

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

The Clarity, Immediacy, Difficulty, and Eternity of Christ's Words

Matthew 24:32-35

What is permanent, and what is temporary?

Wildflowers are temporary... their beauty lasts a few days and they wither.

The morning mist is temporary... as soon as the sun comes up, the heat dissipates the mist

A layer of frost is temporary... again, the warmth of the sun melts it quickly

The movement of the wind is temporary... the gust blows, the leaves flutter and then it is gone... the moment has passed

All these things are temporary...

The real question seems to be WHAT IS PERMANENT?

Is the ground beneath our feet permanent? Is the Atlantic Ocean permanent? Are the Rocky Mountains permanent? Are the sun, moon, and stars permanent?

Recently the striking events of history have stunned us to wonder about permanence! In one stunning morning, the twin towers of the World Trade Center melted before our eyes and disappeared forever from the face of the earth. In five shocking minutes, an earthquake shook the city of Port au Prince Haiti, erasing most of that tragic city and causing everyone who lived there to know that even the ground beneath our feet is impermanent.

Could it be that the most permanent thing in this universe is something invisible... a WORD! Actually many words... Jesus' words:

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

What is a "word"? Is it an invisible thing? A sound like the whisper of the wind that floats through the air and then disappears like a faint echo in a cavern? Is a word anything more than a fleeting shadow of reality, something like a nothing...

For many of us, words are the very picture of impermanence... something that lasts only as long as it causes the eardrum to vibrate. But Jesus said His words will last forever, and heaven and earth won't.

The context couldn't be more powerful...

Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem:

Matthew 24:2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

The disciples ask Jesus a three-part question in private while sitting on the Mount of Olives:

Matthew 24:3 "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

By this time, Jesus has traced out the future in amazing terms

- Vs. 4-14 describes in general but striking terms how life in this sin-cursed world will progress between the first and second comings of Christ
 - Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes in various places
 - The special and vicious persecution of the church
 - The consistent and escalating apostasy of believers under the pressure of that persecution
 - The need to stand firm to the end to be saved
 - The preaching of the gospel to every nation
- Vs. 15-25 the Abomination of Desolation and the terrors that follow
 - The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70
 - The final trial under the Antichrist at the end of the world
- Vs. 26-31 the Second Coming of Christ described
 - No secret coming... visible to the ends of the earth
 - The celestial signs... the amazing issues

Matthew 24:29-30 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." ³⁰ "At that time the sign of the Son of

Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

- The Rapture... the rescue of the elect from the earth

The things the Jews thought were permanent—the temple and the city of Jerusalem—Jesus revealed were actually going to be destroyed...

What a SHOCK! Jesus' disciples were stunned. Now they almost certainly wanted to ask two more questions... 1) When will this happen? 2) If this is impermanent, then WHAT IS PERMANENT? What can I stand on that won't move beneath my feet?

Concerning WHEN WILL THIS HAPPEN?

The answer He gives for the rest of the chapter is two-fold:

Look for the signs... look for these things to happen... add up the signs

AND The Lord will come like a thief in the night...suddenly and unexpectedly

Concerning WHAT IS PERMANENT... WHAT CAN I BUILD MY LIFE UPON?

The unifying theme of today's sermon, however, is not so much the TIMING of Christ's coming but the TRUSTWORTHINESS of Christ's words

We will look at the word of Christ: its clarity... its immediacy... its difficulty... its permanence

In the end, all we have as we look ahead to the second coming of Christ is this: the Words of Christ as recorded in the Scripture

I. Clarity: The Parable of the Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32 Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

A. The "Parable" of the Fig Tree

1. The "Parables": Difficult Until Christ Makes them Clear

- a. Many people think that Jesus told parables to make everything clear
- b. Actually, in Matthew 13, Jesus said he told parables to OUTSIDERS to make things UNCLEAR

Matthew 13:13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

- c. However, to the disciples, the parables became the **CLEAREST** form of teaching, once they came to Jesus for explanations

Matthew 13:16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

Mark 4:11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables

- d. This parable of the fig tree was told to make things clear to His disciples

B. Agricultural Parables: Things Take Time to Develop

- 1. Jesus' point: you know what happens when the fig tree develops

As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

- 2. When you see some simple things happen in the spring, you know what is coming next... summer is on its way
- 3. So also when you see all these signs, you know that Christ's coming is **IMMINENT**

C. "All These Things": The Signs Christ Has Already Given

- 1. Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes...
- 2. This gospel preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations
- 3. Abomination of Desolation
- 4. Running for your life
- 5. Those signs point to the imminent return of Christ

D. The Fig Tree: Is It Israel?

- 1. Late Great Planet Earth: When the modern state of Israel was established in Palestine in 1948, it began a ticking clock toward the end of the world
- 2. They say this is the budding of the fig tree
- 3. The "fig tree" represents Israel
 - a. They cite Jeremiah 24:1-10
 - i) Jeremiah is shown two baskets of figs

ii) The figs in one basket are good, succulent, enticing... they represent the elect Jews that God will send into exile, but will protect in Babylon and eventually restore to the Promised Land

iii) The bad figs represent the wicked Jews whom God will slaughter

b. They cite Jesus' parable of the fig tree

Luke 13:6-9 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' ⁸ "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

c. They cite Jesus' cursing of the fig tree

Matthew 21:19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

From this, they conclude that the fig tree of Matthew 24:32 represents the nation of Israel

Beyond this, they point to the reestablishment of the modern Zionist state of Israel on May 14, 1948 as the "budding of the fig tree"

They then say that Jesus sets the timetable for His return based on that event: within ONE GENERATION of the budding of the fig tree, the end will come:

Matthew 24:34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

4. Dispensational Premillennialists and Christian Zionists take this approach
5. It may well be, but it has now been 62 years since that happened... far more than one generation...
 - a. Some people say that it should be extended to a full lifetime after 1948
 - b. The man who wrote the "88 Reasons Why the Rapture will Be in 1988" (Edgar Whisenant) focused on the 40 year period of judgment on a wicked generation... 40 years of wandering for the Jews before they could enter the Promised Land, 40 years from the resurrection of Christ to the destruction of the Temple, and now 40 years from the reestablishment of national Israel in the Promised Land until the Rapture... 1988... BUT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

- c. So is the “budding of the fig tree” = the establishment of a secular Jewish state in Palestine? Questionable... but possible. Anything to do with the Jews is of interest
- d. I think the parable of the fig tree is just a simile for being able to read ALL the signs Jesus has given in Matthew 24

Matthew 24:33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

6. More certain: the progress of the gospel

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

II. Immediacy: Near... Right at the Door

Matthew 24:33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

A. “Right at the Door”: A Sense of Immediacy

1. Jesus’ return would be imminent after all these things occurred
2. So also we should have a constant sense of the immediacy of the Second Coming of Christ... that He could return AT ANY MOMENT, and so we must be prepared at ALL TIMES
3. When we see all these things, we should know that Jesus is right at the door
4. Yet in some sense, Jesus is right at the door NOW:

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

B. An Immediate Encounter with Christ

1. This is the power of the word of God
2. By this we are escorted right into the presence of God
3. The time of waiting is over... we encounter God IMMEDIATELY through the Scripture, whenever we read it by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit
4. So the word gives us immediacy with Christ... we can close our eyes as we listen to the word and spiritually SEE the Lord return with the clouds of the air

C. Balance Between Prophesied Events and Immediacy

1. Could Christ Come Back Today?
2. If the Antichrist hasn't come yet, can Christ really come back TONIGHT?
3. 2 Thessalonians 2 implies certain things have to happen first

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

- a. Reading between the lines, the Thessalonian Christians had their eschatology all wrong... some false teachers had taught them that the Second Coming had already occurred and they had MISSED IT
 - b. Paul clearly teaches the overeager Thessalonians that the end WILL NOT COME until the “man of lawlessness is revealed”
 - c. This is the antichrist, whom we discussed in the sermons on the “abomination of desolation”
 - d. So, the key question is, the day they got Paul's letter and read that, were the Thessalonians supposed to believe that the Lord could return THAT VERY NIGHT?
 - e. The implication is NO...
4. So also Jesus gives some very specific prophecies in Matthew 24... if those things haven't happened yet, the Lord cannot return
 - a. The gospel preached throughout the world, to every nation (vs. 14)
 - b. The abomination of desolation and the sacrilege of the Antichrist, coupled with the great tribulation (vs. 15-25)
 5. YET at the end of Matthew 24 and in the parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms to be ready at every moment, while implying that there will be a long delay

Matthew 24:42-44 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Matthew 25:13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

6. There is a mysterious balance here... looking at the SIGNS OF THE TIMES as directed by Matthew 24 and knowing that certain things have to happen first, coupled with CONSTANT VIGILANCE, awaiting the imminent return of Christ
7. The IMMEDIACY of Christ's words enable you to keep that intensity up throughout your life

III. Difficulty: Who Is "This Generation" that Will Not Pass Away?

Matthew 24:34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

A. Many of Christ's Words Are Also DIFFICULT!!!

Mark 9:32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Luke 18:34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

John 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

B. One of the Most Debated Sayings of Christ

1. Here Jesus is saying that "this generation" would not pass away until ALL THESE THINGS have happened
2. What in the world did this mean?

C. A "Solemn Declaration"

1. "Truly I say to you..."
2. A common verbal formula Christ used to assert something vital
3. Christ is swearing to something powerful, something significant
4. But what in the world could He mean?

D. Various Interpretive Options to Reject

1. The word "generation" cannot refer to the human race generally, or to believers generally... we can reject that interpretation out of hand, because it would teach us nothing! Obviously, the human race will not become extinct before the Second Coming, and neither will the church

2. It is impossible for Jesus to mean “Before they die, this present generation that is alive today will experience my Second Coming in the clouds with the angels...”... for then Jesus would have been MISTAKEN... and that is impossible; furthermore, Jesus already said the gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in the whole world as a testimony to ALL NATIONS... clearly Jesus didn’t forget that

E. Various Interpretive Options to Consider

1. He is merely speaking of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70; in effect He is saying “Some who are alive today will still be alive when the Temple is destroyed”... that aspect of the prediction will be coming true in this lifetime
 - a. In support of that theory, the word “generation” usually means “the people living today” or “the people all living at the same time”
 - b. In that case, Jesus is referring to “all these things” connected with the destruction of Jerusalem
 - c. Many sound interpreters have taken this approach
 - d. BUT serious difficulties!!!
 - i) Jesus has already described in detail the events surrounding the Second Coming... not merely the destruction of Jerusalem
 - ii) Look again at verse 30
 - iii) This statement from Jesus comes AFTER those verses: the heavenly bodies shaken, the Lord returning with glory, the rapture by the angels
2. Option #2: The words “this generation” refers to “this RACE”, meaning the Jewish nation as a whole... in effect Jesus is saying that, despite all the persecution of the Jews and the slaughter that will attend BOTH the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the later reign of the Antichrist, yet somehow, by the sovereign hand of God the Jewish race will not become extinct, nor will it melt into the Gentile nations and become indistinguishable from them

F. The Ramifications of the Jews’ Preservation

1. This is NO SMALL PROMISE on Jesus’ part
2. Throughout the history of the world since Jesus’ time, the Jews have been the focus of one persecution or genocide after another... sadly, many of the persecutors have claimed to be Christians, doing their slaughter of the Jews in the name of Christ... but not always!

- a. There were terrible persecutions during the Crusades in Europe; during the First Crusade, in 1096, flourishing communities of Jews on the Rhine and Danube were completely destroyed... this began a regular pattern followed by all the crusades
 - b. During the period of the Black Death in the 14th century, Jews were blamed all across Europe for the bubonic plague and were slaughtered in reprisals
 - c. Muslims also regularly wiped out communities of Jews in various lands... Morocco in the 8th century; North Africa in the 12th century; Tunisia, Libya and other places in the 16th and 17th centuries... Moorish Spain saw a terrible massacre of Jews in Granada in 1066
 - d. In Tsarist Russia in the 19th century, there were terrible pogroms, state-funded uprisings and riots against the Jews
 - e. The 20th century of course saw the worst attack on the Jews in all of history, under both the Nazis and later the Communists... the effort was to utterly exterminate the Jews from the face of the earth
 - f. Therefore, Jesus' prediction that the Jews would 1) not be exterminated, and 2) not be absorbed into the Gentile world is frankly UTTERLY AMAZING
3. Why? Because GOD STILL HAS A PLAN for the Jews, despite their shameful rejection of Christ

IV. Eternity: Christ's Words More Permanent than the Universe

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

A. This Temporary Universe

1. Jesus here asserts that "heaven and earth will PASS AWAY"
2. Many verses testify to the temporary nature of this present universe

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

Hebrews 1:10-12 "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Hebrews 12:26-27 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ The words

"once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

2 Peter 3:10 *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 in it will be laid bare.*

3. There is nothing you can see with your eyes, hear with your ears, touch with your hands that is ETERNAL... the physical universe will someday PASS AWAY

B. Astonishing Statement: Christ's Words More Permanent than the Universe!

1. Christ is here asserting that His words are eternal... they will last forever
2. In the New Heavens and New Earth, Christ's words will still stand firm, established, be honored
3. We will still be feeding on them, resting on them, relying on them
4. We will marvel at His words, ponder them, probe their depths, and feed on them

C. Christ's Assertion: Yet Another Claim to Deity!!

1. Who but God Almighty could make such an assertion:

Matthew 24:35 *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

2. This is very similar to Christ's earlier statement about the Law and the Prophets:

Matthew 5:17-18 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

3. Christ is EQUATING His own words to the word of God the Jews accepted!!
4. And this assertion has proven to be true so far!! And amazingly, it reaches BEYOND the end of this world... Christ's word will stand forever

D. God's Esteem for His Own Word

1. God created heaven and earth by word

Genesis 1:3 *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Psalms 33:6 *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.*

2. God's esteem for His own word

Psalm 138:2 you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

3. So Christ esteems His own word here

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

E. What Scripture Says About the Permanence of God's Word

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

Psalm 105:7-9 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. ⁸ He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, ⁹ the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.

Psalm 119:152 Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.

F. The Purpose of this Assertion: Our Faith and Confidence

1. The most intensely wrenching circumstances in human history are described in this chapter
 - a. Horrendous suffering... famines, earthquakes, wars, rumors of wars, attacks on the church, destruction of Jerusalem, a tribulation so great that no one would survive if those days had not been cut short
 - b. The events are so immense and stupendous... even to the shaking of the heavenly beings at the return of Christ
2. Through this and all other trials... one sure and certain foundation: the Word of God
3. Jesus wants us to REST SECURELY ON A FOUNDATION that can never be shaken, and it is HIS WORD

V. Applications

A. Marvel at the Living Word of God

1. Clarity
2. Immediacy
3. Difficulty
4. Eternity

B. Clarity: Come to Christ to Make the Word Clear

1. Christ is the central message of Scripture
2. Christ is the best interpreter of Scripture
3. Christ holds interpretation in His hand
4. Not everything is equally clear in Scripture... but some things are abundantly clear
5. The GOSPEL is CLEAR!!! Therefore come to Christ for salvation!!!

C. Immediacy: Read the Word of God for an Immediate Encounter with God through Christ

1. God wants to have an IMMEDIATE ENCOUNTER with you TODAY... He wants to be the central part of your day, the central part of everything you do
2. God has given the BIBLE, the written word of God, to minister His presence to you TODAY
3. God has given the HOLY SPIRIT to explain the word to us and minister its truths DIRECTLY to our hearts
4. Mystical encounters with God apart from the written word of God are DANGEROUS
5. Seeking an experience with the Holy Spirit apart from the written word of God is a gateway to heresies and errors and sins
6. God means for His church to live by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”... to live moment by moment by this or that passage of Scripture directly applied to us by the indwelling Spirit
7. There is IMMEDIACY in the word of God... He is IMMINENT in your hearts by the Word
8. But... the IMMINENCY of this passage has to do with the IMMINENCE of the Second Coming of Christ

D. Immediacy: Be Ready Constantly for the Second Coming of Christ...and for your own Death

1. Understand the “Signs of the Times” Concerning the Return of Christ
2. Christ will come when He will come... and our mis-interpretation of these passages will not hinder Him

3. We are clearly told to be ready at ANY TIME for the Second Coming of Christ

Matthew 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

4. Jonathan Edwards' resolution:

Resolution #19: "Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be ashamed to do if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trumpet."

5. So also we must be ready at ANY TIME for our own death

Resolution #7: "Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."

IMMINENT: Second Coming of Christ and/or OUR OWN LAST HOUR ON EARTH...

Don't live such as you would be ashamed to do right in front of Jesus... with Him looking on with those eyes of blazing fire.

E. Difficulty

1. There is MILK in God's word, and there is also MEAT
2. Do not expect everything in God's word to be equally clear, equally easy to understand
3. Be ready to WORK HARD on the Word... to work hard on doctrine...
4. Synthesizing the end times teachings of the Bible is HARD WORK... but it is work not just for professional theologians or pastors... it is beneficial for all Christians to labor hard on the word
5. It will stretch you spiritually... it will humble you greatly to admit to God in prayer that you DO NOT UNDERSTAND... that you come to Jesus and say "Explain to me the parable of the fig tree" or "What did you mean by 'This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have been accomplished'?"
6. God ordains difficult things in His word to stretch us and humble us and admit that God's mind soars infinitely high above ours

F. Eternity

1. Meditate deeply on Jesus' amazing statement:

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

2. The image here is of the UNSHAKEABLE nature of Jesus' words... therefore they are a sure and certain FOUNDATION for your life

Matthew 7:24-25 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

3. Jesus' words then are a sure and certain basis for your life

- a. Trust His words with every area of your life
- b. Trust His words with your financial life... if He has commanded you

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

- c. Trust His words when it comes to your marriage...

Matthew 19:5-6 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'

- d. Trust His words when it comes to your prayer life...

Matthew 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

- e. Trust His words when it comes to fighting lusts and temptations

Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

- f. Trust His words concerning His Second Coming
- g. And especially trust these words from Jesus

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Matthew 9:2 "Take heart, my child; your sins are forgiven."

John 6:40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Heaven and earth will pass away... but Jesus' words will NEVER pass away!