JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

HOPEFUL ABOUT TOMORROW (PART 1)

An End Times Crash Course: Four Pillars, Four Views and a Better Way to Read the Times

> On the details of the end times we see in a mirror dimly, but the pillars are sure and Jesus is coming back, so we refuse to be distraught or distracted. We go to the Word, we pray, and we fix our eyes on the revelation of Jesus Christ.

MAIN TEXT
Revelation 21:1-5

FIRST PREACHED
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SERIES
We're Hopeful for Tomorrow, Week 1 of 2

BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Three questions build a personal theology: what does the Bible say, how has the church handled this for 2,000 years, and what fruit does the belief produce.
2. Preoccupation with the end times tends to leave people either distraught with fear or distracted from what God wants to do in their life right now, and it often masks real dysfunction.
3. Four pillars of end time orthodoxy are held by every orthodox believer: the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth.
4. Four views differ only on the timing of those events: premillennial (first century), amillennial (400 to 500 AD), postmillennial (1600s to 1700s), and dispensational premillennial (mid 1800s), which is the Assemblies of God position.
5. Dispensationalism is the most detailed system, cascading like a house of cards, and its reading of Daniel's 70 weeks requires an indefinite gap that no other view interprets that way.
6. On the details we see in a mirror dimly, so the goal is holding the tension of the mystery rather than certainty; the second coming will be the great clarifier.
7. The pastoral danger is a high view of world events and a low view of the finished work of Jesus Christ; nothing political or national may take Christ's place in our eschatology.
8. Daniel's pattern when troubled by the times was to go back to the written word and pray, and what he received was a revelation of the coming Messiah, which is also how Revelation opens.

WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/MttozS7dEo4

READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/hopeful-about-tomorrow-part-1

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message opens a two-week series. It is a teaching session, not a typical sermon: hands free, a dry-erase board, and a flyover of eschatology rather than a deep dive into one text. Next week walks through Matthew 24 piece by piece, so tell people to bring their Bibles.

The goal is not to win anyone to a position. It is to show that faithful Christians have held more than one view, to anchor everyone in the four pillars every orthodox believer holds, and to leave people comfortable holding the tension of the mystery.

Two cautions. First, the Assemblies of God holds the dispensational premillennial view, and this message is candid about its weaknesses. Say plainly what the fellowship holds, and present the critique as "owning our own stuff," not as a rejection of it. Second, the four views are easiest to grasp drawn out. Sketch each one as a simple timeline on a board or screen, working left to right from the cross.

Introduction

The world seems to be getting worse. Things are more tense, more dangerous, and in many ways simply stranger. We have access to more information than at any other time in human history, and yet that information lacks reliability.

Today I want to help you start developing a framework for your own personal theology concerning the end of all things.

> **REVELATION 21:1-5** ESV
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> [1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." [5] And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

These words are trustworthy and true. There is a time ahead of us when those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ will be redeemed, restored, for many resurrected, and given glorified bodies to live with the Lord forever in a new heaven and a new earth. You have something to be hopeful about. We are hopeful for tomorrow.

This is a different kind of message. It is less "go do this" and more opening our minds to the idea that there is a lot more on this topic than we are usually exposed to. The good news is that the extra information gives us more reason to be hopeful, not less.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR BUILDING A THEOLOGY

When I am developing a theology, I ask three questions.

1. **What does the Bible say?** That is the place to start, and it might not be the worst place to finish. The Bible says it, and that settles it. But some passages, especially on these issues, are not easy to understand.
2. **What does this look like throughout church history?** How has the church handled this question for 2,000 years? There are people smarter than you and me who got us to this point. This church did not pop up out of the ground. It came through the faithfulness of those who are now in the great cloud of witnesses.
3. **What fruit does it produce?** Look at a sample of people who hold a belief and ask what it is producing in their lives. Jesus said of false prophets, "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16), and what is true of teachers is true of teaching. Paul says some teaching is built with gold, silver and precious stones, and some with wood, hay and straw, and the fire will show which is which (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

1. Why This Message: Distraught or Distracted

The woman at the well (John 4). Jesus begins to unpack what is going on in a Samaritan woman's life, and it comes out that she has had five husbands and the man she is with now is not her husband. As soon as it gets personal, she says, "I perceive that you are a prophet," and she changes the subject to a theological argument about a mountain: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship" (John 4:20).

Every pastor has seen this in counseling. We are talking about something that would really help, and now someone wants to talk about blood moons or the colors of the horses. We see it in the church over and over: people with a dysfunctional point in their lives who mask that dysfunction in a deep theology that does nothing for them.

Illustration: my mother's Bible. When my mother passed away, my grandmother kept her things, and when my grandmother passed, I received boxes from both of them. Among the butter churn and the photographs was the Bible I had bought my mother after I led her in the sinner's prayer, years earlier. We never saw much fruit in her life. I opened that Bible and found nothing: no church programs, no bookmarks, no notes, no highlights. Nothing, until the book of Revelation. Every strange thing you have ever heard about Revelation was highlighted, underlined and circled.

At some point you have to ask: if your life is falling apart, if your children won't talk to you, if you can't break an addiction or keep a job, how helpful is the 144,000 (Revelation 7:4)? It is not doing for you what other things could do.

That is why I am preaching this. I am not trying to change what you believe. I am trying to expand your understanding that there is more out there than what we usually hear in classical Pentecostal circles.

My observation: people who get deeply invested in eschatology (and the same is often true of prophecy) tend to become either **distraught** or **distracted**.

- **Distraught:** it worries them to death. "Am I going to make it? Are we going to go through this? When is it going to happen? What are the signs?" Sitting in the front row of some end time conferences, you might think the anointing came into the room, when really it was the fear of the unknown.
- **Distracted:** like the woman at the well, they keep looking for some secret knowledge or hidden answer about what is going to happen.

You do not need to worry about what is going to happen. You need to focus on what did happen, 2,000 years ago, at a cross on Calvary, where Jesus Christ gave His life for you and for me.

We are going to shift out of doctrine mode into theology mode. Doctrine is a set of beliefs established by a body and handed to you so you know what to believe. Theology is for thinkers. Look at your neighbor and say, "You've got a big brain."

2. The Four Pillars of End Time Orthodoxy

Every orthodox believer holds these four things about the end times.

1. **The second coming of Christ, bodily and imminent.** Jesus Himself is coming back. Not an emissary, not an angel, not a spirit, but the same body that went into the grave, was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). It is imminent: nothing can stop it, it could happen at any moment, and no one knows when. 2. **The resurrection of the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous.** Everyone is coming back, however they went. 3. **The final judgment.** All evil will be annihilated, and people will be judged according to whether their names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 20:12-15). That is why we are so big on souls here: let's fill the first edition and start on the second. 4. **The new heavens and the new earth.** This is where we will spend eternity, if we are born again. God is making all things new: our bodies, the ground, the sky.

The views below all hold these four pillars. Where they diverge is the timing between here and there.

> **REVELATION 20:1-7** ESV
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> [1] Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. [4] Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.
> [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
> [7] And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison

Pastor Jason summarized this passage rather than reading it. Satan is bound for a thousand years, Christ reigns, and then Satan is released for a little while. That thousand years is called the millennial reign of Christ. There are four predominant views of the millennium, and for the most part they determine how and when everything else happens: **premillennial, amillennial, postmillennial and dispensational premillennial.** The Assemblies of God holds the dispensational premillennial view. Anchor that in your mind.

3. My View: In a Mirror Dimly

A friend told me you would want to know where I land. My strongest view on the end times is borrowed from Paul.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 13:9-12** ESV
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> [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

- When it comes to the end times, we are looking in a mirror dimly. We are wearing sunglasses at night, at best. I don't care how large a chart you can print; on the details, we just don't know.
- But when we see Him face to face, we will know fully. In other words, **the second coming of Christ will be the great clarifier.**

I am less interested in you having a position on any of these issues than I am in you being comfortable holding the tension of the mystery.

4. Four Views of the Millennium

Draw each view as a timeline that begins after the cross, in the church age.

Premillennial. The oldest view, going back to the first century and the early church.

- The church age eases into a time of tribulation as things intensify.
- The righteous dead are raised and living believers are caught up with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- Christ returns at once with them, and He and the church reign on earth for a literal thousand years.
- Then the resurrection of the unrighteous dead, the final judgment, the new heavens and new earth, and the eternal state.

Amillennial. Emerging around AD 400 to 500.

- The church age, the tribulation and the millennial reign are happening at the same time; the thousand years are symbolic of the age we live in, with Jesus on the throne now.
- At some point Christ returns, the dead are raised (likely all at once), and then the final judgment, the new heavens and new earth, and the eternal state.

As one person observed, the thing premillennialists and dispensationalists can neglect is that the Jesus they believe will reign for a thousand years reigns right now. He sits on the throne.

Postmillennial. Coming out of the era after the Reformation, the 1600s and 1700s.

- The tribulation is ongoing and part of the church age.
- As the gospel spreads, things get better and better until we are in the millennial reign.
- After that, Christ returns, the dead are raised, then the final judgment, the new heavens and new earth, and the eternal state.

Of the four, this is the one I most hope is right, and the one I think is least likely.

Dispensational premillennial. The most detailed view, and the one most of us have heard exclusively. It arose in the mid-1800s and spread widely through the Scofield Reference Bible and later the Ryrie Study Bible, which printed it without any contest.

- The church age ends with a rapture of the church and the resurrection of the righteous dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- Believers are with the Lord for seven years while a seven-year tribulation unfolds on earth, divided into the tribulation and the great tribulation.
- During this time Israel is restored, a temple stands, and the Antichrist rises (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).
- Christ returns with the church, Satan is bound, and Christ reigns for a literal thousand years.
- Satan is released, a great falling away follows, and then the final judgment (with the resurrection of the unrighteous dead), the new heavens and new earth, and the eternal state.

All I want you to see is that there is more than one view. So when the TV preacher scares you half to death, take a beat. He might be wrong, no matter how big his chart is.

5. Owning the Problems with Dispensationalism

The Assemblies of God is a dispensationalist fellowship. We sometimes run from the word, but the beliefs are dispensational beliefs. This is not me saying it is wrong. This is me saying we have to own our own stuff.

- **It is so detailed that it naturally seems right,** but it has been plagued by failed rapture predictions and strange political involvement.
- **It is treated as the most literal interpretation** of biblical eschatology, but that is only true if you ignore the inputs and massive assumptions you must make before the literal interpretation begins. No plain reading of Scripture gets you there.
- **It is a house of cards.** The theology cascades: if one card goes down, everything goes down. That is why, if you are dispensational, you are pre-tribulation whether you want to be or not. Without a rapture before the tribulation, nothing else in the system can happen.
- **It tends to hold a high view of world events and a low view of the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

6. Daniel's Seventy Weeks

That last point is best seen in Daniel 9.

> **DANIEL 9:24-27** ESV
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> [24] "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. [25] Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. [26] And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. [27] And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

"Seventy weeks" is literally "seventy sevens," and across the views it is commonly understood as seventy sevens of years: 490 years. Seven weeks plus sixty-two weeks is sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years. And after the sixty-two weeks, "an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9:26). Who does that sound like?

Walk through a timeline (one common way of counting it):

- **The starting point:** Artaxerxes' decree to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-8), around 445 BC.
- **The first seven weeks** (49 years): Jerusalem rebuilt, around 396 BC. Then the sixty-two weeks begin.
- **The sixty-ninth week** ends with the Messiah: on this reckoning, at Palm Sunday.

- **The seventieth week** is bound up with the cross, the resurrection and the ascension, and on down to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

Other starting points work as well. Counting from Artaxerxes' earlier decree to Ezra (Ezra 7), in 457 BC, the sixty-nine weeks reach about AD 27, the beginning of Jesus' ministry. However you count it, the prophecy points to the coming Messiah. It is Christological at its heart. It points to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Here is where it gets squirrelly. Dispensational teaching inserts a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, between verses 26 and 27, sometimes called "the great parenthesis." That gap is the church age. The clock has been paused for nearly 2,000 years. At the rapture it starts again, and the seventieth week becomes the seven-year tribulation, when attention shifts back to Israel, natural Israel is restored and saved, and Jesus returns with those raptured to reign for a thousand years, followed by a great falling away.

The other views say: Jesus comes back, and that is the big event. The dispensationalist tends to look toward the tribulation and the restoration of natural Israel, while everyone else looks to what Jesus did at Calvary and to His second coming. The result is a natural disposition to become obsessed with signs and world events more than with the finished work of Jesus Christ. That is how we end up with Christian pastors of Christian churches whose profile picture is the Star of David. It makes sense to focus all your attention there only if Jesus is not the center of the whole thing, and only if you tear the book of Hebrews out of your Bible.

No other prophecy is treated like this. Look at how often Scripture uses seventy: seventy years, seventy this, seventy that. It is a number that carries an idea, not a perfect stopwatch.

If we are going to hold this view, it is our responsibility to make sure that no politician, no policy, no country, no organization, no party, nothing takes the place of Jesus Christ in our eschatology. What do you run to when you wake up in the morning: the secret place or the news?

SUMMARY OF THE FOUR VIEWS

- The premillennialist says it is going to get worse and worse, and then Jesus comes back.
- The postmillennialist says it is going to get better and better, and then Jesus comes back.
- The amillennialist says it doesn't matter how it gets, because Jesus is coming back.
- The dispensationalist says a TV prophecy teacher just released a new book, and Jesus is coming back tomorrow at 1:57 p.m.

Shame on us for not making Jesus the main thing.

Illustration: the best view of all. In 1859 Charles Dickens published words that may describe the time until Jesus returns better than any chart: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (*A Tale of Two Cities*). Things will get better and better. Things will get worse and worse. Some things are already settled and some are left to be done.

The bold statement for the day: **every view is probably right to some degree and greatly wrong in many ways.** We look in a mirror dimly. It is sunglasses at night. But Jesus is coming back.

7. A Better Way to Read Daniel 9

> **DANIEL 9:1-3** ESV
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> [1] In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—[2] in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. [3] Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Persia has overthrown Babylon after the seventy years Jeremiah prophesied (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Daniel looks at the times, and instead of chasing every report, he compares them with the written word: he "perceived in the books" what the Lord had said through Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2). He goes to the Scripture, and he goes to prayer.

> **DANIEL 9:20-22** ESV
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> [20] While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, [21] while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. [22] He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

While Daniel was still praying, Gabriel came with insight and understanding. In Daniel's pursuit, he got a word from God. If only you had a pastor who stood up regularly and told you that you need to get a word from God!

And what was the word? "An anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9:26). Concerned about the times, Daniel does not walk away with a theory. He walks away with a revelation of the coming Messiah. God turned his attention to the One who was to come.

> **REVELATION 1:1** ESV
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> [1] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

You want to talk about the end of all things? The first five words are all you need: "The revelation of Jesus Christ." We keep looking for events, patterns and timing. We buy one teacher's book until it proves wrong, then the next one, then go back to the first one's next book. What God did with Daniel and with John is the same: when they were troubled about the times, He gave them a revelation of Jesus Christ. That revelation transforms me today.

Conclusion

Go back to where we started: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). The same Jesus Daniel saw, John saw and Paul preached is the One who makes all things new.

- **I don’t want you distracted.** Don’t let something that seems like “the deep things of the Lord” pull you away from the victory available in Christ today.
- **I don’t want you distraught.** Don’t let your anxiety climb because you watch world events like a hawk and wonder every day, “Is this it?” Something happens in the Middle East every few minutes, and sounding deep is not the same as knowing.
- **I want you hopeful.** Jesus is coming, and it could happen at any moment. We can trust, we can have confidence, we can have hope. This is not just a series; it is a value of our church. We will not bring in preachers to scare you or get you worked up.

Next week we walk through Matthew 24 to see why we don’t have to be worried. As Paul says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Give the Lord praise.

OPTIONAL: INVITATION

This line is in the original notes but was not preached on April 12, 2026. Use it if time allows.

Maybe your tomorrow looks bleak because you haven’t made Jesus the Lord of your life. Today you can put your faith in His finished work, and your tomorrow will be hopeful too.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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