, the antichrist, would demand worship in the Temple and the last three and a half years, if they have not been cut short, they would destroy the world. That's when Jesus comes back.

There are some different ways to interpret this in scripture, but this is what we believe. When we study the scriptures at Woodland Hills, we feel like this is our best interpretation of our end times. At the Second Coming of Christ... It picks up in Matthew 24.

29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. **31** And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

This is Revelation 19. As God is showing John a picture of what it's going to look like. He says in Revelation 19, **11** "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. **12** His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head, are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. **13** He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. **14** And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. **15** From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. **16** And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Jesus comes back and he destroys the armies of the antichrist. He takes the antichrist and the prophet and he throws them in the Lake of Fire. He takes the devil himself and he locks him up in the abyss and Jesus rules on earth for 1,000 years to show us what it looks like to live under a righteous ruler. At the end of that millennium, of those 1,000 years, Satan is released one last time and he gathers up armies from the far reaches of the earth and they march on Jerusalem and fire rains from heaven. Satan is thrown in the Lake of Fire with the antichrist and the beasts where he will be tormented forever. Then Jesus himself brings in the new heaven and the new earth. We will get to enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Sin will be no more. No more pain. No more mourning. No more sadness. No more death. It's over. That's the story that we, as Christians, get to hang our hats on. That's where our hope is found; in a victorious King that cannot be drawn off course. God is victory.

What do we do about it? How do we apply that to our lives, people? It's important that we walk away with something from this. I love this passage. I think it's 1 Thessalonians 5: 8. **8** *But since we are of the day, let us be sober...* Now, I'll spend a lot more time on this with the 11:00 service, right? We'll go 90% eschatology and 10% sobriety with first service and then will flip it with the second service. **...having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.**

So, this is a charge for us to lay hold of. This idea of sobriety is to be calm and be collected in spirit because we know that no matter what's going on around us, it can't touch us because our hope in heaven is secure.

Paul is writing to the Thessalonians and he is saying, "I want you to be calm and I want you to be collected in spirit." Then he tells us to do two things. He says to protect your heart, for your heart is the home of faith and love. That idea of a breastplate on a warrior... A breastplate protects all the vital organs, but most importantly, it protects the heart.

Our unofficial scripture of Woodland Hills Family Church is Proverbs 4: 23. We just can't seem to get away from it. It says, ***Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.***

So, he says, "As you stand firm, calm, cool, and collected, you need to guard your heart. It is the home of your faith and your love." So, as Christian, we have to be careful not to allow our hearts to grow cold. It would do us well to go out from here today and take a spiritual inventory of our heart and ask ourselves where our heart cold. "Whom do I hold bitterness or unforgiveness against?" "To what people group am I prejudice toward?" "What is it that I read on social media that stirs up unhealthy anger in me?" Then we need to take those things to the Lord and perhaps we need to go and reconcile with those that we've wronged. But, we've got to protect our heart because we can just as easily have our heart grow cold as anybody else. You're responsible to protect yourself and to place that breastplate over your chest.

Then the third charge he gives us is to guard our mind. Our mind is something that we are feeding right now. We are taking a look at God's plan for the future. When we believe in truth and we place our feet on the firm foundation of truth, we've got to put on a helmet to protect that because part of the enemy's strategy is to get into your head and twist the truth of God. Ever so slightly, he's going to find one little avenue, one little place of compromise or of tolerance or of anger or of hatred or unforgiveness and he's going to tweak it just a little bit until he gets a foothold. He knows that as soon as he gets a foothold, just one little sin, one little unforgiveness, like an infection, that sin will grow and it will overtake your mind, which feeds your heart. So, we feed faith and love in our heart by having a sound mind and knowing and meditating on the truth.

I believe living in the information age, there are agendas and messages that are thrown at us at an unprecedented rate that we have a greater responsibility to guard our minds. That might mean that you need to stop reading a specific newspaper. It might mean that you stop watching certain shows. It might mean that there are certain movies that you no longer go to. It might even be people in your life that speak untruth that you need to separate yourself from. We've got a responsibility to guard our minds. This is what Paul charges the Thessalonians with in 1 Thessalonians 1: 2-3. He says, ***2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father...*** Faith, hope, and love. That is the church's response to the tense culture that we live in.

Knowledge is in service to our heart. As we feed ourselves with truth, it gives us a platform of which we will act out of. As we hope in the truth, we stand firm in faith and love.

What does it look like for us to have a warm heart today? I was thinking about it this morning. I have a great buddy named Richard Marks who, to my knowledge... I don't want to stamp this as absolute, but to my knowledge, he's the first African American pastor in our community. He's a new pastor at New Beginnings Fellowship, which I think is an awesome church in Hollister. Richard, being an African American man, is actively processing... He has a heavy heart for racial reconciliation. One day, he just kind of, in a loss for words, said, "What can I do? As an African American man, what do I do to reconcile the racial tension in our country?"

If you don't think there is tension... We've got a good African American friend, a young lady, who was called the "N" word just a couple of weeks ago in our town. This is a real thing and there are people's hearts that are truly hurting.

I was praying for Richard one morning and I was just taking on the angst of my friend. As I was praying, I just had this realization or this little message for Richard, "You're already doing it." He says, "What do I do?" and he's already doing it. I called Richard and I said, "Buddy, you're doing it. You're ministering to families with the gospel of Jesus."

Here's an example. If you were to look up Ashley and my genealogical line, our family tree, you would find racism. But, because both of our parents, Dell and Peggy and Rob and Susan, radically gave their hearts to Jesus in their youth, racism was eradicated from our family tree. And because of their radical commitment to Jesus, Ashley and I grew up and we have never had racist feelings.

Now, I've had a thousand other issues. I'm not even pointing a finger because we've all got our stuff. The fact is we are human beings and we've got to deal with our stuff. But, because of that radical commitment, Ashley and I have never had that.

And now our children, the five little Robbins kiddos, are absolutely clueless and naïve to skin color. It's nothing! Their buddy Tred's got curly black hair; it's awesome. That is the power of the gospel. I said, "Richard, this is what you're doing. By loving on those families in Hollister and preaching the gospel to them, through the power of God, racism is going to be eradicated from an entire generation, from an entire family." That's what we do.

As believers, I want to just leave with this. In this tense environment, I pray that we would answer the call to love. When people are rising up in activism, we need to run to their side to take them out for coffee and say, "Tell me your heart. How are you hurt? What are your feelings? What can I do to help you?" And then the power of the gospel will transform families. That's our call.

I'm going to close with these verses from Revelation 19. John writes, **7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." 9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" "And he said to me, "These are true words of God."**

This life is full of hardship, but we've been called at a unique time, an important time. Peter writes, "God is not slow about his promises, but he is patient, wishing that none would perish and that all would come to everlasting life."

And those that we get to a part of their story of them coming into relationship with Jesus will be sitting to their left and their right at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Let's pray together. Jesus, you are so awesome. God, I pray that our hearts would be filled with love. I pray, God, that our minds would be sound because we know the truth and the hope that comes from

the truth. I pray that our church body would endure well, that we would love people well. God, I just want to pray that your Holy Spirit would tenderize our hearts, Lord Jesus. If there is any callus, and surely there is, I pray that you would deal with our callused hearts, that you would forgive us and tenderize our hearts.

I want to pray, Jesus, over this church body that our hearts would be impassioned and emblazed, that they would be fiery hot for you and for the people you love so much.

It's in the mighty name of Jesus we pray. Amen.