

Who doesn't love a good discussion about the end of the world? The disciples were no different. In Matthew 24 they get into a discussion with Jesus about the end of the world. This begins a series of several parables in Matthew 25 where Jesus talks about the end, about final judgement, and being prepared. I hate to disappoint you. The world will not end due to a zombie apocalypse, a nuclear Armageddon, or a rogue asteroid hitting the planet. It won't be a coronal mass ejection from the Sun, an eruption of the great caldera under Yellowstone, and it won't be COVID19 or any other pandemic. God has reserved this honor for himself.

The third and final teaching in Matthew 25 is what is known as the parable of the sheep and the goats. However, it's not really a parable. Scripture doesn't call it a parable. Jesus isn't telling a make-believe story, but describing what will really take place. It's more like the analogy of the sheep and the goats. He giving us a description of final judgment, and he compares it to a farmer separates his sheep from his goats. In this analogy the sheep represent those who know and belong to Jesus, and the goats represent those who do not.

This is the passage where Jesus says, *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."*

Jesus starts talking about the goats in verse 41 of Matthew 25. This is our Core Verse for this morning, *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"*

Now, we just want to hit the pause button right here, and talk about this for a moment this morning. Our big idea, our theme for this morning, isn't really about the final judgment or this teaching specifically, but it is the reality and the importance of the supernatural. In one verse, Jesus drops this bomb— the final destiny of much of humanity will be in a place he calls the lake of fire, and it is a destiny that was originally prepared for the devil and his angels.

This isn't a part of some symbolic metaphor. Jesus isn't telling a story that begins with once upon a time or in a Galaxy far, far away. Jesus speaks about this stuff as if it's a matter of fact.

### **Our Culture is Double Minded When It Comes to the SuperNatural.**

As with so many things, our culture is of two minds when it comes to the spiritual realm. We are moving in two directions at once. On this side are those who deny the existence of the spiritual altogether. They believe in nothing other than the material, physical world. Our is a universe composed of nothing more than mass, energy, space and time, and it is governed entirely by the laws of nature. Science is all that is needed to understand our existence.

However, over here are increasing numbers of people who not only embrace the spiritual, but are willing to see almost everything as having some sort of connection to the spiritual realm.

Anything from crystals, or pyramids, or the movement of the stars, to breathing techniques and essential oils, almost anything can tap into the supernatural. They borrow from nearly every religion and belief system. In this sense, being spiritual can be almost anything we want it to be. There are no guidelines, limits, or measure of truth, just this gelatinous superstition that anything we want can connect us to something bigger and beyond.

### **Jesus Believed in the Spiritual Realm**

However, Scripture claims that God has revealed some very specific things about the unseen spiritual realm and the supernatural. Jesus talks about the supernatural as though it were very real. This presents us with a very important choice. We can accept that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be– the promised Messiah and the Son of God– and we can accept what he says about the spiritual realm and the supernatural at face value. There is a spirit world and that world is integrally connected to our world. There are supernatural agents at work both within that realm and within ours. What we say and do has an effect on that realm, and that realm has a very real impact on our lives.

However, others argue that Jesus was influenced by the mythologies and simplistic beliefs of his ancient culture. He either believed these things because everyone around him did, or didn't believe these things, but he spoke this way, because it's what everyone around him understood. If we choose to believe that Jesus didn't really know what he was talking about, then on what basis can we believe that he is the Son of God who can forgive our sins, and change our lives? If Jesus is wrong about the SuperNatural, then how can we believe him about anything?

Here's the bottom line. Jesus talks about heaven as though it is a very real place. He talks about hell as if it is a very real place. Jesus not only talks about angels and demons as if they were very real beings, but he acted as though he were actually interacting with them. Jesus talked to angels and to demons. He cast demons out of people. He commanded them. Angels came and ministered to him after his time of temptation in the desert. They comforted him in the garden. If Jesus was just imagining all of this, or he was just acting out a charade for the benefit of his audience, then Jesus isn't a Savior and Lord to be believed, obeyed and worshipped. He is to be pitied, diagnosed, and analyzed. Or He is to be condemned, judged, and ignored.

We can't be like Thomas Jefferson who cut out all the miracles and supernatural parts of the gospels in an effort to keep the moral Jesus, the wise teacher, the ethical example. You can't keep the good Jesus without the SuperNatural Jesus, because Jesus embraced the SuperNatural, and spoke of it with such passion and conviction. Either the SuperNatural is real, and Jesus is really who He claimed to be, or the SuperNatural isn't real, and we should just shut

these doors, quit singing our songs, quit praying our prayers, and just go home, because we are wasting our time.

### **We Are Wired for the SuperNatural**

But don't we instinctively know that there is more to life than what we can immediately experience with our five senses? We are wired for the SuperNatural. We long for a spiritual connection. We are drawn to it. Think of the stories and movies that portray our world as being a part of or being connected to a greater reality. Whether it's Alice descending into Wonderland, or the Pevensie children going through Professor Digory's magic wardrobe, or Agent J discovering that our world is just one small world in a series of much bigger worlds, or Neo being awoken to discover that real life was just a program running in the matrix. We are fascinated by this idea, because it is etched into our souls that our world and our lives are a part of something bigger.

Life is filled with what have been called thin places and thin moments where the veil between our earthly reality and spirit realm becomes so gossamer thin that like stained glass in an old church, the light of SuperNatural can't help but shine through into our lives of concrete, dirt, and steel. We feel something beyond. We experience the transcendent. We know it in our bones that we are a part of something bigger, something greater, something deeper.

It might be a thin place— a mountaintop vista that takes your breath away, an ocean's shore where waves of the seemingly infinite lap at your toes, or at the top of a tree stand in the middle of a forest glade where all of nature conspires to declare the glory of its Creator.

It could be a thin moment— the first time you hold your newborn child. A tiny hand grabs your pinky finger and yet it is you who feels in the clutches of something much greater. That moment when your dying mother opens her eyes one final time, looks into your eyes, a smile creases her lips. She whispers, "I've seen Him. It will be alright," and a lifetime of love and meaning passes between you in a moment that makes the hands on a clock face stand still. In a time of fasting when suddenly and unexpectedly the power of prayer hits you like it never has before. You can actually quote the words God spoke to you. In those thin moments and in those thin places you become intensely and intimately aware that God is very real, and that the SuperNatural is not something to be ignored.

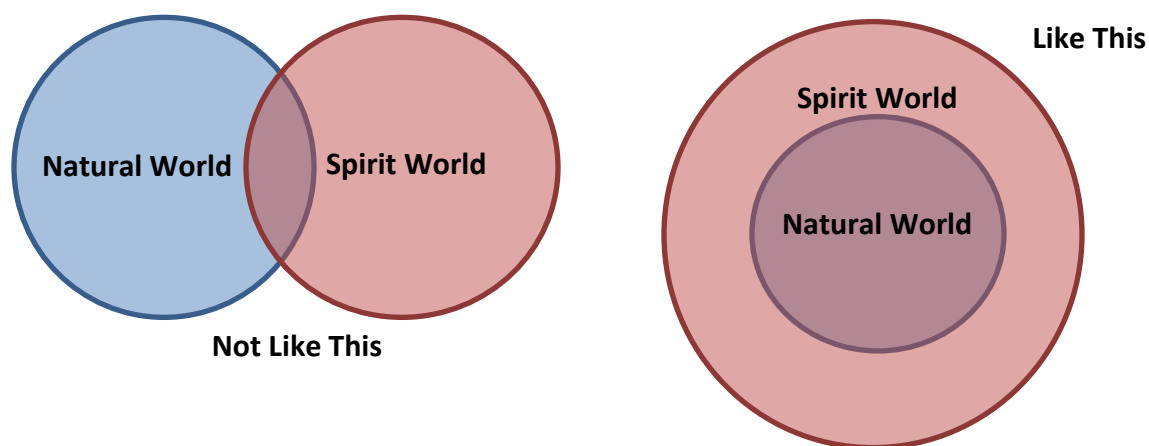
It's not as if God is more present or more real in some places more than others, but I think we are more able see, more able to hear, and more able to focus in some moments more than others.

Given the reality of the SuperNatural, let me take just a few moments to make just a few points about the Spirit Realm from a Biblical point of view. We can't do a complete overview in a single sermon, but I do want to make a few key observations.

### **Our World is a Part of the Spirit Realm.**

The first thing you need to understand is that our visible, physical, natural world is a part of this unseen spiritual realm. The Spiritual realm of the SuperNatural is a greater reality that transcends, surrounds, and encompasses our own.

We shouldn't view our world and the spirit realm as separate, alternate realities that only connect with our world at certain points. Rather, the spiritual realm is a greater reality that includes and transcends the natural world we experience with our five senses.



In this sense, everything is a part of this spiritual realm. When you look at it this way, everything IS spiritual. School or work on Monday. Book club on Tuesday. Zoom meeting on Wednesday. Practice on Thursday. Date on Friday. Fishing on Saturday. Church on Sunday are all spiritual. You can't really divide your life into the spiritual and non-spiritual. There is no place where you can put something from your life where it isn't a part of this spiritual reality.

### **The Spiritual World is Eternal the Natural World is Temporal.**

Secondly, the spiritual world is eternal and the natural world is temporal. One of the things that makes Spiritual realm supernatural, or beyond nature, is that it is eternal. It is beyond time. It is not subjected to the same laws of time as our natural world. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4:18, *"as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. ... For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

The Bible is very clear that this world will someday cease to exist as we know it. One of the things Jesus tells his disciples in their discussion of the end in Matthew 24 is that heaven and

earth will pass away. God's ultimate plan is to rescue, renew and restore His original plan for this world, but it will not last in its present state. Evolutionary science likes to replace an eternal God with an eternal universe, but God is very clear that this universe and all of history is moving toward a predetermined and guided outcome. 2 Peter 3:7 says, *"But by the same word [of God] the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."*

### **Evil is Real.**

A third truth about the spirit realm and the supernatural is that evil is real. Some today argue that the concept of evil is an antiquated concept whose time is past. What we call evil, they say is just a lack of education, or economic justice, or political inequalities, or merely the symptom of mental health issues or malfunctions in brain chemistry.

However, the Bible affirms that evil is very real, and its source is something else that is also very real, and that is the existence of Satan. The Bible tells us that Satan is a very real being who was once a high ranking angel in service to God, who rebelled against God along with a number of other angels. These rebellious angels in turn tempted humanity and led humanity to also rebel against God thus corrupting God's physical creation. The Bible calls this human evil, sin.

For decades, belief in the reality of Satan in our culture steadily declined. But in recent years, a curious phenomenon has been taking place. Even though belief in God continues to decline, belief in Satan is on the rise.<sup>i</sup> At the same time, belief in hell has continued to decline to all-time lows while belief in heaven remains fairly high.

Are you following this? We live in a culture that increasingly doesn't believe in God, but does believe in heaven. We also believe in Satan, but we don't believe in hell. How do you make sense out of that? I have learned to never underestimate the ability of the average American to hold to contradictory beliefs at the same time.

But this tells me two things. 1.) We have dangerously underestimated the seriousness and reality of evil. 2.) More of us actually believe Satan is either good, or, at least, a misunderstood figure. When you don't believe that evil is real, or that evil is even evil, then you give evil a lot more elbow room to do its work.

### **The Battle between Good and Evil is Not a Battle Between Equal Forces.**

While we must understand the reality of evil, we must also understand that the battle between good and evil is not a battle between equal forces. A lot of people have this mistaken notion of good and evil engaged in this cosmic yin and yang struggle, vying for control of the universe.

Sometimes evil has the upper hand, and then good makes a comeback, and back and forth the battle rages. The battle is fierce. The outcome uncertain. Who will win? No one knows.

In the Biblical picture, however, is quite different. God is almighty, and is in sovereign control of the universe. The well-known Romans 8:28 declares, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The Bible also affirms that the ultimate outcome and end of evil has already been decided. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:10-11 that God's plan is—

*to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*

In our Core Verse this morning, Jesus says there is already a lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Whether the lake of fire is metaphorical or literal, Satan's destiny is already decided. Satan isn't fighting to win. He's fighting to take as many of us with him as he can. The Bible teaches that the defeat of Satan and the spiritual forces of evil was decided when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. Here's what Colossians 2:15 says about the spiritual forces of evil, "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*"

If God is in control, and if evil has already ultimately been defeated, then where does all the evil come from? This is the big question that so many people wrestle with and trip over. Why is there so much evil in the world?

Let me give you the short answer, and it is this— Satan is no longer the only source of evil in the universe. The greatest source of evil in our world is the sin that exists in every human heart. Consider the following verses that cover a wide swath of human history.

Genesis 6:5

*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.*

Ecclesiastes 9:3

*The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.*

Matthew 15:19-20a

*For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person*

Romans 3:23

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Herein is God's dilemma. He has the power to fully and finally do away with all evil in the universe at any moment, but that also means doing away with sinful humanity, which He longs to save. We are his beloved creation. This is why God delays. He is trying to rescue as many of us as possible. He can't destroy the sin until He first saves the sinner. 2 Peter 3:9 says, *"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."*

### **What we do matters**

This brings us to our final point this morning. What we do matters. What you do HERE matters THERE. Since our world is a part of the greater, unseen reality. Since our daily lives are affected by this spirit realm. Since evil is real and Satan has a plan for our lives, and since God is greater and has a greater plan for our salvation, then what we do here in our earthly lives has a huge impact in the spirit world. The temporary affects the eternal. The material affects the spiritual. We are neither insulated nor isolated from the SuperNatural.

Ephesians 6:12 says, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* The rulers, authorities and cosmic powers he's talking about refer to Satan and his demonic minions. He's saying that in our lives here, we are dealing with forces there.

Everything you say and do sends out ripples in this unseen spiritual realm. You are either stirring forces for good through prayer, through God's word, through selfless acts of love, or you are stirring up the forces of evil, through sin and rebellion. What you do here can either make you stronger and more secure from the forces of evil, or make you more vulnerable.

It isn't just what we do here matters there, it's also what we do NOW matters THEN. What we do in these temporal world matters in eternity. All the things you do and all the decisions you make have a lasting impact on what happens forever.

The Bible says there is one decision that matters more any other decision you make. It's not where you go to school, or who you will marry or who you vote for. It's the same question we saw a couple of weeks. Who do you say that Jesus is? Jesus is the one who has defeated the forces of evil. Jesus is the one who paid the price for all the evil we have done. Jesus is the one who can transform the our own evil hearts into a home for all that loving and good. Jesus is the one who can secure our place in eternity. But you must place your faith in Him. You must follow Him.

That means that not only does what you do here matter there, but what you do HERE THIS MORNING may matter more than anything else you have ever done and will ever do.

In Matthew 24, Jesus and the disciples are leaving the temple. Now keep in mind, Herod's temple was one of the great wonders of the ancient world. It was built on a scale that is still staggering to this day. Herod desired it to be one of the masterpieces of Roman architecture. The temple, its grounds, the temple courts and surrounding structures dominated the surrounding landscape.

Not only was it big, it was brilliant and beautiful. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, describes the front of the temple being covered with "massive plates of gold," a large golden vine hung with golden fruit hung above the large door leading into the inner sanctuary. The temple faced east, and the rays of the rising sun would catch the white marble and the plates of brilliant gold, and it would put on a dazzling display that threatened to blind all who looked upon it. It was glorious.

As you can imagine, the Jews were quite proud of their temple. So, as they are walking out of the temple, Jesus points to the majestic temple grounds and makes a startling statement, "*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.*" It was incomprehensible considering the white marble stones used to build the temple were 36 feet long, 18 feet deep and 12 feet high.

The disciples are seemingly stunned into silence by this statement, because they don't say anything about it until they have crossed the valley and are over on the Mount of Olives. Matthew 24:3 says they came to him privately asking to know, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age."

In their mind, the destruction of the temple would be a catastrophe so serious it meant nothing less than the end of the world. Little did the disciples know that the destruction of the temple would happen within most of their lifetimes. In fact, Jesus says in verse 34 that their generation would not pass away until all these things take place. It would happen in less than 30 years in 70 AD. Jesus gives them warning signs of when it will happen and what it will be like in those days.

As for Jesus' second coming and the end of the age, that was a different story. Jesus assures them in verse 35 that heaven and earth will pass away. But then he tells them in verse 36 that about that "*day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*" Jesus can't give them any signs, because he doesn't know when it will happen. It will come suddenly and unexpectedly.



---

<https://www.vox.com/2014/7/3/5864861/belief-in-god-is-declining-but-belief-in-satan-is-on-the-rise>