

Claremont Baptist Church
Sermon Series: Endgame
Sermon: We're In The Endgame Now
Date 29 March 2020

Introduction

Good morning Claremont Baptist Church and everyone who is tuning in this morning. I am truly thankful to the Lord for what He has done with our first entree into the digital world: Last week, we were forced to operate by this platform on YouTube and a few other platforms, and the response has been nothing short of amazing. Thank you to all who have tuned in and shared and so forth. I truly do appreciate it.

This is the second week of going digital for us, there are no people in the church beside the staff that is assisting. It is also the first week of lockdown; many people have spent a good few days not being able to leave their houses. I'm hoping that the sermon will add a welcome break to the humdrum of normalcy; of looking into the same faces and the same walls these last few days.

We have a resource available as well and you can check it out. That is some advice from some people who know more than I do, about what to do when it is a time for lockdown. Please do check it out on the various platforms as well.

Before I proceed with the scripture reading and the exposition of the passage and the preaching of the sermon, you watched a clip from the *Infinity War*, part of the Marvel franchise; a very short clip - thank you to the people that made the movie so we could use that clip. All rights reserved! No profit intended or profit-making intended. The clip is notable for a huge reason that relates to the sermon: One of the main characters, Tony Stark, Iron Man, asked his colleague, a fellow superhero, "*Why did you do this?*" And the fellow superhero responds and says, "*We're in the endgame now...*"

We, too, have just entered into the latest phase as a nation, as a community and specifically, as a community of faith - into the space of lockdown. It's our attempt nationally, locally and individually, to stop the spread of the coronavirus - to make sure that we do not unnecessarily have contact with other people and that social distancing and social solidarity become values that are inculcated in our very souls over the next three weeks.

I'd like to tell you that we are in the endgame now. We are in the fight, literally, for our lives and for the lives of others. In the film of *Infinity War*, everybody knew who the big, bad guy was. And today, in our situation, we know who the bad guy is... It is a virus called COVID-19, a new strain of the Coronavirus. It is unseen and it is an elusive enemy. We never know when it has touched us.

It's got some similarities to the passage that I'd like to read and I'd like to invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 26. We'll be reading from verse 45:

'Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. '

Matthew 26:45-56

May God add a blessing to the public reading and exposition of his word.

The title of the sermon is The Endgame. As I've mentioned in my brief introduction, I would like to exhort you, to encourage you and maybe even to warn you that we are in the endgame now: socially, nationally, familiarly, individually, we are in a space of confinement, in the hope that we will not be touched by the coronavirus. In fact, my hope is not so much that I am not touched by it, but that if I do get touched by it, I don't pass it on to my family members who are weak, fragile and health compromised. You might be in the same situation to your loved ones who would not survive it. Every day the news gets grimmer: more infections and more dying as a result of these infections. We are in the fight for ours and other's lives.

1. KNOW THE ENDGAME

Point number one is simply this: It is the same as the title - The Endgame, In fact, "Know The Endgame" Jesus knew his endgame and that's why I started reading from verse 45 and not verse 47 (which would kind of be how the Bible portions the various passages)

Verse 45 and 46 reads as follows:

'Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" '

It's important to know that Jesus knows exactly what's going down. He's not caught by surprise. He doesn't even seem too perturbed about what will happen. He was perturbed just before this, when he asks, "Are you still sleeping?" when he returns to the disciples after an all-night of prayer. He asked some of his disciples to assist him by keeping watch over him, and keeping watch over him probably means two things:

- To help keep him awake. If I want to pray all through the night, I will need someone's assistance to help keep me awake - I have been known to go on my knees, to start praying, and 10 minutes later to be found with my head on the bed, eyes closed and nose snoring - with the intention of praying. Jesus said "*watch over me,*" and he said, "*Please if I do nod off, or stray from the purpose of this deep intercession with God, come and bring me back to that purpose.*"
- He wants them to watch over his safety. This is the humanity of Jesus coming out and saying, "Listen, I'm a little weak, I'm a little bit vulnerable and I'm emotionally fragile right now. Please keep watch over me."

So Jesus gives a stern rebuke to them when he comes. It's not a question of "*are you still sleeping?*" Jesus knows they are sleeping. It's a rebuke: "*Guys, I have invested so much into your lives, I performed miracles, I've supernaturally calmed stormy waters, I rebuked winds to dissipate and I provided food for you when there was nothing. I did it out of thin air by the command of my word. I've asked you just tonight to get me through this very emotional, taxing period,*" and they could not do it.

Before I even get into the major points of the sermon, can I just tell you that as valuable as you are to the work of the kingdom, and as great as you might be in terms of your service to a local church and congregation, if you are sitting under my voice right now, I want you to know that you are too weak and too fragile to truly affect anything in the heart and the plan of God.

The disciples who would become world changes just weeks after this are in a position where Jesus explicitly asked them, "*please help me in this way,*" and they explicitly are too weak to help Jesus.

Let this be a reminder, brothers and sisters and friends, that in and of ourselves, there is not much that we can do. In John chapter 15, especially verse five, Jesus says that you've got to be connected to the Father; you've got to be grafted into the vine. If you are on your own, there is absolutely nothing that you can do of worth for Him.

The disciples found themselves in this situation. Look at verse 46: Jesus understands that this is the endgame. He knows it is His Endgame. In the little clip that you saw Tony

Stark asked, “why did you do this?” thinking that maybe if he had died and sacrificed himself, that possibly he could have stopped it from getting to this stage that, the battle might have been cut short. But his colleague knew different - he had peaked into the future. He had done the strategic analysis. He had crunched the numbers and done the math and realized that the only way to win this war was to get to the endgame and to allow Tony to live (at this point). So he makes a deal with the devil, gives him that gem, that Infinity Stone, and he says, “*don't touch Tony.*”

You see Tony did not know that he is in the endgame. The other guy did. It's important that you know the phase of life that you're in, that you know the place of battle in which you stand and that you know the place of life that you are functioning in right now. It is very important.

I am a minister, a reverend, a pastor, whatever you want to call it. I am a full-time Christian worker and preacher and I love what I do. It is the greatest blessing to my sense of well-being and purpose to do what I do. But when I get home, I am not Pastor Peter. In fact, on many Sundays, most Sundays, if not every Sunday, there will be at least one or two people who come to me, shake my hand and they will say, “*Well done, Peter. Good sermon today!*” “*It challenged me. I liked the way you used that phrase,*” or they complement my sermon in some way, form or manner.

I can tell you that my 14-year-old son in the 14 years that he's been alive, has never, ever when we get home, told me, daddy, that was a great sermon. It's never happened. You see, because to them, I am not Pastor Peter. I am Daddy: the PlayStation provider. That's who I am. I am daddy, the Magic Company coins provider for when we take them to the arcade. I am the guy that puts food on the table. I'm the guy that they jump on in the bed and tickle - That's who I am. I am not 'Pastor' Peter. There are some people, very few, who might treat me with reverence and respect - Not at home. I'm the guy that does the washing and, at least 50% of the time, I'm the guy that does the cooking, too. I'm not that guy at home, and it's important to know my space and my place and the lane that I'm in.

Now, this is not that motivational message that says, “Let no one tell you who you are, This is for you to understand what phase of the battle you are in. Tony Stark was misinformed. He didn't know and got caught up in the heat of his battle with Thanos. He didn't know that everything was passed. He is in the endgame now.

Jesus knew the disciples didn't know. They were still under the impression that Jesus will continue to pull miracles out of his bag of divine tricks and save the day. Yes, he would but they just didn't understand that it came through across. Know the phase of the battle that you are in.

If you know the phase of the battle that you're in, it will take the frown away from your face. And I want you to understand that the frown that Jesus had, was looking towards the reality of the suffering of torture of the cross and of a tomb. But what put the smile

back on his face was the ultimate purpose for which why he was doing it. In fact, when he asked, “Are you still sleeping and resting,” it jogged his memory. Jogged his mind back to why he was doing it: “These sheep, these silly human beings need me to go to that cross. They need me to be betrayed.”

Look at verse 47.

*'While he was still speaking, Judas, **one of the Twelve**, arrived...'*

I want you to look at the titles that are given to Judas, the first title that is given to him is 'one of the twelve' he is noted here, as one of those who are in the inner circle of Jesus. Jesus had the 12, he had the 72, and he had the 120 and the crowd. Even in the twelve, he had an inner circle (within the inner circle). Judas is as close to Jesus as anyone could possibly be. Even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray him; even though he knew the cup from which he was to drink. The author of Matthew's Gospel still says Judas is one on the twelve.

'...With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. (Matthew 26:47-49)

Folks I want to tell you that danger, especially in the endgame, does not always come with a big sign or flashing red light. Sometimes the endgame is signaled by the ultimate betrayal from those who are closest to you.

During Jesus's endgame, he knew he could resist the whitewashed tombs of empty religiosity represented by the Pharisees and the Sadducees (at least most of them). Jesus knew that he could resist the type of pious academic discussions, even when he was 12 years old, that they levelled with him and at him - when he “got lost” at the temple. He knew that he could overcome even the temptation of Satan himself. When Satan took him to a mountaintop and said, *“throw yourself off this mountain. I’m sure you have the power for angels to come and fix you,”* and just by the way, Jesus refers to them again because he does have that power. He knows that he's got the power He could get himself out of any situation.

But his Endgame is activated, this last phase of the battle before victory comes at the betrayal and the disappointment of those closest to him. The kiss of betrayal by Judas, some of the other disciples falling asleep – Lazy, still resting. It is a low point in the realization of Jesus. But it's a great point for him to understand that this is why these sinners, these inept followers of Yahweh: they need a saviour and Jesus was that Savior. You need to know your endgame.

I want to tell you that, just from a Coronavirus perspective, a lockdown perspective, know your endgame because we are in the endgame. Now is not the time to be frivolous with public health. Now is the time to take the warnings seriously.

If we wrote this chapter of the story of your life, I would rather have you respond like a mini Jesus than being someone who was either lazy and refused to put in the work to stay awake and support someone of value, or maybe even be someone that betrayed someone of value. I would rather you be Jesus. Christians, brothers and sisters in the Lord, and anyone else, we are being called to be Jesus at this time.

No doubt there will be many who will disappoint us. No doubt there will be many who will not respond in a really healthy way, but I want to encourage you to take control of your own mind, of your own emotions, of your own actions and do what Jesus did. Take the traumatic frown, of knowing what's lying ahead, and turn it into a smile for you know the endgame. And you know your purpose.

- The first point is to Know Your Endgame.

Look at this bridging comment I'd like to make before I get to point number two:

The first title for Judas is **“one of the twelve,”** then he is called **“the betrayer,”** for the second time - first in verse 46 and then 48 says, 'Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: *“The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.”* Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, *“Greetings, Rabbi!”* and kissed him. '

Judas plays it normally. I mean, he could have just come and said, *“There’s Jesus, arrest that man! The one with the white robe,”* No! He decided to betray Jesus with an intimate act - with a kiss (probably a hug as well). He also greets him with the friendliest of terms, *“Greetings.”*

Jesus responds knowing exactly what's going down, and what the intentions of Judas are. He gives Judas his third title (the first one is **“one the 12,”** an acknowledgement of his special place in the inner circle of Jesus and the second one is **“betrayer,”** his current purpose which will usher in the endgame). The title from Jesus himself (and I love this point) is **“Friend,”** *“do what you came to do.”*

2. KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The second point is to know your enemy. I'm going to contradict what I just said, about knowing your enemy: Jesus knew his enemy, but didn't treat him as such. Jesus greeted him, genuinely, not sarcastically. I can tell you that if I was Jesus (be grateful that I'm not), if I knew that you were coming to betray me, and you're going to greet me as if nothing is wrong, by using the greeting and a kiss on the cheek as a sign for the officials to arrest me; I can tell you, there will be a few superlatives coming out of my mouth. There'll be a few insults directed at you. My anger will be verbose and obvious. My anger would be directed at you in ways that you can only imagine. Even just thinking of it is making me angry.

But Jesus does not fall to the temptation of anger. Jesus looks at Judas, knowing the endgame is here, but he doesn't allow it to set the agenda for his demeanor, for his

ministry, nor for his interpersonal relationships with those around him no matter where they are in this story. He says, “*friend.*”

Let me pause here for a moment and become a little bit more personal to anybody listening to me right now. I don't know your phase in life; I don't know the chapter of the book that you're in, in terms of your life story, but I do know that we all share a common story right now: We're in lockdown. I also know that if you are at home with people that you might not get along with, and it's going to make lockdown very difficult. You know what it's like to experience many betrayals and little irritations but still get along with people - it is difficult

I want to look at you and I want to say something to you and I want to get this understanding across and deeply rooted, hopefully in your understanding and in your soul: That no matter what you have done, no matter who you've done it to and no matter how you've betrayed Jesus Himself - you might have cursed him, you might have sold him out or you might be the prodigal that said, “I don't want him anymore.” You might be the atheist or agnostic that even denied his very existence - but Jesus is looking at you in this time, in the endgame, and he says, “Friend.” He is being genuine.

He is inviting you into his inner circle. You see, at this point, Judas could start turning around. The kiss had just been given, but the fact that Jesus said, “friend,” meant that Judas could still have said, “forgive me, Jesus.” “I'm sorry for what I've done.” “Guys, sorry, I've got the wrong guy. This greeting was just because I haven't seen him for a while. We'll have to reconvene this meeting some other time and I'll take you to the traitor at another point...” But Judas doesn't do that - he betrays Jesus, yet Jesus still calls him a friend.

If you've betrayed Jesus or if you've sinned and betrayed others, we might not forgive you that easily, but I want to tell you that Jesus forgives. Simply come to Him, repent, confess, and he's sure to make that title of “friend” a relational reality - if you just meet him.

3. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

You must know the endgame: the phase of the battle that you are in. You must know your enemy, with that you need to know who your friends are, as well. And last but not least: you need to know your purpose.

I refer to this a little bit before in my introductory comments, but look at what Jesus says:

'Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions...' Matthew is being very nice to Peter here because he was the one - my namesake, '...reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. '

This was no mere act of defiance and defense; This was a full-on attack to one of the soldiers and/or officials with a, probably blunt, sword. With the force of his swing, he swipes off and cuts off the ear of that official. Jesus says, *“Put your sword back in its place,”* and again, there's a tone of sternness, there's a tone of rebuke and correction that Jesus speaks to Peter with when he says it. In another account. Jesus picks up the ear and performs a miracle just to show, “I have miraculous power and if I wanted, I could make all of you cut your own throats, but I won't.” “I'd rather use my power to heal than to defend myself.” This he tries to get across to Peter and says:

' “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ’

The answer is yes. It's a rhetorical question. It must happen in this way.

You see, Jesus knew that his purpose was not just to walk the earth, and be the greatest moral and ethical teacher that this world has ever seen. Jesus wanted to confirm the Old Testament prophets, so that the validity of Scripture, of the word of God between the covers of the Bible, all 66 books, specifically all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, spanning Genesis all the way through to Malachi, that what he was really doing here, was not just getting to the cross (which he could have done easily if he wanted to, and just die and raise himself again) but he understood that in this battle, in this endgame, what he needs to do is to fulfil the words of the prophets. No one else knew this. Retrospectively, we've got the New Testament, we can read and we find out the thoughts of God Himself. We can look back and have some understanding.

Conclusion

- You need to know the phase of the battle that you are in - know your endgame!
- Know your enemy and thereby know your friend - as Christians, we don't make the distinction. The enemy slaps my left side, I turn my right side and say, “Take another shot, buddy.” You tell me, *“Walk with me for a mile and carry my bags,”* I say, *“It'll be my pleasure to walk for two miles sir.”* We don't make a distinction between friends and enemies. Know your friend, know your enemy, turn that frown into a smile.
- And last but not least: you want to know your purpose. Jesus knew every minute purpose as to why he was doing what he was doing. To put it more specific, and succinctly, why he was not doing what he was not doing: Not calling on the 12 legions of angels, not speaking a creative word that turned men into monkeys or turns the swords into candy floss because he could do it, but he would not do it because of the veracity of God's Word. The prophetic prowess of the Old Testament is at stake and his purpose is to fulfil that as well.

And then he says, “you have a purpose.” And he says this to the church, “You have a purpose in going through the challenge of COVID-19.” There is a purpose for going through the lockdown. There is no more rumour, there are no more possibilities. We are where we are; it is what it is. The Coronavirus has taken root in South Africa. Many will get infected and we pray that many will not die.

We need to do whatever we can; suffer if we must so that we get through this. Don't use your power. Maybe apply that really quickly to where we are as a nation: My wife went to buy some groceries - some stock, bottled water, juices, breakfast biscuits, a whole lot of stuff. One of the things that we are doing to respond to this crisis is to bless our Healthcare workers. We'll be putting quite a few packages together that contain some of the items I just mentioned and more. And we'll be taking them around to some of the clinics, both private and government, and just blessing our pharmacists and nurses and doctors, and whoever else we can find. And that'll be a gift from the Claremont Baptist Church.

We are doing that because we understand that people are often unappreciative of the sacrifices that other people make. I would encourage you to, as a Christian specifically, to embody the type of ethic that says, *“the purpose of coronavirus and lockdown and the phase of the battle that we're in is not just my discomfort, but it's the opportunity I get to use my faith to minister to others,”* Such as at this store, it's called Giant's, it's a giant of a store, a wholesaler. My wife had to wait two hours in line just to get into the store. And the reason she waited that long is because, I would say, 99% of the people who were there did it not go and buy stock to bless anybody with. They went to stock up for the next month for themselves.

Although that might not be a sin as defined in the Bible, there have been calls that went out to say the stores will be open. Please do not panic-buy because you will be taking stock from shelves that could feed people who are only going to get paid in the next few days, at the end of the month. There might not be enough for them when their time comes around. Buy what you need. Come back when you need more. The government has guaranteed that it will be so. I want to say don't you use your power, your purchasing power, to disadvantage the next person.

That's only one way. You see the devil comes to Jesus at his great temptation, and he says, ‘throw yourself off this mountain,’ You know, ‘turn the stones into bread. Feed yourself. You've got the power.’ And Jesus says, ‘I will not use my power just to satisfy myself.’ ‘I will use my power to turn a foe into a friend, to turn a cross of torture into the symbol of salvation and to turn a tomb, a prison for the dead, into the catapult of salvation.

Use your faith. Use your power. Know your purpose as Christians at this time and rise up and sacrifice for others.

Know your endgame, know of your enemy and your friend, and know your purpose.

