

[HOPEapocalypse1] If I were to ask you, "What will the world look like in twenty years?" I wonder what we would all say. Little more than 100 years ago, the answer was easy: at the dawn of the 20th century, Americans were filled with a boundless optimism. We were convinced the world was getting better and better, that we were all on the path to a new golden age.

[HOPEapocalypse2] But the 20th century wasn't kind to us. 100 years later, at the dawn of the 21st century, we're much more pessimistic about where we're headed. How many young adult trilogies are set in a post-apocalyptic world? Those stories - *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Pure*, they all paint a bleak picture of the future. Or take some of the most popular TV shows right now - *The Walking Dead*, *Game of Thrones*, the recently-departed *Breaking Bad*. They are grounded in the conviction that people are ultimately pretty terrible. We don't get too many months without a disaster film or dystopian story of some kind.

Is America in trouble? Is the *world* in trouble? More and more people have decided deep down that the world is falling apart. It might be slow or it might be fast, but we have a deep-seated pessimism about where everything's going.

And, if you ask a lot of people, the Bible agrees. After all, "Apocalypse" is *from* the Bible - it's what the book of Revelation is called in Greek! The Bible practically *invented* the apocalypse, with its lakes of fire and moon turning to blood and blacking out the sun and asteroids hitting the earth and all that.

It's this Biblical take on Apocalypse that freaks a lot of people out. We get excited about Jesus, about the message love and new life he offers. But then we remember his dad is sort of hanging out in the background, read to rain down hellfire and brimstone on the world and we have second thoughts.

After all... how good can Jesus really be if his endgame is fire, death and destruction? But wait... it gets freakier!

It's hard to believe, but the Apocalypse is actually good news for us. All of us - not just Christians. But those who follow Jesus should be looking forward to the End, and even doing what we can to bring it quicker.

That's right... people who follow Jesus look forward to the End of the World, and work to bring it quicker.

This is the part where you start planning an exit strategy, and keep an eye on the door in case we start bringing in cups of kool-aid.

[HOPEapocalypse3] But bear with me for a moment: Wouldn't it be nice to look to the future with hope? To be able to consider your life twenty years from now, the lives of your children, and *their* children, and feel confidence? Not to worry about what shape the economy will be in, or how the environment will fare or what the moral state of our culture will be?

Can you imagine looking forward with excitement, anticipation and hope rather than despair and pessimism? If you could, that'd be an idea worth considering, especially if it's not blind escapism.

So let me assure you: the reason we're freaked out by the idea of the End is that we misunderstand it. The promise that God will bring about what we call the End of the World was an integral part of Jesus'

message, the message his first followers called "Good News". They didn't say, Hey! This Jesus guy has some *great* stuff to say (oh and some sort of downers too). No, for them, all of Jesus' message was good news, and that includes what we call the Apocalypse.

In fact, in the years immediately after Jesus left, his followers were so excited they expected the End within their lifetimes. And as the years wore on and Jesus kept not coming back, many of them got ticked. They weren't grateful for more time, or relieved the big fireballs weren't raining down (okay, they were probably glad that wasn't happening).

[Scripture Slide] One early writer actually had to explain to them why God was taking so long. If you have a Bible, turn with me to 2 Peter 3. If you grabbed one of the free Bibles on your way in, you can find 2 Peter on page XXX. And if you don't own a Bible, please keep that one as a gift from us.

As your turning to 2 Peter, this is a letter written to followers of Jesus about a generation after Jesus was raised from the dead. As I mentioned, most of them expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes. And they weren't just impatient - being a Jesus follower in those first few generations was hard. It often meant being disowned by your family, maybe your friends. It could mean facing persecution from Jewish or Roman political authorities. So we can understand why these first Christians might have longed for Jesus to come back.

But we're sitting here 2000 years later, so obviously Jesus didn't make it back when they expected. And they're getting anxious, restless. So we're about to read how one of their leaders advises them. Take a look with me, beginning in verse 8 of chapter 3:

Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation. -- 2 Peter 3:8-15

Now, some of you are no doubt thinking, Let's see... fire. Like a thief, heavens disappear. Destruction of the earth. Yup. Sounds like the terrible apocalypse I was expecting.

But notice what Peter tells them about *why* that hasn't happened yet:

The Lord isn't slow in keeping his promises... instead he is *patient* with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. -- 2 Peter 3:9

According to Peter, the reason everything is on hold, the reason Jesus hasn't come back is that God is *patient*. God is giving more people a chance to find life.

Peter's words point to an important truth about the End of the World - it's the culmination of God's plan to save the world. There's a reason Christians also call it the *Second* Coming - second implies a first coming. And that First Coming is what we're preparing to celebrate, what we call Christ Mass.

[HOPEapocalypse4] This season is Advent (which is a fancy word for "arrival"). It's a time Christians have set aside to prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas.

Advent points to the time in human history before God came among us, when God's people were anxiously waiting for God to come in a new, decisive way. The *coming* they were anticipating is the arrival, the advent, we celebrate as Christmas: God came among us in a new, unexpected form: as a human - and not just any human, but as a baby.

Jesus' earthly life, which began in a barn, a stable, a trough, pointed over and over again to his mission: he had come to end suffering and injustice. He had come to give life to the whole world.

He died and was raised from the dead to show that he had the power not just to spruce up the old, broken ways of the world, but to create the whole world new again.

And then he ascended to the throne of Heaven, telling those of us still here on Earth that he'd be back to finish what he started.

[HOPEapocalypse5] So you can understand *why* everyone thought when he said, "I'll be back", they thought he meant *I'll be right back*.

But consider with me: During the time Jesus was on Earth after his resurrection, before he ascended to Heaven, he appeared to 5,000 believers. And in the first few years after he ascended, the Church spread to a few key cities across the Roman Empire. By the time this letter was written, there may have been 50,000 Christians in the world?

Out of the millions who lived then.

Had Jesus returned immediately, there would've been millions who had no chance to hear the Good News. Millions who couldn't know they had a chance at freedom, at life that is truly life, at rescue from sin and death.

So God waited. And waited.

And is still waiting.

[HOPEapocalypse6] And so now we are waiting too. Like our ancient fathers and mothers waited for God's first coming, we now wait for God's Second Coming. We're waiting for Jesus to return, to finish what he started on that Christmas night so long ago.

And you think... right. Waiting for destruction. Waiting for fire and blood and pain and terror.

But when we see that the End is Act II of the Christmas story, that changes how we see what's happening. We can ask: when we say it's the End... the end of what? The end of the World, but the end of *which world*?

And Jesus tells us it's the end of the Old Creation. The World that's broken by sin. The World that's characterized by injustice. Suffering. Abuse. Slavery. Inequality and excess and greed and envy and pride and gluttony.

[HOPEapocalypse7] What the Christmas story shows us is that we're actually living between two worlds right now - an old world that's headed to destruction and a new world that's headed toward life. This new world is characterized by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control.

The Old World *will* end soon, and this New World will last forever. And right now, we're waiting for the End of injustice. Of evil. Of suffering and death.

Don't you want those things to end? Which of us hasn't stood morning at a graveside and thought *the world isn't supposed to be like this!*?

The End is coming, but it's not the end of all things. Only the end of *evil* things. And the good news is that there's still time. Still time to be rescued from the destruction of the old world, like those carried from a burning building.

God is waiting for more people to be rescued and so we are waiting on God's patience.

Sounds thrilling, doesn't it? We're... just waiting.

Sitting around, waiting for people to find God, hoping they get a clue... while we... just hang out? Just endure this in-between time, tolerate a world that continues to suffer the effects of sin and death?

That doesn't sound so nice.

Look again at what Peter told those early followers:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. -- 2 Peter 3:11-12

Peter says, since you know this is coming, you ought to live holy and godly lives as you *look forward* to the Day of God and *speed its coming*.

It's easier for us to understand why we should look forward to the End. The End of injustice, of evil and death, actually does sound like good news.

But how can we speed its coming?

God is waiting for more people to find the life Jesus offers us. But God is not waiting passively. God is out and about, working in the world, calling people to new life. We believe the Spirit is working in every

heart, ever person, calling them to repent, to abandon the old world that's headed toward death and destruction and accept Jesus' invitation to this new world of life.

God's waiting isn't passive. Neither should ours be.

And we understand the difference, don't we, between passive waiting and active waiting?

Passive waiting is what you do at the doctors' office. You show up on time, they're behind, and so hopefully you brought a book or something, because there's nothing you can do until they're ready for you. You're just sitting there, waiting.

On the other hand, consider a big change, a big transition. Amanda and I first got a phone call about coming down here to be part of Catalyst in May. We officially accepted the job in August. And we moved at the end of September. That was about 4 months worth of waiting. But while we were waiting, we weren't simply going about life as normal. If we were going to move to Texas, we had a lot to do.

We began talking to close friends about our move.

And then we began packing. And looking for a house. And a job for Amanda. And a moving truck. And shutting off old utilities and getting new utilities.

Can you imagine if we had just sat around until it was time to move? If the day before we were supposed to start down here we'd look around and said, "Uh... what do we do now?"

That would be a nightmare you guys... that's in fact how some of our nightmares looked leading up to the move!

No, when we know a big change is coming, our waiting is *active*. It's *preparation*. We're doing everything we can do to be ready for that change to come, so the transition is as painless as possible.

And Peter says we do that by living holy, godly lives. *That's* how we prepare for the End.

What do holy and godly lives look like? Does that mean we all have to start passing out tracts and preaching on street corners while holding signs that say, The End is Near!?

No, actually.

When Jesus was asked to summarize this new life, the kind of person who thrives in the New World he's initiating, he said, "This is what you have to do: 'Love God with all your heart and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.'"

We simplify that by saying, "Love God and Love people."

According to Jesus, the entire Way of God is wrapped up in that simple instruction. You want to know what a holy, godly life looks like? Ask today, "How do I love God and love people?"

This is how we speed the End. The more we do this, the more we become pictures of God here in this time of waiting. The more our friendships become holy friendships. Our entire lives become invitations

to see what Jesus was all about. We become beacons of hope, showing our friends, our family, our coworkers, that the ways of pride and wrath and envy and sloth and greed and gluttony and lust aren't all that's available to them.

Our lives can become giant neon signs that announce not "THIS IS THE END", but "THIS WAY TO A WHOLE NEW WORLD".

[HOPEapocalypse3] We have a decision to make: as we look forward, toward the future, will we be filled with pessimism or hope?

Will we fear death and destruction? Or will we find Hope at the End of the World?

Will we submit to the conviction our culture embraces that the world is going nowhere good? Or will we choose to say, We know that some things are passing away, but what's passing away is evil, injustice, suffering?

Are we afraid we're all bound for apocalyptic destruction? Or are we hopeful, excited for God finally to put an end to evil and reward those of us who hope?

Are you waiting for the End, or waiting for a new beginning?

Let Catalyst be a people who live holy lives, lives that become beacons of hope. Let Catalyst be a people that stands tall against the apocalypse, that knows the End is coming but not yet because God is patient, and we still have work to do.

Let us be a people who by the lives we live, in our small, everyday decisions, speed the coming of the End because we are constantly showing people the Way of God, the path from death into life, into the New World that will survive the End of death and suffering.

Communion SetUp

[Communion Slide] That journey begins for us at this Communion Table. This ritual reminds us of the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed. At that meal, he broke bread and passed it to his disciples. He told them the bread represented his body, broken for them. So we take wafers to represent our brokenness, the brokenness of the world. These wafers remind us that we've filled the world with pride and lust and envy and wrath and greed and sloth and gluttony. Evil and injustice.

Later in the meal, gave them a cup of wine that represented his blood, spilled to begin a new relationship between God and humanity. So we dip our wafers in grape juice to remember that Jesus' first coming wasn't the end of the story. That he's coming back to finish what he started and in the meantime, we can join him. We can live in the new world he's bringing about *right now*.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive this communion. This is Jesus' meal, and he offers his body and blood to anyone who is hungry. So if you want to face the future with hope rather than despair, if you're tired of a world characterized by evil and injustice, if you're craving a more beautiful world, and if you're willing to be part of bringing that world about, then you're invited to come to the table today.

I'm going to pray, and then as you're ready, you're invited to approach and receive Jesus' meal.