

When we talk about the end of something, we often mean in a temporal or time sense. For example, I waited until the end of the movie to use the restroom. It can also mean a spatial sense. For example, I tied a kite to the end of a string. But end can also mean the goal of something. We talk about this when we say the ends justify the means. Neil Postman in the book *The End of Education* talks about the purpose of education.

A Reformed confessional document, the Westminster Shorter Catechism opens with the question, “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” This is fairly similar to Luther’s Small Catechism which states that Jesus has saved me “that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Man’s end is to be reunited with the one God almighty in whom we live and move and have our being.

Mankind has an end. The world has an end. The universe has an end. Time itself has an end. All of these have a goal. To be restored to fellowship and perfection by the Almighty Triune God. Paul writes in Romans, “**For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**” We are hurdling toward this end year by year, day by day, hour by hour.

We read in Mark’s Gospel, “**Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**” THE END IS NEAR IN JESUS.

First, I. Jesus' ministry marks the end of the season of waiting for a kingdom. Jesus was saying, “**The time is fulfilled**” It reminds us of how Paul writes, “**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,**” History does have an end. The Father has orchestrated all of time to have its goal in Jesus Christ.

Farming has an end. The goal of farming is the production of food. That’s why they say never to insult a farmer with your mouth full because even in a twinkie, all the constituent parts were made on a farm. The farmer plows the field, plants the seed, waters the crop, but when it’s time for harvest, everything takes a backseat to gathering the grain ahead of the winter. The time is fulfilled! The grain is ready to live out its destiny as a loaf of bread or a bowl of cereal.

The world had been waiting for the birth of a savior. In this sense it was the planting and growing season. The arrival of Jesus onto the scene in his birth, baptism, and ministry marks the harvest season, and the time approached for mankind to be reunited to the Lord. Jesus’ arrival was the end of the world’s

waiting. It was the start of a new era. In fact, the very way our culture marks time is in respect to Jesus' birth. Time is either B.C. before Christ, or A.D. which is Latin for year of our Lord.

When Jesus said, "**The time is fulfilled,**" He was saying, "Don't wait. Now is the time to act. There's a new way of doing things." His ministry in Galilee was a foretaste of what was to come.

Second, II. Humanity's chief end is near in Jesus' ministry. The end is near in Jesus. What that means is that the goal of humanity, the very form we are to be molded into is manifest in our Lord Jesus Christ. During this Epiphany season we reflect on who Jesus is, and how His revelation to the nations has changed our outlook on life.

Jesus said, "**the kingdom of God is at hand.**" The Kingdom of God is wherever the king is. Wherever Jesus is, that's where His kingdom is, also. What does it look like when the kingdom of God is at hand? Exactly what you read in the Gospels! Jesus teaches the people. Jesus heals the sick, forgives sinners, and casts out demons. Jesus gathers believers together to minister to them and to train them to do the same. In some cases the result of this ministry was rejection and anger, but for those who knew Jesus, the result was praise. When Jesus healed a deaf man, we read of the crowd, "**And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'**"

The Kingdom of God being at hand means the start of an era where Jesus does all things well, and God's people respond with praise, thanksgiving, and service. This is what mankind is for, to receive the blessings of God and return thanks.

The Kingdom of God has come through Jesus living that perfect life, dying, and rising again to forgive me and you, and to grant us new life. Jesus ascended to heaven and we now live in a time where the Kingdom of God is at hand through the work of the Church, and we await Christ's second coming where all of creation will be restored, and sickness, death, and the works of the devil will be completely destroyed. In Jesus, the end is near. In other words, in Jesus, we become who we were truly meant to be.

But how can we know we're on track? How can we know if we're part of the kingdom? III. The end is marked by repenting and believing. In Jesus, the end is near, and He accomplishes His purposes in you when His word works in your heart to change you. If Jesus just preached, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand**" then that would be it. It would be just the transmission of information no different than if I told you the capital of Iowa is Des Moines.

But Jesus gives us instructions on how to live. He preaches, “**repent and believe in the gospel.**” He’s not just saying repent once and believe once. Don’t just check a box and move on with your life. He is saying, keep on repenting and keep on believing in the gospel. Be the kind of people who repent and believe!

This message is for people inside and outside of these four walls. You who are sitting listening, to be a Christian means you live a life of repentance. You are a worse sinner than you know, and you need to turn from that sin. That is, turning from sin and seeking the welfare of others before yourself. In fact, Luther alludes to this text in his famous 95 Theses when he wrote, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Jesus also calls you to believe the Gospel. Jesus died for you so that your end could be with him. He died and rose that you might become spotless, blameless, and perfect before the Lord. You are a worse sinner than you could have imagined, but your Lord Jesus has forgiven you and loves you more than you can know.

Likewise, those outside this church need to hear the message, repent and believe the Gospel. Someone might say, “Repent? That’s not a very joyful message. People don’t want to confess their sins as they come in worship, maybe we need to do something different, pastor.” But the fact of the matter is that people know something’s wrong deep down, and they confess their sins. However, they confess their sins to their barber, their bartender, or their counselor rather than to the Lord who can actually forgive them. “**Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**” A dying world finds its true purpose fulfilled as their ends conform to the ends of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Christ that end is near.

Finally, IV. Jesus calls disciples to shepherd humanity to this end. I want to conclude with a brief mention of the call of the disciples. This call of the first four disciples could be a sermon unto itself. I think it’s important for us to understand that Jesus uses people like me and you to achieve His goals of the salvation of the world.

Jesus didn’t need to call the twelve disciples, but in love He chose them to come along for the ride, and the Church now operates with disciples serving in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus to proclaim this same message: “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**”

Jesus calls pastors to serve in this role just as He called the disciples. As we await Christ’s second coming, now is the time to call people to repentance. Now is the time to invite people to hear the Gospel. Christ’s kingdom is at hand!