

The End of Your Story

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[0 : 00] it have a happy ending? Or for those of us who are in our working stage of life, looking at retirement, looking at inflation, what are we asking? Does it have a happy ending, right?

Will I get the job that I need? Will I be able to retire? Will it all mean something? Or am I condemned to a rat race of a meaningless life and a meaningless job? In our world, in our hearts, there is a deep intuition of what a happy ending could be like, what it would feel like, what it would look like. And everybody has a vision for that. Everybody has in their mind, as they look into the future, what a happy ending would be. A sense of completion, of arrival, of peace. And you're non-Christian, you have it, and your non-Christian friends have that feeling. It's deeply aware. And in the midst of that, in our world today, in 2025, people are feeling a lot of tension around that. It's not a guarantee like it has been in other parts of our world, of our lives, of our American history. The reality is there are a lot of question marks around a happy ending. Politically, economically, socially, there's no doubt about it. We're in a lot of upheaval.

You listen to the news on any news site, and there's questions, right? And this leaves people with a massive chasm between their intuitions and their hopes, and what they look like are the realities, what they look like when they check their bank accounts or when they look at their jobs.

There's a lot of expectation and not a lot of hope a lot of the time. Generation Z, in particular, which is the generation that I'm pastoring currently, is one of the most pessimistic generations that's ever been recorded. Deeply, deeply cynical about the economic potential of our world right now. Most of them are pretty much resigned to the reality that they won't be able to afford a home, that they will rent for years, decades. And out of that will come the realities of building generational wealth. Now, there's hope in things like generational wealth transfer, but most of them say, I don't think I'll own a home. So they've got this sense of, I want to own a home.

I was talking with a student the other day. He said, I just want to have a middle-class home and a wife and kids, and I can't find a woman who's a Christian, and I don't know if I'll be able to afford a home. There's this deep sense of, will it have a happy ending? And here's the exciting thing.

[2 : 45] Into that feeling that all of us have and that your friends have, this is where evangelism is really powerful and really fun, because there's this great need that all of us have and that our non-Christian friends deeply have, and we get to come and say, there is a happy ending. There is a happy ending.

The opportunity for the gospel to present the happy ending that every person longs for, desires, is at a level that I don't think we've seen in, I mean, at least 70 years, maybe longer in our world. So my hope today, the big takeaway that I would hope you all would take away with this is that each person has a longing for peace. Each person has a longing for peace, and the gospel alone can satisfy that. It's very simple. Each person has a longing for peace, and the gospel alone can satisfy that.

And so we'll look at this in three ways, as per usual, that we'll look at the broken heart that longs for happy endings. Second, the gospel gives the happy endings. And third, how do we evangelize with it? Very simple. The broken heart longs for happy endings. Second, the gospel gives us a happy ending.

And how do we do evangelism in that? To look at this, I want us to turn to the very end of the Bible, which shows us the happy ending, Revelation chapter 21. I'm just going to read five verses from Revelation chapter 21, and we will begin. So this is Revelation, John's vision of the end of the world and the end of the universe or the beginning, as it were. And this is what he says, Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. [4 : 53] And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. This is God's word. Would you pray with me?

Father in heaven, as we are gathered here today to worship you, we pray that you would now use your spirit, send your spirit and use your word to shape us into faithful followers of Jesus. Chip away at the sin that would entangle us, strengthen our hands, lift our drooping heads, and may we run with endurance the race set before us for your glory and for the good of our world that you are and will redeem. It's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen. Okay, so first thing to see in this is the broken hearts desire a happy ending. Broken hearts desire a happy ending. There's a famous quote from C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity. If you've read it, you know that this, you underlined this quote.

If you've been a Christian or in Christian circles for more than a couple of years, you've heard this quote, but it's a famous quote for good reason. He says this, creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger. Well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim. Well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire. Well, there is such a thing as sex. Now pay attention here. He says, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. It just means that there are pleasures that nothing, that only a world beyond can satisfy. What is he saying here? He says, if I find in myself a desire which no, nothing in this world can satisfy. Ecclesiastes, we read this in our Old Testament reading, hints at that. He says, you have placed eternity in the hearts of man. There's something within the human heart that longs for something that nothing in this world can fully satisfy. And yes, there are many wonderful, satisfying things that this world can provide. This is what Ecclesiastes talks about. It's good to work and eat and drink. But at the end of the day, there's something that we go, there's this itch that I just can't seem to scratch. There's this itch that I can't seem to scratch. There's something in this world, there's something that I feel that this world cannot satisfy. And here's the amazing thing, is your non-Christian friends feel that acutely at their most vulnerable moments. They feel that acutely. They are full of desires that they are aware that nothing in this world can satisfy.

[7 : 55] Their hearts, our hearts, long for it. And what is it? They long for a happy ending, right? Two examples. At the root of our whole world of confusion around sexuality and gender, gender dysphoria, all of these things, is a sense of wishing to belong in the body that I'm in.

Now, we can take issue with this and debate it as we can debate it a million different ways. But for a myriad of reasons, myriad of million reasons, young people can feel like they don't belong in the right body, which is tragic. Perhaps they were abused. Perhaps they were shamed.

Perhaps they don't fit cultural stereotypes. But whatever it is, they look within themselves and say, something is deeply wrong with me and I need to fix it. I need a happy ending for my body and my life. And they think, deeply wrongly, deeply misguided, that if I was just someone else, then I would have the happy ending. Do you see that? On the same level, think about politics. Another deeply hot topic. I'm trying to pick the hot ones for you all today. A deep hot topic is that both of our major political parties have tapped into this deep feeling of estrangement, this deep sense of this country is not what it should be. Something is deeply wrong with our society.

Some people would say, this country isn't what I thought it was. Or some people would say, this country isn't what I think it should be. But everyone, all the political parties, all the candidates, have this vision for what a happy ending would be like in our nation. And they say, if you vote for us, we'll give you the happy ending. They have tapped into this deep feeling that every person has, that if only we could do this with our nation, then it would be a successful, prosperous nation of equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

What our sinful hearts do is they ask something, anything less than God, anything less than Jesus and his kingdom. And they warp that and say, if I can have that, if we can pull that off, then I will have the happy ending that I intuitively know has to be there. And this is at its core, idolatry, right? Idolatry is when we look to something other than God and ask it to be God, ask it to satisfy that desire that only God can satisfy. It's asking anything other than God, anything other than Jesus to be the happy ending that we want. But here's where evangelism gets to come in. And this is so exciting. What we get to do, what you get to do is to tap into that feeling, tap into that intuition they

have and say, yes, that desire for belonging or for peace or for stability is legitimate and real and good. God placed that desire in you. You are a human being created in the image of God. What you intuitively recognize, the Christian message, the gospel, provides more satisfyingly, more beautifully than anything else in this world can possibly imagine.

[11 : 29] The evangelism move is to harness that feeling for the happy ending and rather than say, well, no, don't desire that. No, you get to say, yes, what you desire. This is again, C.S. Lewis, he says that your desires are not strong enough. Your desires are not in the right place. It's for God and his kingdom that you yearn. It is for God and intimacy with Christ that you yearn.

Behind all of this is a major goal for evangelism in 2025. This is one of the core things that I want you all to come away with as you're thinking through this. For the last 150 years, Christians have rightly sought to prove that Christianity is true. We have sought to prove that Christianity is the true faith, and it is. I will defend it to my dying breath. Christianity is true. And our non-Christian friends are not asking that question. Our non-Christian friends are asking, is Christianity good?

That is what they are asking. They are asking, is it good? Is Christianity good for black people? Is Christianity good for women? Is Christianity good for politics? Is it good for men? I've had students will say, I don't really care if it's true or not. I just think it's bad for humans. And so I could slam them over the face as many times as I want with the factual proof, the truthfulness of Christianity.

But if I don't present, if we don't present a case that the Christian life following Jesus is the best and most satisfying and most fulfilling way to be a human being in this life and the next, we will not persuade them. The suspicion today is that Christianity is all about power and oppression. Power and oppression. That's not good. And our goal is less trying to prove that Christianity is true, which of course it is, and more seeking to prove that it is good for their world, for our lives, for our relationships with ourselves, with others, with our neighbors.

Do you see that? So you get to tap into the desires that they intuitively have and say, Christianity offers good news, satisfaction for what you legitimately and truly long for.

[13 : 59] So the first thing is, is that broken people have desires. The second part then is that the gospel offers that happy ending. My daughters cry, is there a happy ending? Christianity says, oh, is there?

Oh, is there a happy ending? And this is our text. Look down at the text with me. There's three things that we see here. Three things. We see a new city, a new relationship with God, and a new absence.

A new city, a new relationship with God, and a new absence. First, a new city. The gospel arc is from a city of rebellion to a city of peace. This spans the whole story of the Bible. What happens in Genesis 3? Human beings reject God and say, we would have nothing to do with you, and that leads to a brother killing his brother. Well, what does the brother who killed his brother go and do? He makes a city. He makes a city. And what does that city do? That city says, we reject God, and out of our spite and our rebellion, we are going to build a tower up to God. We, in our rebellion and our city, are going to try to get ourselves, raise ourselves up to God in an act of rebellion. They seek to reach up into heaven, and God, of course, confuses their language and, you know, makes the whole thing fall apart. But then at the end of history, this is the very last image of the Bible, what do we see? God brings a city down, and it is a city of peace, a city not of rebellion, but a city that is peaceful, a holy city, the new Jerusalem, where Jerusalem means city of peace, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. What does this mean? It means that all of our goals and our aims of culture and politics and social strategies and civilizational goals, God will bring all of those to us at the end of history as a gift, not us raising ourselves up, but God bringing the peace that we all desire to us. Augustine, in his City of God, says the great goal of every human being is peace, contentment, being in harmony with one another and with self and with God, and at the end of history,

God comes and brings that city of peace to us. The first earth had passed away, the sea was no more, and I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God as a gift, as a mercy.

The second thing we see in this text is a new relationship with God, a new relationship with God. Then I heard, verse 3, a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God will be with them as their God.

[17:06] We could do a whole sermon series on that phrase, but the great promise of the Christian faith, the high point of the Christian faith is the promise that I will be your God, and you will be my people.

I will be your God, and you will be my people. Genesis 3 enters a giant separation between God's world and his people. It alienates and brings shame and guilt to God's people and between God and his people. And then in Genesis 12 through 17, God comes to Abraham and says, I will be your God, and you will be my people. And then in Exodus 3, he comes to a people who are oppressed in slavery to Egypt, and he says, I will be your God, and you will be my people. And then in Exodus 19, he comes to them on the mountain of Horeb and gives them the Ten Commandments and says, I will be your God, and you will be my people. Over and over and over again, God comes to his people and says, I will establish a new relationship with you, one that you intuitively know, which is at peace, harmony, goodwill towards men, everything that we long for. I will be your God, and you will be my people.

Revelation 21 promises that God himself will be with them. And what's the last and final picture of this? John 1. God comes down, the word became flesh and dwells among us and says, I will be your God, and you will be my people. Jesus is the embodiment, the final picture of that. And he says, I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come back and get you. In my Father's house, there are many rooms.

If it were not so, I would have said it, but I will come back to bring you to myself. Revelation 21 promises that. That's good news. Think about our friends who are estranged from their families, who can't go home for the holidays because it's just toxic and abusive. Think about our friends who are so desperately lonely that they just turn to drinking or gaming or something like this.

Those of you who are soldiers, you know soldiers who are like this. This is the promise that Christianity offers, a happy ending to relationships.

[19:36] Lastly, it offers us a new absence. Verse 4. He, God, will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Isn't that what we long for?

No more death. No more crying. No more sickness. No more people missing church because of the flu.

No more babies dying in mother's wombs. No more parents getting that terminal diagnosis. No more death.

No more death. The former things have passed away. This means that all of the traumas and the abuses and the pains and the miseries of this life, all of the effects of sin will be gone forever. That's the happy ending. That's the happy ending that our faith offers.

The theological doctrine that I'm describing here is called glorification. Glorification. We read it in our confession of faith. Turn with me, if you would, to that again in your bulletin.

[21:00] How does the article concerning life everlasting comfort you? Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness, such that no eye has ever seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

That's a happy ending, friends. That is the satisfaction that we find nothing on this world can satisfy. That is what your friends are looking for.

And that is what we get to offer them. Glorification. Final, forever, perfect, full, blissful union with Christ and with one another. And Revelation 21 promises the happy ending that we all intuitively know is out there.

Your friends know it's out there. They're just desperately looking for something to satisfy it on earth, and it can't. It won't measure up. And you get to say, I know how it's coming.

It's by following and trusting this living God, Jesus Christ. Go to the slide, the next slide. Oh, the slides are down. Okay, it's okay. I'll do it anyways. Oh, there it is.

[22:16] So, one of the best ways I know this is from the play Les Miserables, right? The very end of the play. The people are standing on the barricade, and they're singing about heaven.

Listen to these lyrics. Do you hear the people sing? Lost in the valley of the night, it is the music of a people who are climbing toward the light.

For the wretched of the earth, there is a flame that never dies. Even the darkest night will end, the sun will rise. We will live again in freedom, in the garden of the Lord.

We will walk behind the plowshare. We will put away the sword. The chain will be broken, and all men will have their reward. Will you join in our crusade? Will you be strong and stand with me? Somewhere beyond the barricade is a world we long to see. Do you hear the people sing? Say, do you hear the distant drums?

[23 : 21] It is the future that they bring when tomorrow comes. That's a happy ending. That's a happy ending.

That is glorification. That is the hope that the gospel offers, and it is good news. And our non-Christian friends know it's out there, and all we have to do is tap into it and offer it to them. Now, how do we do it? How do we get there? I have two thoughts on this. One is an active way, and one is a more passive way. The active way is this. When you're meeting with your friends, when you have them over for dinner, as you're talking about life with them over a glass of beer or over the water cooler, whatever it is, just ask these.

This is more active, so it's a little more awkward. But just ask them, hey, if I promise to shut up, you know I'm a Christian. If I promise to shut up, can I just ask you some questions, and I'll just listen? And you're going to ask them these four questions.

Go to the slide. Where did everything come from? Where did everything in our world come from? And just ask them that and let them talk. Don't say anything. Just let them talk.

[24 : 29] And then you ask, well, what went wrong? Because they know something went wrong in our world. Explain what went wrong. Then ask, how is it going to get fixed?

How is it going to be fixed? And they'll start to stutter a little bit. And they'll maybe offer a political solution. Or they'll offer, maybe we try harder. And, you know, they might be really confident. They might not be as confident. But then here's the real one. If you could write the rest of your story and the world's story, how would it go? If you could write the rest of your story and the world's story, how would it go?

And I promise you that in that sentence, you will find a desire for a happy ending. It is going to be there. They know it's there. And that's where you get to tap into it and say, how are we going to pull that off?

That desire that you have for the rest of your story, the rest of our world's story, it's really good. And so far, I haven't seen anything being able close to tap into that, to be capable of that.

[25 : 35] And then the bonus question is, if you could ask God one question, what would it be? And it'll be something, as you build trust with them, very vulnerable. Why did he let X happen? Where was God when so-and-so died in my life?

That's more active, and it is an opportunity for preaching the good news of the happy ending of Revelation 21. That is an awesome opportunity.

It's an intimate moment to tell them about glorification. The kingdom of God is at hand. There is a day coming when every tear will be wiped away. Would you follow the one who brings it with me? You use your unbelieving friends' intuitions and hopes for this world, for peace, for meaning, for belonging, and joy. And you say, you are right to desire that.

And I think Christianity offers it. Can I show you Revelation 21? Total peace, total joy, total belonging. God invites you into that city and into a relationship with him.

[26 : 38] What you long for, the newness that you need, he offers. And you can springboard off of their intuitions the eternity placed within their hearts and show them the kingdom of God.

You see that? So that's the active one. Here's the more passive one. You listen for their longings. You just listen. You pay attention to what they say. And as you pay attention, people will give you these things.

So a couple weeks ago, I met with a student in RUF who's working incredibly hard in school. I told you, he's running his own company. He's trying to figure out what to do with his life. And finally, eventually, he said a throwaway comment.

And I said this at the beginning. He said, I just want a middle class life. And I'm not sure I'm going to be able to get it. I don't know if it's possible. And I said, it may not be.

But that's not the end of your story. God is throwing and hurtling. He's a Christian. I said, God is hurtling your life towards the happy ending of belonging with God and with others in a way that you and I don't understand.

[27 : 43] What the catechism says is beyond what we can imagine. Hold on. Dig deep. Trust anew. He gave me this throwaway, and I got to use that to preach the gospel to him.

Another example, a few weeks ago, I was meeting with a student who has bounced around. She's just, it's tragic. She moves from one romantic sexual relationship to the other. She just slams through them.

She grew up in the church and has now hard rejected the faith. One's absolutely nothing to do with it. And we've met for several weeks, several months now, and we talk about family and her, these serial sexual romantic relationships.

And as I listened, I started to notice a trend in it. And eventually I asked, hey, if I can, I'm hearing you say that what you really want out of all these relationships is stability. You know, you're just moving from person to person to person, hoping that the next person will provide a sense of stability that you never really had when you were growing up.

From what I'm hearing, you know, you never really had a stable life, and you're asking this next romantic relationship to do it. And she stopped and she said, yeah, that might be it. I've never thought of it that way before.

[28 : 53] And I said, look, you know that no romantic relationship is going to give you that stability because you've had a lot of them. And it's not going to work. That's not going to give you the happy ending.

And I said, but what if Jesus could? What if Jesus's whole project was to bring a time and a place, a city that was stable, that actually offers you what you most deeply need?

And she said, I've never heard that version of Christianity before. I need to think about that one. Because all she's heard is, you're a sinner. Repent. And she's rejected that.

But I'm trying to show her that Christianity is good news, that her deepest intuitions for stability in her life are satisfied in following Jesus. And if she, as she repents to follow him, she'll get what she most deeply needs.

All I had to do is listen. All you have to do is listen. They will give you the longings. If you're a non-Christian here, I would challenge you. What are you longing for in this world?

[30 : 00] What's the thing that you are looking for to be your happy ending? The challenge is it's not going to satisfy you. It can't. Your heart was made for something beyond this world.

And the good news is something beyond this world will come into this world. A city, a God, a relationship with that God, no more tears will come.

And you are invited to join that story. This is true, but it's good. And so would you consider following Jesus with me?

That's what we get to invite our friends into, and it is the happy ending that we desperately need. Would you pray with me? Lord in heaven, thank you that you have done everything necessary to restore and heal all things.

That is, Colossians says, you will reconcile all things to yourself through Jesus Christ. Give us faith in that. When all of us feel doubt, when we feel despair, would we return to the end of history, which is the beginning, that you are bringing your city to us.

[31 : 15] Give us courage and wisdom to how to bring that to our friends. And would you be glorified, and would your church be gathered and perfected through it. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.