

The Kingdom Come

Matthew 24

Peter Hiett

July 3, 2005

Today's message is a continuation of our last message from Matthew. So if it raises questions, be sure to get that tape.

Matthew 24 beginning in verse 1,

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"

The disciples ask Jesus:

- 1) When will Jerusalem be destroyed?
- 2) What will be the sign of Your coming?
- 3) What will be the sign of the close of the age?

From the last sermon and from history, we know the answer to the first question. Jerusalem and the temple were obliterated in 70 A.D. with many signs preceding its destruction. "Expect it in your lifetime," says Jesus.

We preached on that last time.

As to the last question, the close of the age, “No one but the Father knows,” and there will be no signs. “Expect it when you don’t expect it,” says Jesus.

We’ll talk about that next time.

As to the middle question, the coming of the Son of man, well, things get painfully confusing and paradoxically foolish.

We’ll talk about that now.

They asked three questions that seemed like one.

And Jesus answered them, “Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.”

Earthquakes, famine, wars... all birth pangs. Somebody’s being born and, according to scripture, the “somebody” is us, and all creation is a womb.

Being born must be absolutely terrifying for a baby in a womb. Yet, it is absolutely exhilarating for a father outside the womb.

We are like babies in a womb, and the pains are a sign we’re being born.

Yet, when the pains come, we often wonder, “Where’s God?” A baby must wonder, “Where’s mother?”

Well, actually, baby, you're entire world is your mother. In her, you live and move and have your being.

Paul said, "In God, we live and move and have our being."

A baby might also wonder, "Is there a father? I can't find him."

I was shocked when my first child, Jonathan, was born. He knew my voice. I'd speak, and he'd be still. He didn't do that for anybody else. He had come to know my voice in the womb. He couldn't find me in his womb world, yet when I'd speak, everything in his womb world vibrated to the sound of my voice.

A baby might also wonder, "What's the point of it all? What's the point of these hands and feet, these eyes, this mouth? They serve no purpose. All that matters is this great umbilical cord that brings me blood and bread, oxygen and nutrients."

It's fascinating to think that in a womb,
the very things that seem *pointless* are the point,
and what seems to be the *point*
becomes pointless upon birth.

Hands, feet, eyes, mouth are foolish in the womb.
Your belly button is foolish outside the womb,
and your umbilical cord is garbage.

That's why it's so good to gaze at your navel and make a declaration, "You used to be everything to me! But I was made for another world."

And believers are all called to gaze at this world, and declare, "You used to be everything to me, but I was made for another world."

Well, the pains of this world are birth pains. In verses 9-14, Jesus prophesied a lot of pain. Then in verse 15, He says,

So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath.

When the birth pains become critical, flee the city!
 Don't run back to the womb.
 Don't hang on to the umbilical cord.
 Let the old temple go.
 Let the old city go.
 Flee the city!

Last time, we talked about how counter-intuitive that was because the temple, and city were a giant, stone fortress. So when danger loomed, everyone ran into the city and not out. The city was their security, identity, and sociology.

When danger looms, we all want to run back into the old city. We all circle the wagons and get conservative and preservative... protective of self, self-centered.

Before I started preaching this stuff, folks used to send me articles and fliers on how we were entering the "last days," and so needed to prepare with underground bunkers and fortresses, and the proper food storage

technology. As if when Jesus comes back, He'll be, like, really impressed with us sitting on stockpiles of food, holding shotguns while the pagans starve in the streets.

People will say, "Well, I'm storing food to give it to the starving in the last days."

Well, don't we read the papers? About 4 million people will starve to death this year. About 11 thousand today.

And don't we read our Bibles? These are the last days (Acts 2:16). This is the last hour (1 John 2:18).

So, if you're stock piling food, wealth, possessions, now might be the best time to pass that stuff out.

In verses 21-23, Jesus prophesies more pain and confusion. Then in verse 24,

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, "Lo, he is in the wilderness," do not go out; if they say, "Lo, he is in the inner rooms," do not believe it. [You won't find Him in, but out.] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together. 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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power

and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

It's a picture of Revelation 10, the days of the last trumpet call. That trumpet call lasts for days, maybe 2,000 years. And it's also Revelation 14, when the Son of man comes on the clouds and angels harvest the earth.

In John 4, Jesus says, "The fields are ripe for harvest."

In Mark 4, He says, "When the harvest is ripe, at once the harvester begins to reap for the harvest has come."

In Matthew 13, He says, "The harvest is the close of the age..."

Which would mean it's been the close of the age for 2,000 years, and the harvesters have been harvesting all that time (harvesting the elect from this fallen world in every age)...

Which would mean the Son of man has been coming on the clouds of heaven for 2,000 years.

When Jerusalem fell, lots of people died, and I imagine many were harvested. Maybe the fall of Jerusalem was the sign of His coming.

"Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it?" (Amos 3:6).

Jeremiah prophesied, "Behold, he [singular] comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind his horses are swifter than eagles. . . . Announce to Jerusalem, 'Besiegers come from a distant land.'"

Well, maybe “besiegers” are a sign that the Son of man has come. He’s at the gates... of the womb. Yes, it hurts, but have courage. Your redemption draws nigh. You’re about to be born.

Well, Jesus says they not only see the sign, but all tribes will see Him coming on the clouds... in *that* generation.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have

watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Well, that means He's definitely not coming seven years after a bunch of people get left behind in a pre-tribulation rapture because that's exactly when they'd expect it.

I knew He wasn't coming at Y2K because He was so expected. Yet for me He might've come because I didn't expect it because everyone expected it.

Well, He's not coming when all the signs point to His coming, for that's when we'd expect it. Instead people will be going about their business as in the days of Noah. One will be taken, and one left behind. One taken in the ark through the flood of fire and judgment, and one left behind.

It kind of reminds me of death. People are with us, then suddenly they're gone, and we're left behind.

In John 14, Jesus tells His disciples He will come for them and take them to where He is going because He's the Way, like an ark.

Maybe He comes for each of us at the end of our age, the end of our time.

Last year, as my father lay dying, he could no longer speak, but he kept looking up in the corner of his room. I kept wondering what he was looking at. Maybe clouds and one like a Son of man coming in power and glory.

Well, most people would say that's foolish because no one else saw clouds. Most modern people thought Jesus was foolish.

About the first question, the destruction of Jerusalem, He was remarkably right.

About the third question, the close of the Age, He was also right... He didn't know.

About the second question, the coming of the Son of man, foolish, "He was nuts," they'd say. For He said foolish things that can't be empirically verified.

In Daniel 7, Daniel has a vision of one like a "Son of man" coming on the clouds of heaven and receiving an eternal kingdom.

In Daniel 9, he seems to expect that to happen about 30 A.D..

In Luke 18, as Jesus goes to Jerusalem in 30 A.D., He tells the disciples that everything written about the Son of man will be fulfilled.

In Matthew 26, He says to the High Priest, "From now on you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (From now on...)

In Revelation 1:7, John writes, "Look, He's coming with the clouds and all eyes will see Him."

In Acts, chapter 7, as Stephen lay dying, he said, "I see Jesus, standing at the right hand of God." He was there.

Matthew 24:36, Jesus just said, "No one knows that day but the Father," and in verse 44, "The Son of man comes when you don't expect."

Yet, in verse 30 He says, "The tribes of the earth will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." In that generation, in their generation, according to verse 34.

Well, people say, “That’s all nuts, and Jesus was obviously wrong about coming in His generation for we are utterly lacking in verifiable, empirical evidence.”

Empiricism is basically the idea that we can only know things through our sensory experience of this world rather than through faith. That is, you take physical evidence very seriously and words or ideas not seriously (which is ironic since empiricism is an idea that can’t be empirically verified but only received by faith).

It’s very similar to the scientific method, though most great scientists weren’t empiricists for they believed that there was far more to reality than what could be verified by the empirical method or scientific method... including the scientific method.

Well, even though empiricism disproves itself, it’s an idea that utterly permeated 20th Century modern America. It’s why Joe Friday said, “Just the facts, ma’am. Just the facts.”

I suppose it’s part of why we are so materialistic because matter is all that matters. We can control and comprehend matter (we think). Materialists explain everything, but nothing’s worth explaining for nothing has meaning.

Truth, beauty, love... those things are all foolish. They don’t matter because they’re not matter. Even “mattering” doesn’t matter for it’s not matter.

And now, empirical science has revealed even matter isn’t really matter, and so, of course, can’t matter.

We all know that everything is mostly nothing—protons, neutrons, electrons, and lots of space. But now they say even those particles are made of smaller particles that aren’t even particles. They are quanta—quarks and leptons—that behave like light, that are fundamentally

uncertain, and appear to be dependent on your idea of them, such that idea or word is more real than all matter.

Well, whatever the case, these quantum things are so bizarre, so painfully confusing, paradoxical and foolish that to make all the equations work and match existing data, scientists now postulate at least 10 dimensions.

And they postulate that each quanta isn't so much a thing as like a vibration on a one dimensional string (like the manifestation of sound, voice, or word). And these super-strings must inhabit and intersect somehow in at least 10 dimensions.

All that to say our empirical world of space and time isn't really real, at best maybe partly real, for space and time are only four dimensions... only partly real or not real for it's all uncertain and dependent on an idea or a word, a word.

And now listen to The Word through whom all things exist, chapter 24, verse 35, "Heaven and earth [that is sky and land] will pass away, but my words will not pass away." That is, stop taking your experience of this world so seriously and believe my Word is more real than all this world.

I've found that often people who say they take the Bible literally really don't. They take the Bible empirically. That is, they believe it only pertains to their five senses in this three dimensional world. So they walk by sight and not by faith. They think they "believe," but they can't even perceive The Word, the meaning, for their minds are stuck on matter, on stone temples, empirical Jerusalems... stuck on this world.

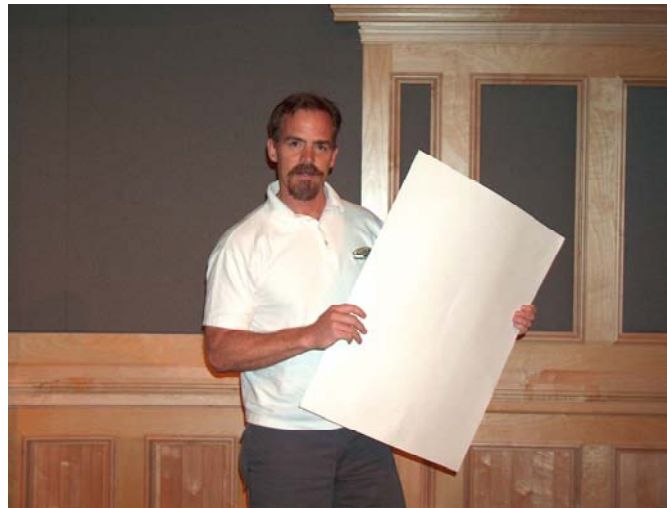
But maybe we were destined for another world. Maybe these three or four dimensions are a womb, and

maybe the painfully confusing and paradoxically foolish are signs of another world.

In 1884, Edwin Abbott published Flatland: A Romance in Many Dimensions. I never read the book, but I saw the cartoon. (I talked about it four and a half years ago when we preached through the Revelation and can't seem to avoid it now.)

You know, we live in a world of three dimensions: height, breadth, and depth, and a fourth dimension we call time (in which we can only travel in one direction, although we dream of traveling in two).

Well, Flatlanders live in a world of two dimensions. Flatland looks like this [Peter holds up a poster board with height and breadth but no depth.], a two dimensional world.

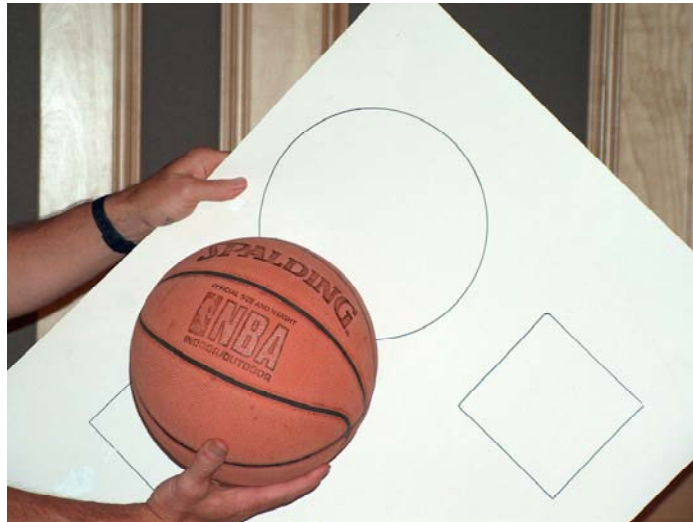


And so all flatlanders can comprehend with their natural senses, their empirical and scientific method, is two dimensional objects... rectangles, circles, squares. *

But suppose a three dimensional creature limited Himself and somehow entered their world and told them of other dimensions?

Well, he'd sound painfully confused and utterly foolish. They'd say, "Nice metaphor, now get real."

Well, what if he brought some three dimensional objects to their world? What if a sphere intersected their world? What would they see? [Peter holds up a basketball.]



They'd see a point, then growing circles, then shrinking circles, then a point... a miracle. But they'd find it hard to believe for they couldn't conceive. They might call it a trick.

** Note: Actually Flatlanders could only "see" points and lines. They would have to "feel" or "theorize" squares, circles, and rectangles by traveling around them (they could only "see" a two dimensional object's edge).*

Now what if spheres, circles, and cylinders intersected Flatland all the time? And stayed there? Well, Flatlanders would be surrounded by miracles and deep meaning and not even know it.

What if my finger intersected Flatland? They'd see a circle and have no idea it meant me... that I was "at hand."

[Peter holds up a cube.] Now imagine if we lived in Flatland...



We'd say, "Hey, look at that square."

And the fellow from another world might say, "It's more than a square; it's a cube."

We'd say, "Look at that circle."

He'd say, "It's more than a circle; it's a sphere."

We'd say, "I just felt an earthquake."

He'd say, "You just felt a birth pain."

We'd say, "Look, a man hanging on a cross."

He'd say, "Behold, the King standing on His throne, the Lamb as if He'd been slain."

We'd say, "Look, the city's under siege."

He'd say, "Behold the Son of man is coming on the clouds."

We'd say, "Look, they're all drunk."

He'd say, "Behold, the Spirit filling the temple."

We'd say, "Look, they share their possessions and have all things in common."

He'd say, "Behold, the new Jerusalem coming down."

We'd say, "Look, some broken bread and wine."

He'd say, "Behold, my body and my blood, a banquet for my household, my brothers."

We'd say, "Well, I'm nothing, just a little circle without meaning."

He'd say, "Take this bread and wine, and you are more than you know."

Maybe He'd give us a revelation, saying, "Come up here." And we'd leave Flatland and see the King of kings with His finger in Flatland, and He'd say, "You are more than a little circle in Flatland. You are my body. You are my temple. You are my city. You are my bride. It's not a metaphor; it's truth!"

Well, after that revelation and after you believed (which may be the same thing), all Flatland would be filled with new meaning, although other Flatlanders would have a hard time believing the meaning mattered (or that their matters could have meaning).

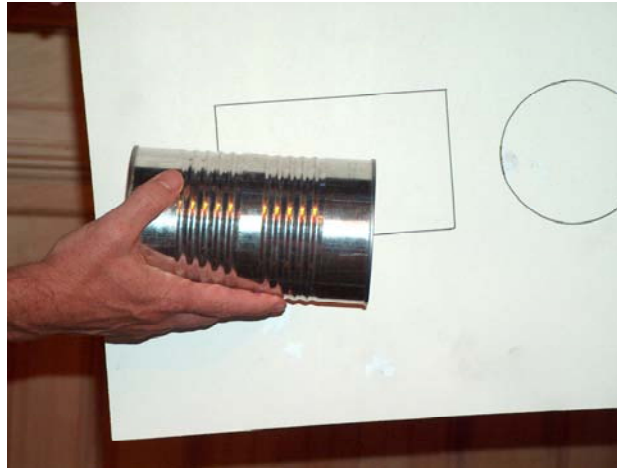
We have a hard time believing faith, hope, and love matter (or that money, food, and sex can have deep meaning.)

Well after that revelation, you'd preach paradox, but you couldn't explain paradox, and you'd sound foolish, not because what you said was *less* than empirically true, but because what you said was more than empirically true, more than literally true... paradox.

If a cylinder intersects Flatland this way [Peter holds the cylinder so the flat, circular end, intersects the page.], what do Flatlanders see? A circle.



If a cylinder intersects Flatland this way [Peter holds the cylinder so the side of cylinder intersects the page.], what do Flatlanders see? A rectangle.



What is a cylinder? An infinite number of rectangles and circles. In Flatland, that is inconceivable, but true.

What is light? A particle and a wave. Inconceivable, but true.

What is Jesus? Fully God and fully man. Foolish in Flatland, but true.

What if I took three fingers and intersected Flatland and spoke, “All three circles are one—three circles, one substance—a trinity.” They’d say, “Inconceivable. It must be a metaphor,” and I’d say, “No, it’s the truth.”

What if Flatland was inside of me (two dimensional plane inside of me)?

People in Flatland would say, “Is there a Peter Hiett? How can we believe in Peter Hiett?”

I’d speak and everything in Flatland would move. Yet, I couldn’t be found in Flatland. And Flatland could only be truly found in me, faith in me.

Well, I might say, “Flatland, in me you live and move and have your being.”

And now, what if I was love? Flatland would be immersed in love, yet find it confusing and foolish.

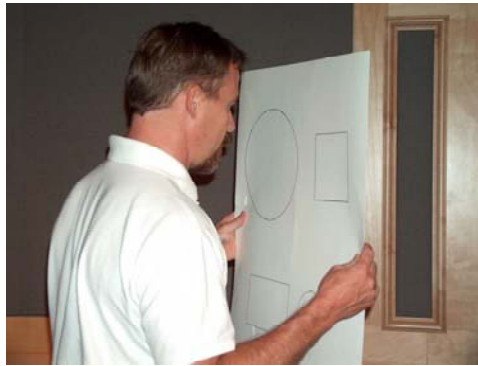
Imagine that time is one of the dimensions of Flatland. So at the bottom of the board it’s 30 A.D., and at the top, the end of the age.



Now suppose I held the board 1 millimeter from my face, and I spoke, “Behold Flatland, the kingdom of Peter is at hand.”

Well, every *place* in Flatland that would be true,
and every *time* in Flatland that would be true,
from 30 A.D. to the end of the age.

And now, suppose you were in Flatland, and I said, “Behold, I come,” and then crammed Flatland into me.



Well, I would have come to Flatland once, like lightning from the east to the west, as on the clouds of heaven. I would've come to Flatland once, and yet I would've come to Flatland throughout its time from 30 A.D. to the end of time in Flatland.

And now, suppose I had come to take you out of Flatland, that is
out of time,
Flatland time.

Well, then I would have come
 at the end of time in Flatland,
 and I would have come
 at the end of *your* time in Flatland,
 the end of the world,
 and the end of *your* world,
 the end of the age,
 and the end of *your* age,
 which is the day you die to Flatland
 and are born into my world.

Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” That means today (that day) Jesus must have come for Him.

I think He comes at the end of the age,
 and He comes at the end of your age,
 and it’s all one event,
 one parousia,
 one coming on the clouds of heaven.

Therefore, those that die in Christ and those that live until the end of the age, they are all caught up in the air, and they all see Him at once (“made perfect” at once as the author of Hebrews puts it, Hebrews 11:4).

Well, you can think what you will about Flatland. But if you take The Word more seriously than heaven and earth, more seriously than your empirical experience of space and time, well, I think you must believe the kingdom of God is really at hand.

In fact,

- 1) The Son of man will come within a generation, your lifetime.
- 2) And even now you can see your old city passing away. He's coming for folks all the time, at the end of time.
- 3) Yet, He will come when you least expect Him and suddenly this age, this world will be no more.

And so, you must always be ready
 for the moment He delivers you
 from darkness to light,
 transforms you
 from flesh to spirit,
 transfers you
 from the kingdom of self to the kingdom of love,
 from old Jerusalem to new Jerusalem.

How are we to be ready? By getting conservative, conserving our old securities, identities, sociologies, our old cities? By reinforcing the fortress of old Jerusalem or rebuilding the old stone temple, the fortress of ourselves? By stockpiling money, weapons, and food for ourselves? Is that how we get ready for the kingdom of love?

Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing.

That is, distributing the Master's food to the Master's household, His kinsmen, even the last and the least of these. Soon we will see they are more than we know.

Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, "My master is delayed," and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

We don't prepare for the return of Christ
by stockpiling food.
We prepare for the return of Christ
by giving it all away.

I think the Master's food for His household
is bread and wine;
it's really body and blood.
It's the love of God for a fallen world.
It's the kingdom of God, crashing the gates of hell.
It's the new Jerusalem coming down.

There is an old story about two sons who each inherited half of their father's estate. One was rich and alone. One was poor and had a large family. The night their father died, and they inherited the estate, the rich son couldn't sleep. He thought, "My brother is poor, and he has

a large family to feed. He needs the estate more than me. Early in the morning I will rise and move the stone marker.”

Meanwhile, the poor son couldn't sleep. He thought, “My brother is alone, and I have a family to comfort me. He should have the land of our fathers. Early in the morning I'll rise and move the stone marker.”

Very early in the morning, the two brothers met at the ancient stone marker. They fell with tears into each others' arms, and on that spot was built the city of Jerusalem, city of peace.

Of course, the story is a legend for no two brothers loved like that, and old Jerusalem is not a picture of that. It's a stone fortress built by human hands, utterly divided and torn by thousands of years of war.

The story is a legend, but it's also a dream of what is true in another world. For in this world there actually weren't two kind brothers, but there was one kind brother and millions and millions of little brothers.

The one brother came to move the ancient stone marker (the demand of law) in order to give His kingdom to all His kinsmen. His kinsmen met Him at the marker, and crucified Him. They took His life, and yet He gave it, He forgave it, body and blood. And on that spot, God built the new Jerusalem. The old one is passing away, and the new one is coming down.

Get ready.

Believe it, now.

Receive it, now.

Live in it, now.

By Faith.

For on the night that our big brother, our kind brother, was betrayed, He took bread and He broke it saying, “This is my body.” Flatlanders struggle with that statement. We’ve fought a lot of wars over that statement.

The Word said, “This is my body, given to you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup, and He said, “This is the blood of the New Covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.”

And in Matthew it’s also recorded that He said this, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new, with you, in my Father’s kingdom.” And He came preaching, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

And so if you believe, if you desire, if you want Him, we invite you to come forward and walk into another world by faith. Tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cups. The black cups are wine; the purple cups are juice. They’re both fire.

Oh, yeah, if there were a scientist here with some kind of molecular spectrometer in Flatland, he might say, “No, actually, that’s grape juice, a metaphor.”

No, it’s fire. It’s the blood of Christ poured out for you. His body broken for you because you are far more than you know.

And so, if you want Him, come to the table and worship. “To the table,” you’re coming into judgment. Jesus is God’s judgment. If you receive Him in faith, He’s the sweetest wine. If you come not believing, it’ll burn you. If you want Him, that is Him, calling you to His table, will you make a public declaration, “I surrender my city, and I receive your city, your self, my groom, Lord Jesus.” In His name, come to the table, Amen.

Shut those back doors and pay attention, okay. For in the beginning, God said, “Let us make man in our own image and likeness.” And He picked up Flatland, and He thought of you, and He did this... [Peter blew a breath.].

And you say, “Yeah, but I struggle, and I wonder, and I’m confused, and I long for more.”

Listen to this verse, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” And what do we hope for? A kingdom of loving kindness that is better than this whole world.

And so maybe you came to the service this morning hoping and longing and for the first time, maybe for the first time in your life, you came forward to the communion table. Just a mustard seed of faith, just like a breath of faith, you came forward, hoping and longing. You took the cup; you took the bread, with a little bit of faith, and faith is the substance of things hoped for, and we hope for the kingdom of love. Faith, hope, and love abide.

And so let me tell you what just happened if you could truly see. this is what you’d see. The Famous One, and He did this... [Peter sticks his finger into the Flatland poster.], and that’s you. In Jesus name, believe the Gospel, amen.

If you’d like prayer, we have a prayer ministry team in the back. They would love to pray for you.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.”[‡] As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”[†]

Matthew 24:1-3 (RSV)

[†]Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

John 2:19 (RSV)

[†]So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [‡]built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; [‡]in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (RSV)

Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. . . . Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [†]I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride

beautifully dressed for her husband. [†]And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

Revelation 3:12, 21:1-3 (NIV)

[†]For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest. . . But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, [†]and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:18, 12:22-24 (RSV)

[†]From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . [†]I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.”

Matthew 4:17, 12:6 (RSV)

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.

Matthew 24:7-8 (RSV)

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now.

Romans 8:22 (RSV)

Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born anew.”

John 3:7 (RSV)

You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

1 Peter 1:23 (RSV)

So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),[†] then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . . 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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; [†]then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:15-16, 24:29-30 (RSV)

[†]Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?
Does evil befall a city, unless the LORD has done it?

Amos 3:6 (RSV)

Behold, he comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles—woe to us, for we are ruined! O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims evil from Mount Ephraim.[†] Warn the nations that he is coming; announce to Jerusalem, “Besiegers come from a distant land; they shout against the cities of Judah.”

Jeremiah 4:13-16 (RSV)

¶And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:31 (RSV)

I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest.

John 4:35b (RSV)

¶But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

Mark 4:29 (RSV)

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. . . the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Matthew 9:37b, 13:39b (RSV)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ¶So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Matthew 24:32-33 (RSV)

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14 (RSV)

¶And taking the twelve, he said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. ¶For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and

shamefully treated and spit upon; [†]they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” [†]But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said. . . . “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, [†]men 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 coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [†]Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Luke 18:31-34, 21:25-28 (RSV)

“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes. . . . Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. . . .” “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’” [†]And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” [†]But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” [†]Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Matthew 10:23, 16:28, 26:61-64 (RSV)

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

Revelation 1:7 (NRSV)

[†] On that day the LORD will put a shield about the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, at their head. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.

Zechariah 12:8-11 (RSV)

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Matthew 24:34-35 (RSV)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. [†]You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [†]for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever.” That word is the good news which was preached to you.

1 Peter 1:22-25 (RSV)

Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. [†]He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still.

1 John 2:8-9 (RSV)

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

1 Corinthians 13:8 (RSV)

Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love. No, this trick won't work. . . . How on earth are you ever going to explain in terms of chemistry and physics so important a biological phenomenon as first love?

Albert Einstein

As I read the Old and New Testaments I am struck by the awareness therein of our lives being connected with cosmic powers, angels and archangels, heavenly principalities and powers, and the groaning of creation. It's too radical, too uncontrolled for many of us, so we build churches which are the safest possible places in which to escape God. We pin him down, far more painfully than he was nailed to the cross, so that he is rational and comprehensible and like us, and even more unreal.

Madeleine L'Engle

Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend.

Dennis Covington

[†]But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. [†]As were the

days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

Matthew 24:36-51 (RSV)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the

heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:10-13 (RSV)

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