



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: The Apocalypse

Week 12: Matthew chapters 23 and 24

Talking to the Kids
Talking with kids about the end of the world is difficult. They are just developing a sense of permanence, and they have not experienced a lot of grief yet. And yet here we have Jesus openly talking about the end of everything and what comes next.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when talking about the end times with kids:

God is in charge, and that is a good thing. Nothing bad will happen to us, because God is in charge.

God is renewing everything broken, so everything beautiful can be seen whole and perfect.

Consider a rainbow after a thunderstorm. The rainbow shows beauty after the loud sounds of thunder and bright flashes of lightning were scary. The rainbow is what God wants us to focus on.

And it is also important to remind kids that if they hear people say things like the world is ending soon, that no one knows that for sure. And we have God who will protect us, even if the end does come soon.

- Matthew presents a form of "dualism" in the way he writes about the end times. Dualism is a theological construct that holds there are two spiritual forces at conflict - one good and one evil. For Matthew, the good is associated with God and Jesus, the bad is represented by Satan and his human agents. Sometimes Jesus uses metaphors in his speeches to link certain pharisees or other religious leaders with Satan. Sometimes Jesus warns his listener to avoid those who are sent to earth by Satan, as if they have nothing to repent for since they are not from God.
- This dualism construct is not present in the Old Testament. Ancient Jewish theologians had a much broader construct of the realm of spiritual beings. They had an understanding that every nation had its own patron diety, in Israel that diety was known by the name YHWH, or most often referred to as "the LORD." And the knew other nations had their own patron dieties, and they had warnings against adopting those dieties for your household or clan. But they did not divide the spiritual realm into the neat dual categories of "good" verses "evil."
- Much of this understanding is a Greek philosophical construct of understanding the divine world as having good and evil beings, and the idea that the earth was the battlefield, and the people are the selected, or sometimes sent ones, for this battle between these forces. And the followers of Jesus were not the only ones to adopt this construct, but with Jesus, this dualism construct became very popular and easy to understand.
- So, the disciples have to ask about the end times, how will we know. And Jesus provides a very illustrative picture of what it will look like. Now, in the 2000 years since Jesus spoke, none of what Jesus said has come true. Sure, there have been wars between nations, and earthquakes, and famines. But those are hardly prophetic notions, that is just the way the world works.
- Today, the apocalyptic theology of dualism is grounded in Dante's Inferno and Divine Comedy from the middle ages, as well as rapture theology of the mid 1800's. These constructs paint a picture of hell for those who are not faithful to God and who do not believe in Jesus. And these constructs paint a picture of paradise for those who are faithful to God and who believe in Jesus. and if all we had was Matthew's Gospel, we might find some truth to these constructs. But the Bible does not always agree with itself, and other writers have different visions of how life after this life will happen.
- As you read through the passages where Jesus is speaking of the end times, take note of what makes you fearful, what makes you trust God more, what makes you realize you can live differently here and now, and what ways you are encouraged to live a strong faith life today.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

First Lutheran Church * 116 South B Street * Monmouth, IL 61462

309-734-2106 * office@flcmonmouth.org * www.flcmonmouth.org

Pastor Jamie Gallagher * prjamie@flcmonmouth.org