

August 5, 2018
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THE CASE FOR SPIRITUAL SUNBLOCK Matthew 24

Laurie and I have lived in the San Diego area for 39 years. When we first moved here I began shifting my allegiance to the local professional sports teams. I became an ardent fan of both the Chargers and the Padres. I hoped for, looked for, and waited for one or both of them to finally win a championship. There are 32 NFL teams and 30 major league teams. The Law of Averages says that teams should win a championship once every 30 years or so. You would think in 39 years at least one of them would accomplish that lofty goal.

Unfortunately it turns out that the Law of Incompetence trumps the Law of Averages. The Chargers had 3 brief periods of about 3-4 years each where they actually were good, surrounded by long stretches of being putrid. And now they are gone. My hope of a San Diego team being the NFL champions is over. There will never be an NFL champion in our town. Ah, but we have the Padres, who have had a sum total of 1 winning season in the past 10 years. A few years ago they finally tried a better strategy to build a winning team but everyone knew it would take several years for that to succeed. The plan was that this year they would have some building blocks in place, next year they would actually start to compete and be a winning team, and in 2020 they would be a force to reckon with. In June, after a miserable start, they began to look like it was happening. And then in July reality hit. They are now the worst team in the National League. Hope is dying. I fear I am waiting, hoping for something that is never going to happen.

That's all right, though disappointing. But there is something all Christians are waiting and hoping for, that many say is never going to happen. That is the return of Jesus Christ to rule on this earth. Is there really hope? Let's look at Matthew 24. We will learn about that this week as we look at Matthew 24.

JESUS SAID THERE WOULD BE SIGNS

At one point as Jesus and his men left the temple area the disciples talked about the magnificence of the temple. They were proud of this large edifice and marveled at it when they visited there. Scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote in his book on the temple that there has never been "a sacred building equal to the temple, whether for situation or magnificence." One ancient writer said, "He who never saw Herod's edifice (referring to the temple) has never in his life seen a beautiful

building.” The temple was “Jerusalem’s pride.” Indeed, it was the pride of all Israel of that day. In response to the disciples’ comments about the temple Jesus shocked them, telling them, “Not one stone here will be left on another.” He told them the entire temple would be completely destroyed.

They went to the Mount of Olives, which is a ridge line just to the east of the Old City of Jerusalem. There Jesus delivered a talk to them that was about what would happen in the future. It began with the disciples asking, “When will the temple be destroyed? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of things?” They were not clear on how all these things were connected but they assumed this shocking news of the coming destruction of the temple had something to do with the end of this age and with Jesus taking his throne.

It is surprising to see the disciples ask about his coming, since they did not have a grasp on the fact that he was going to die, rise from the dead, ascend to heaven and later come back. However, one of the meanings of the word translated “coming” is “arrival,” and I believe they had that meaning in mind. We use the expression “he has finally arrived” to refer to an athlete who was known to have enormous potential finally fulfilling that potential. Kris Bryant was a huge baseball star at USD. He was drafted by the Chicago Cubs, and rocketed through their minor league system in only 2 years with great success at every level. In 2015 he was invited to major league spring training and just tore it up, hitting a ridiculous 9 Home runs in only 40 at bats, yet the Cubs sent him back to the minors to start the season. Cubs fans screamed for him to be promoted to the major league team. He finally was a couple of weeks later. In his first game he got no hits and struck out 3 times. But he got his first hit the next day. And I remember when he hit his first home run a little later I heard a TV announcer say, “Kris Bryant has arrived.” That’s kind of how the disciples were using the term. At some point they knew Jesus would “arrive” in the sense of at last taking the position Messiah surely should have. He will arrive. That’s what the disciples were thinking. They could not imagine the temple ever being destroyed and figured if that ever happened it would be at a tumultuous turning point. Ah, probably when Jesus finally took over as the messianic King and instituted the reign that would last forever, ushering in a new age, the messianic age of peace, prosperity and power for Israel that would never end. So, in other words, when Jesus finally “arrived.”

Jesus answered by giving a description of things that were going to happen, the “signs” the disciples were looking for. There will be phony Messiahs claiming to be from God. There will be many wars. There will be famines and earthquakes.

The followers of Jesus will be persecuted. Nevertheless the gospel of the kingdom of God will be proclaimed everywhere in the world.

Jesus said these things are “the beginning of birth pangs.” It has become standard to point out that, as everyone knows, birth pains increase in frequency and intensity as a mother gets closer to delivering a baby. So the conclusion is that the wars, famines, natural disasters and persecution Jesus referred to will follow that pattern. As we get closer to his coming they will increase in intensity and frequency. The world will seem to be coming apart at the seams.

However, that’s not Jesus’ point. He’s giving us an illustration, and he doesn’t want us to build whole theological systems on deductions we make by pressing every possible aspect of the analogy. He had one main point. The point is, when a woman goes into labor and experiences birth pains, you know that she is going to have a baby. Jesus was saying when you see all these mostly frightening things happening, understand they are signs that he is going to come back at some point. He didn’t mean we could tell how close we are to that event by how severe the catastrophes are and how often they occur. His point was in verse 6. “See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” Don’t be upset by it all, but know that his plan is still in effect, and some day he will show up. He was not talking about the timing of his arrival.

The things that Jesus described in these verses will happen throughout the period of time until he “arrives.” For those first disciples there would be an especially intense outbreak of the difficulties in their lifetimes. There would be intense persecution, there would be war and famine. But the same has been true ever since. There continues to be war and natural disasters to this day. Here’s the bad news. It won’t end until Jesus arrives. Neither will the persecution of his followers.

You will occasionally hear preachers and supposed prophecy experts detail how wars and natural disasters are increasing dramatically, clearly indicating that Jesus is about to come back. Jesus may well be about to arrive, but that whole analysis is based on a misunderstanding and misapplication of Jesus’ illustration. It was not intended to tell us that increasing intensity and occurrence mean we’re getting close. It means don’t be surprised when you see all the turmoil of this world. That’s just how it’s going to be until Jesus comes back. Such turmoil is merely the reminder that it is going to happen at some point. It is the way the world will be until the Prince of Peace rules on earth.

JESUS' COMING WON'T BE A SECRET

There is something of a change beginning at verse 15. Jesus had been saying all these awful things will be happening, but don't be dismayed. Stand firm, this is not yet the end. But then he says, "When you see this happening, get out of town." He was talking Jesus about a period of time that will occur just prior to his coming. It is a time when "the abomination that causes desolation" will happen in the holy place according to verse 15. In the Old Testament an abomination frequently referred to an idol, a false god. There is an historical precedent for this that was also prophesied by Daniel. In Daniel 11:31 he described how a ruler he calls the King of the North will desecrate the temple in Jerusalem when his forces set up "the abomination that causes desolation." This was fulfilled in 167 BC when a Seleucid king called Antiochus IV had his armies set up an idol to Zeus in the temple and sacrifice a pig on it.

In Daniel 9 the prophet prophesied that during a 7 year period of intense disasters, difficulty and war that occurs before the King arrives another ruler, one who opposes the king, would set up another abomination in the temple. This ruler is called the Lawless One by Paul. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 after bringing up the Day of the Lord and telling his readers not to be deceived or disturbed about it, Paul wrote, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God."

This person is commonly known as the Antichrist today, though he is only briefly referred to once that way in the Bible. At first he will not seem to anyone to be a hideous monster. He will appear to be a great leader. He will seem to unify nations and will be an appealing, charismatic man of peace. He will seem to be exactly what the world needs and longs for. Right up to the time when he reveals his true character. He sort of reminds me of a line from the classic movie *Top Gun* when Jester says to Maverick, "that was some of the best flying I've seen yet, right up to the point where you got killed." Antichrist will be the best leader anyone has seen yet, right up to the point where he turns out to be truly evil.

Jesus is saying, "There are going to be terrible things that will happen in this world the entire period before I arrive. Don't worry about that, it's just part of the process. But when this dude shows up, if you're living in Jerusalem, get out of town. It's going to get really bad there." His words about fleeing to the mountains don't apply if you're living in San Diego. However, this is part of the events that

are the real deal. Verse 21 says “There will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of time until now.” Jesus says things will get so bad “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.” In other words, this will be the worst time of suffering and calamity in all of history. Older translations referred to it as a time of great tribulation, so it has become known as the Tribulation. But if you were using a more recent translation I guess you would call it the Distress.

During that time, he says, there will be people claiming that Messiah is already back. One should pay no attention to those rumors. He says when he comes back it will be obvious. His coming will be as obvious as a lightning bolt. And we all know that’s as obvious as it gets. When lightning streaks across the sky you see it. It is not hidden. His coming will be about as subtle as a nuclear explosion. No one will wonder if this is the real thing. It will be loud, obvious and undeniable.

In fact, there will be dramatic and noticeable events in the sky associated with these events. Verse 29 says the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky and the heavens will be shaken. Evangelical scholar William Hendricksen says in his commentary on Matthew, “In connection with this apocalyptic picture strict literalness must be avoided. Until this prophetic panorama becomes history we shall probably not know how much of this description must be taken literally and how much figuratively.” What we do know is that there will be world shaking events that cannot be missed. “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.

Some people pick up on Jesus instruction in verse 32 to “learn this lesson from the fig tree.” When you see leaves come out you know that summer is near. We get that. It is also true of the peach tree we have in our yard. It loses its leaves in the winter, but in the spring beautiful blossoms sprout. Then they fall off and leaves appear, and we know that summer is right around the corner. Many point out what we saw a couple of weeks ago that the fig tree sometimes symbolizes Israel. So they conclude this is a reference to Israel becoming a nation again. We all know that Israel did something true of no other nation. After centuries of no longer existing, it became a nation again in 1948. Hey, the fig tree sprouted leaves. Jesus said in verse 34 “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen.”

Wow, the generation alive when Israel becomes a nation will not pass away until Antichrist shows up, then dramatic events occur with the great climax being the return of Jesus Christ to this earth! Well that generation is passing away. So

doesn't that mean these things have to start happening almost immediately? Isn't Jesus coming back in the extremely near future?

One problem with that construct. Jesus wasn't using a fig tree to symbolize Israel in this case. This was not a reference to what happened in 1948. He could have used any deciduous tree, such as our peach tree, to make his point. When you see them getting leaves you know summer is not far off. He was essentially saying when you see the Antichrist showing up you will know that the arrival of the King is not far off.

What about that comment that "this generation" will not pass away until these things happen? What generation did he mean? The Greek word translated "generation" doesn't mean exactly what the English word means. We mean people born in a particular period of time like the baby boomers or the Gen-Xers or the Millennials. But the Greek word was more general. It could mean people born around the same time, but it could also mean any particular group of people. In this case I believe "this generation" was a reference to the Jewish people. They will not pass away before Messiah comes back.

JESUS' COMING WILL BE A SURPRISE TO MANY

In one sense Jesus' coming will be a surprise to everyone. He says in verse 36, "About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." He says it will be like it was in the days of Noah. No one expected a flood, and all except Noah's family was tragically caught by surprise.

We are not going to know when Jesus will come back. All the supposed experts on prophecy and eschatology who parse out the whole plan and explain exactly what is going to happen and when it will happen, don't know what they're talking about. You either have to believe them, or you have to believe Jesus, who said, "no one besides God knows when I will come back." Personally, I'm going to go with Jesus on this.

You'd think people would figure out that Jesus meant it after all the embarrassing failures. Back in the 19th century a preacher named William Miller became convinced that Christ would come back in 1843 or 1844. He gained a large following, but that ended with what is called the Great Disappointment because, as you may have noted from your history book, Jesus did not, in fact, come back during the 19th century. Miller's teaching became the backbone of the 7th Day Adventist church, but what he was most known for was an epic failure. A man

named Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA engineer, published a book listing 88 reasons why Jesus would come back in 1988. He sold 4.5 million copies. So how did that turn out? I was alive in 1988. I was 18, making me 48 today. Do you believe that? No? Well that would be easier to believe than that Jesus came back that year. George H. W. Bush was elected President, NASA started flying space shuttles again after the Challenger disaster and the first B2 bomber was unveiled, but Jesus most certainly did not arrive. Whisenant had 88 reasons and they were all wrong. He then recalculated the date to 1989, then 1993, then 1994, then 1997 when he finally gave up. Harold Camping, a radio preacher, first predicted it would be in 1994, then more recently May of 2011. He finally acknowledged that his efforts to predict the date were not only wrong, but in his words, sinful. None other than Isaac Newton predicted the year 2000. The late supposed psychic, Jeanne Dixon, predicted that Armageddon would happen in 2020. The beat goes on.

There is a reason God has not told us exactly when Jesus is going to return, and it's not too hard to figure out what it is. Former pastor and author, Ray Pritchard, tells the story of a time his wife had to go away on a trip and left him and his son at home. He says it was bachelor time. They lived on cereal and pizza, left dirty dishes in the kitchen and didn't clean anything for 3 days. But he knew that his wife would get home at 3 on Friday afternoon. So about noon that day he went to work. He cleaned all the dishes, put pizza boxes in the trash, picked up all the dirty clothes, and vacuumed the house. When his wife got home everything looked great. He could do that because he knew the time and date of her arrival. If we knew the time and date of Jesus' arrival, what do you suppose we would do? It would be the same thing. We would live with the mess, and wait until the last minute to try to clean everything up.

Jesus said that the world is going to be caught totally by surprise when he comes back. None of Noah's friends or neighbors believed him when he told them about a coming flood. They thought he was loonier than Daffy Duck. No doubt there were lots of snide comments about his boat. But they got a terrible and fatal shock when the flood came. Jesus said the world will be just like that when he comes back. They will be sure that anyone who believes that Jesus is going to return must be a brainless, superstitious rube. And they will think that right up to the moment he shows up in the clouds.

In verse 43 Jesus said had the owner of the house known when a thief was going to come he would have stood watch and been prepared to stop him. I can tell you from personal experience that is true. I've been burglarized on 4 occasions, and if

I'd any inkling of what was going to happen I'd have been ready to stop it. But I had no clue whatsoever. It was a surprise every time. Jesus said we should not be like that. He told us that he is going to come back, so we should be ready for that to happen. Don't be caught by surprise. Be ready at all times.

As you likely know there are several theories about the exact sequence of events. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says after the dead in Christ are raised to life, "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The Greek word translated "caught up" is *rapto*. You have heard about the Rapture. It's name is derived from that word, and it refers to believers being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Some believe that will be the first event in the sequence that leads to Christ's return. After the Rapture will come the 7 years of misery, and after that Christ will come all the way back. Some believe the Rapture happens mid way through that 7 year period, and some think it will happen at the end. I suspect it will be the first thing. Otherwise we could have a pretty good idea when it will take place. But I also have a conviction that whatever we think about the sequence of events, it will probably be wrong. So whatever we think about this we need to keep our grip on it very loose.

IMPLICATIONS

WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE

Some of the most important words in this entire speech are found in verse 35. There Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." The theme of 2018 for me has been that nothing here on earth is permanent. That's been a theme for me because we have been having to fix up a lot of things around our house. It was brand new when we moved into it. Everything was clean, bright, and worked perfectly. It's not that way anymore. We are having to repair, replace and repaint lots of stuff. Nothing stays the same in this world. I also see that unfortunate principle at work in my own body. I've had to have a biopsy that was like something out of the Great Tribulation because one system is not functioning according to original specifications. I just had to have hernia surgery even though had not suffered a traumatic injury due to being too zealous. I asked Toby what causes that. He said, "Age." In other words, I'm wearing out!

The city recently did some paving on streets in areas near our neighborhood. Last week we were out for a walk and we walked along one of those streets. It had just been paved and the lines had been painted. Both of us noticed how good it looked. The asphalt was a dark, unmarked black, and the white and yellow lines were clean and new and stood out in bright contrast to the pavement. We both thought it's too

bad that it won't stay that way. Everything will fade, get worn and dirty. Nothing stays the way it is in this world. Everything in this world changes. The world itself is not permanent. But Jesus' word is forever. It is not going to change. It is not going to fail. It will prove true.

This is crucially important for us. It is easy to think that it has been 2000 years since Jesus made the promise to come back. His followers thought it might be a matter of weeks or months before he returned, a few years at most. Certainly in their lifetime. But it didn't happen. And now it has been 2 millennia. Lots of people think you would have to be an idiot to think Jesus is actually going to show up some day. Give it up already. It's not going to happen. Surely if it was ever going to happen it would already have occurred, wouldn't it? But Jesus said his word would never pass away. He said he will come back, so come back he will.

But why should we believe he was right? Remember that there were many promises of the first coming of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. Century after century passed with no sign of those promises coming true. Had you been alive then you might well have concluded that those promises were not trustworthy. And yet, after centuries of waiting God fulfilled them. The Word of the Lord did not pass away but proved true and reliable.

Peter, later in his life, when some were saying, "Well where is Jesus? Looks like he's never coming back to me or he would already have been here," wrote a response. It's in 2 Peter 3:8-9. "But 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." So do the math. It's only been 2 days on God's calendar. Jesus has only been gone for a weekend! Laurie and I took care of our little granddaughters last weekend. We love it, but it is exhausting. But hey, it was only 2 days. We can do 2 days easy. So surely we can keep waiting for Jesus if we have to, can't we? Peter went on in verse 9, "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." Yes, it's been a long time. But Jesus' word will prove true. He will arrive, and he will do so when almost no one expects it.

WE SHOULD NOT BE DISMAYED

This is one of the main reasons Jesus gave this talk. He knew his followers were going to live in the middle of upheaval and turmoil and persecution. At times it would be so bad it might cause them to wonder if God had lost control of the whole thing. It might cause them even to lose courage or lose their faith. Jesus said, "Don't be dismayed." Yes, there will be terrible wars, famines, devastating

earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, horrible economic times, appalling descent into immorality culture wide, but don't be afraid. These are the birth pains. There will be no birth without the birth pains. They are expected and are a part of the process, so keep faith and stay calm.

There are lots of predictions of catastrophe and calamity out there. Climate change is going to wreak more havoc than we can imagine. Some unforeseen pandemic is going to break out and wipe us all out. Something will spark a nuclear exchange and in the end we will all be destroyed.

What we need to remember is that Jesus said people are still going to be alive all over the planet when he returns. We're not going to be wiped out by some planet killing asteroid. The environment is not going to be utterly destroyed by human ravages so that we all die. Jesus will come back, and people will still be here when he does. We may not be, for it may happen after our lifetimes. At one point in my younger years I felt sure that Jesus would come back before I died. Now I have to say that the odds are pretty good I'm going to go see him a few years down the road rather than the other way around. But the crucial point is this, Jesus' word is firm and secure. No matter what happens in this world we don't need to be afraid. We don't have to go into a panic over all the terrible things that might happen. Some day Jesus will come back and when he does the human race will still be on the planet.

WE SHOULD BE READY

The main thing Jesus said in this sermon was that since we don't know when he's going to return, we should be ready for that to happen at any moment. There are Christians who beat the drum of "Jesus is coming back soon." Often they go to great lengths to show how world events are matching up with their interpretation of what's going to happen just before Jesus comes back, so get ready. Some of that is due to their own eagerness for it to happen, and some is due to a desire to motivate people to put their faith in Jesus. However, that strategy has a big drawback.

On January 13 in Hawaii visitors and residents were shocked and terrified when an emergency message showed up on televisions, radios and cell phones through the Emergency Alert System. It read, "Emergency Alert. Ballistic Missile Threat Inbound To Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." Can you imagine the effect that would have? I envisioned myself vacationing in Hawaii and getting that message. What would I do? Where do you go to find shelter from a ballistic missile that very well could be nuclear? That would have great potential for ruining

your whole vacation! As you can imagine that message caused a great deal of fear, confusion and chaos. It turned out that an employee at the Emergency Management Agency working at his computer hit the wrong item on a drop down menu by mistake, and erroneously generated the terrifying message. It took the authorities 38 minutes to announce that the whole thing had been a foul up.

Here's my question. What do you think would happen if that message shows up again at some point? What if it shows up two more times and is always a mistake? Are people going to believe it? They're certainly going to question it. After the 9/11 attacks there were numerous instances of the government giving out a security alert, and people freaked out, got hyper about security. But after years of such alerts with nothing happening, what is the response now? The public pays little to no attention. When Christians keep trying to prove that Jesus is going to come back RIGHT NOW, and then he doesn't, what do you suppose the effect is? People just tune it out.

We don't want to make that mistake in regard to the coming of Jesus. A long delay can conceivably affect us in one of two ways. It can cause us to stop believing altogether. When someone promises you something, and even reiterates the promise several times, but then as time passes they don't deliver on the promise, what do you tend to do? You start to think they're not going to deliver. You start to think it is an empty promise and they're never going to come through. Jesus tells us to not lose heart, to not lose faith, but to know that he will arrive, and that even though it's been a long time, it could happen at any moment.

The other problem that can come from the long wait is we can grow complacent. When I was young I, like many of you, was not a fan of any kind of sun lotion. I heard talk about the damage that baking out in the sun can do, but my only concern was immediate. I wanted to avoid sunburn, because that's painful. But back in those days lotions were "sun tan lotions," aimed at protecting from sunburn and trying, futilely in my case, to get a good tan. As I got older I heard more and more about skin cancer, but paid little heed. Let's just say when it came to sun block I was complacent. Yeah, yeah skin cancer, blah, blah blah. After all, nothing had happened to me. Until it did. When a skin cancer was discovered on my forehead and had to be excised that all changed big time. I became an instant sun block believer and practitioner.

Jesus knew that the big issues for his believers through the centuries would be loss of faith, loss of hope and complacency. So his Word has numerous reminders that he is coming, but no timetable, so that we will be ready at any time.

But why is it important for us to be ready? If we are not doing the right things, obeying Jesus diligently at the moment of his coming, are we going to be condemned or punished in some way? No, the gospel of grace means we don't earn God's love and acceptance, it is given to us freely even if we not faithful. But Jesus reminds us of his coming to give us hope in the most difficult of times and to encourage us to live in the reality that the spiritual realm is real.

This matters because this present world is so demanding and consuming. It is hard for us to believe the spiritual realm is real because we cannot see it. But the things of this world are not just easy to be aware of, they are blinding. I know bills must be paid. I know people have to be related to. I know approval and love are infinitely better than rejection. I know it feels good to have luxury and it feels terrible to do without. The noise of this world deafens us to the whisper of the spiritual realm.

As it currently exists ***this world is designed to kill you!*** The Bible says Satan is the god of this age, and he is using it to keep you from experiencing life and from bringing life to other people. Laurie just told me about a story she read that had a character who was a wine maker. He made some of the most delicious tasting wines. But he was also an evil and nefarious person who was out to kill many people. He used a toxin from a sea creature called the cone snail, which I had never heard of, that is an incredibly potent and deadly poison. He would put it in his wine, and it would kill his targets. The wine looked good, tasted good to people, seemed appealing, but was deadly. This world system is like that. It is made to seem appealing, but actually destroy you. Real life comes from Christ, from the spiritual realm. It is not found in the things of this world. The point of the imminent coming of Jesus is it rattles our cage, it awakens us and reminds us of the reality of the spiritual realm. It turns us back to the source of real and full life. It enables us to not only live but to be a source of hope and life for others.

I hate movies that are just sad and have sad endings. I like happy endings. They make me feel good. I don't like going to a movie and coming away depressed. Last year as a lover of most things Star Wars, I went to see the then most recent installment of that film franchise. It was called Rogue One. Laurie and I liked it so much we went out and bought a Nissan Rogue to honor it. Actually that's not true, or even close to true. Spoiler alert. If you haven't seen the movie but plan to, plug

your ears. It was a pretty good story, but in the end, everybody dies. I hated the ending. I ended up not being a fan of the movie because of it.

But when you look at this world, how it is, how much suffering and evil there is, and how things seem to be getting even darker, it is awfully hard to believe in a happy ending. Especially when you know that no matter how good things might be in your own personal life, it's not going to end happy. It's going to end sad. The problem with this is that if there is no happy ending it is going to make us less joyful and it is going to tend to turn us inward. If there is no happy ending we will tend to become more focused on just limiting our pain. We will work to protect ourselves and try to make our journey here as comfortable as possible. But the coming of Jesus says there is a happy ending. There is hope, and that can make us more joyful, more hopeful, more confident people who can count on God's victory and focus on being a blessing to others.

