

The End of Time

Edward Payson (1783–1827)

Revelation 10:5-7 *And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven; and swore by Him that liveth forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.*

The commencement of this chapter St. John informs us, that he saw in vision a mighty angel descend from heaven, clothed with a cloud, and having a rainbow upon his head, while his countenance shone resplendent as the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. This angel, placing one foot upon the land and the other upon the sea, lifted his hand to heaven, and swore by the everlasting God, who created the heavens, the earth, and the sea, with all which they contain, and who therefore possesses both the right and the power to prescribe limits to their duration, that there should be time no longer but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

My hearers, we have witnessed, and perhaps reflected and moralized on the lapse of time. In this passage we are called to contemplate its termination. We are called to see that current, on whose bosom we have been borne ever since our existence commenced, swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. This forms a most interesting object of contemplation; but it is too vast, and embraces too many particulars, to be seen by us at once as a whole. Let us, then, divide it into parts, and consider them separately. The several particulars which it is necessary to consider may be included in an answer to the three following questions:

1. What is meant by the end of time?
2. When will the event denoted by this phrase arrive?
3. What will be the attending circumstances and consequences of this event?

I. What is Meant by the End of Time?

In other words, what is meant by the declaration, *“There shall be time no longer”*?

Time, so far as man has any concern with it, is that portion of duration which is commensurate with the existence of our world, and which is measured by its diurnal and annual revolutions. It began when this world began to exist. Agreeably we are informed that, in the beginning, that is the beginning of time, God created the heavens and the earth. Previous to this event there was, properly speaking, no such thing as time. There was duration, there was eternity, but time there was none. So long as this world continues to exist, time will continue; and when it shall cease to exist, the end of time will have arrived; or, in the language of our text, there will be time no longer. **Therefore, the end of time and the end of the world are synonymous.**

II. When Will Time End?

When will the event denoted by these expressions arrive? We learn from our text that it will arrive when the mystery of God shall be finished. To that period the oath of the angel refers; and when that period arrives there shall be time no longer. By the mystery of God is intended the design, or object, for which He created the world, and toward the accomplishment of which He has ever since been advancing. This design is here called a mystery, that is, something secret, or concealed; because, until God revealed it, it was entirely hidden from mortals; and because it is still but partially revealed. So far as was necessary for the information of mankind, God has communicated it to His servants the prophets, and the other inspired writers of the sacred volume, that through their instrumentality it might be made known to others. From them we learn that **God’s great object in creating this world and its inhabitants was to gratify and glorify Himself.** Their language is, *“The Lord hath made all things for Himself”* (Proverbs 16:4); *“Thou Lord hast created all things; and for Thy pleasure they are and were created”* (Revelation 4:11); and they represent God as saying, respecting everyone who is called by His name, *“I have created him for Mine own glory”* (Isaiah 43:7). Now God at once glorifies and gratifies Himself when He displays His perfections in His works. Some of His perfections, as, for instance, His power, wisdom and goodness, He displayed in the creation of the world; and they, as well as some other perfections of His nature, are still displayed in its providential government. **But the principal display of His perfections is made in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ, the great object to which all His works of creation and providence ultimately refer.**

Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom

Agreeably, inspiration informs us, that for Jesus Christ all things were created (Colossians 1:16); that all power in heaven and earth is given to Him (Matthew 28:18); that to Him all judgment is committed (John 5:22), that He is made head over all things to His church (Ephesians 1:22); and that to Him there is given *“dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him”* (Daniel 7:13-14). This kingdom here mentioned is usually called Christ's *mediatorial kingdom*; and over this kingdom He is to reign so long as the sun and moon endure; that is, in other words, until time shall be no more. **When the purposes for which this kingdom was given to Christ and set up in the world are accomplished, the mystery of God, mentioned in our text, will be finished.**

Now the purposes for which this kingdom was given to Christ, include two things:

1. **The first is, the complete salvation of all who are given to Him by the Father.** We are informed that by Him, as the Captain of their salvation, God is bringing many sons to glory. He must then reign, His mediatorial kingdom must continue, until all the chosen sons of God are brought home to glory, or to mansions prepared for them in heaven, their Father's house. Hence our Savior declares that, before the end shall come, the gospel of His kingdom *“must be preached to all nations”* (Matthew 24:14). The reason is obvious. The destined subjects of this kingdom, the chosen sons of God and heirs of salvation, are to be gathered, we read, *“out of every kindred and nation and tongue and people”* (Revelation 5:9). Of course, the gospel, by which they are to be called and gathered into the kingdom of Christ, must be preached to all nations before the mystery of God can be finished, before the end of time and of the world can arrive.
2. **The second thing, included in these purposes, is the complete and final subjugation of all Christ's enemies.** Agreeably, an apostle informs us, that *“He must reign till all enemies are put under His feet”*; and that, when this is done, *“when He shall have put down all opposing rule, and power, and authority, then the end shall come”* (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). This event synchronizes, as our text informs us, with the sounding of the trumpet of the seventh angel. Accordingly, we read in a succeeding chapter that when the seventh angel sounded, great voices were heard in heaven, saying, *“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and Savior”* (Revelation 11:15).

Thus when all Christ's chosen people are brought home to glory, and all His incorrigible enemies are placed under His feet, the mystery of God which He is now accomplishing will be finished, and then will the end come and there will be time no longer.

Time, then, may be considered as an island, raised out of the ocean of eternity by the Creator for specific purposes, and destined, when these purposes shall be accomplished, to sink again and be lost in the ocean from which it rose, and whose waves on every side bound its shores. The appointed day and hour when this shall take place is known, we are informed, neither to man nor to angel, but to God only. It must however be obvious to all who can discern the signs of the times, that though it is still at a considerable distance, the course of events indicates its approach. We have already remarked that, before the end can come, the gospel must be preached to all nations. And how much has been recently done, how much is now doing and with increasing success, to accomplish this work! God's ancient people, the Jews, must also be called into the fold of Christ, and with them the fullness of the Gentiles. And present appearances indicate, as I need not inform you, that these events are not very far distant. The downfall of Papal superstition, of Mohammedanism, and of the Turkish Empire, are predicted events, which must take place before the end of time can arrive. And that these events are not very distant, who can doubt? The great mystery of God is then evidently approaching its consummation, the end of all things is comparatively at hand.

And it becomes us to remember that, with respect to ourselves, the end of time is still more near. **To each individual the hour of death is the end of time.** When that hour arrives to anyone, God does in effect say to him, "There shall be time no longer."

III. Circumstances and Consequences

Let us now inquire: What will be the attending circumstances and consequences of this event? That this question may receive a proper answer, it must be considered with reference to ourselves, our race, and the world which we inhabit.

A. Ourselves

With respect to ourselves considered as individuals, the end of time is synonymous with the end of our lives; it will be attended by circumstances and followed by consequences most important and interesting.

1. **In the first place, we shall then be separated at once from all temporal and earthly objects.** The relations which we now sustain to such objects, and the connections which now bind us to them, will be entirely and forever dissolved. The world will no longer be our habitation; this country will no longer be our country; our houses, lands, and other temporal possessions, for which we have labored, will no longer be our property. One moment after our death they will no more be ours than if we had never possessed them. The richest and the poorest of us will then be reduced in this respect to a perfect equality. The places which now know us will know us no more forever. Of all our possessions nothing will remain to us but the necessity of accounting for them to our Judge, and the consequences of the manner in which we have employed them. Then too, the ties which now bind us to our fellow creatures will be dissolved. We may now have numerous relations and connections; we may surround ourselves by a large circle of admiring, affectionate friends; but death will separate us from them all, and in one moment after its arrival we shall be as friendless as the beggar who dies unknown in a foreign land. Our surviving friends may indeed weep over our remains; they may honor them with sumptuous funeral rites; they may say much in our praise, and give us a place in their memories; but we shall know nothing of all this, nor, if we could, would it afford us the smallest gratification. In fine, the world with all which it contains will be no more to us than if it ceased to exist, at the very moment of our dissolution. To these remarks there may be one exception. If we are real Christians, if we have become united to Christ as our Head, and to His people as fellow members, we have formed a union which death itself cannot dissolve. The truly pious will meet all their pious friends again, meet and know them as friends, and be separated from them no more forever.

2. **In the second place, with the end of time our state of probation, and our day of grace will end.** We shall be removed from our present religious privileges and means of spiritual improvement. Not another petition can we ever offer, not another sentence can we ever read in the word of God; not another offer of pardon and salvation can we ever hear; not another opportunity of warning, or of doing good to our fellow mortals can we enjoy. Prepared or unprepared we must go. Our accounts, whether ready or not ready for the inspection of our Judge, must be sealed up to the judgment of the great day; our plans, our begun enterprises, our works, whether finished or unfinished, must all be left just as they are. No part of the work which God has required to be performed in time, can be done in eternity; for there is in this sense no work nor device.

3. **In the third place, when time ends, eternity will begin.** The moment in which we leave this temporary and mutable state, we shall enter a state which is eternal, and, of course, unchangeable. Sound philosophy unites with revelation in declaring, that no essential change can take place in eternity. The moment in which we leave the body and enter the future world, eternity will set its stamp upon us, exclaiming, "Such as I find you, you shall continue to be while I endure." *"He that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is sinful, let him be sinful still"* (Revelation 22:11). It is necessary, however, to recollect that, when the good man leaves the body, he leaves all his remaining sins and imperfections behind, and enters eternity a pure and spotless spirit; while on the other hand, the wicked leave all their apparent goodness behind, and enter eternity with the character and feelings of a fiend; for, says our Savior, *"To him that hath, more shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have"* (Matthew 13:12).

B. The Human Race

Let us next consider the circumstances and consequences which will attend and follow the end of time with respect to the human race. Considering them separately as individuals, these circumstances and consequences will be the same to each of them, as have already been mentioned, but we now speak of them collectively in the number, including ourselves.

1. **And first, the general resurrection will take place when the end of time shall arrive.** Then *“all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation”* (John 5:28-29); for *“there shall be a resurrection not of the just only but also of the unjust”* (Acts 24:15).
2. **In the second place, the Day of Judgment—the great day for which all other days were made—will arrive at the end of time.** The Judge will be seen by every human eye, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; the whole human family, small and great, shall be placed before His tribunal to be judged and rewarded according to their works; the righteous and the wicked shall be separated from each other; the former shall be called to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, while the latter will be doomed to depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. These sentences will be no sooner pronounced than executed. The righteous will ascend triumphantly with their Savior to heaven, there to live and reign with Him forever; while the wicked will be thrust down to their destined prison, between which and the abodes of the blessed a great and impassable gulf will be fixed.

C. The Earth

It remains only to consider what will then be the fate of the globe which we inhabit. It has already been seen that **the end of time and the end of this world must take place at the same moment. While the world continues, time must continue, and when the world ends, time ends.** Agreeably, we are informed that, when the period referred to shall arrive, *“the earth with all its works shall be burnt up”* (2 Peter 3:10); for then the design for which it was created will have been accomplished, and its longer existence would be useless. Then the gold, the silver, the jewels, and all the glittering but delusive objects, for which so many thousands have bartered their souls, shall be destroyed; then the monuments, the palaces, the cities, which their vain builders fondly hoped would render their names imperishable, shall be whelmed in one common ruin; then the exploits and achievements, the civil and political systems, from which their authors hoped to derive a deathless fame, shall all be blotted out and forgotten; then those literary works on which the impious pride of man had inscribed the epithet

“immortal” will be consumed like a worthless scrap of paper. In fine, **all the works of men will pass away with the world which contained them, and it will be clearly seen that they “built too low, who built beneath the skies”; and that all who did not labor for the glory and honor and immortality beyond the grave, labored in vain, and spent their strength for nothing.**

Reflections

It will have already occurred to you, my hearers, that we have led your attention to the subject before us with special reference to the circumstances in which we meet. We have just passed the line which separates two of those divisions of time by which our short span is measured out. We have bid an eternal farewell to one year, and entered on another, which to some of us must, and to any of us may, prove the last. Yes, to some of us the end of time will arrive before the close of the present year, with its attending circumstances and consequences. There are some present who have reason to say, *“My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me”* (Job 17:1). Whether I shall preach another new year’s sermon, whether you will hear it, God only knows. During the past year, 28 individuals of this society, 19 adults and 9 children have passed the bounds of time and entered into eternity. This number does not include those who have died while absent from us. To an equal number the end of time will probably arrive during the present year. As none of us can say that he shall not be among this number, let us pause and, with the end of time full in our view, indulge those reflections which it is suited to excite, and for which the occasion calls.

1. In view of this subject, how insignificant, how unworthy of an immortal being, do all merely temporal and earthly pursuits appear!

Look at these pursuits, ye who are engaged in them, and then at the scene before us, and methinks you can scarcely fail to be convinced of the irrationality of your conduct. You have spent many years in these pursuits, and what is all that you have really acquired worth? What will all the connections you have formed, and all the friends you have acquired, be worth to you, when the hour of separation, which may come tomorrow, shall arrive? What will all the applause you ever have obtained, or ever can obtain, be worth to you, when your ear, closed in death, can no longer hear it? What will a portion in this world be worth to you, when the world itself, with all which it contains, is burnt up? What is it worth to those who died the last year? The answer to all these questions is short—***just nothing.***

You have spent many years then, the most valuable years of life—years which if spent aright would have secured eternal salvation—in acquiring nothing. Nor is this all. By thus laboring for temporal, when you ought to have been pursuing spiritual and eternal objects, you have incurred the just displeasure of your Creator; you have been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath (Romans 2:5). Yes, sinner, **the only treasure you have accumulated is a treasure of wrath.** Of all that you have acquired this, this alone, can you carry with you when you leave this world. Can you then deny that your conduct has been irrational in the extreme? If you do deny it let me ask, whether you really believe that your souls are immortal? If so, you believe that they will exist after death, that they will be in existence a hundred or a thousand years hence, and that, when that period arrives, happiness will appear to them as desirable, and misery as dreadful, as it does now. **Have you then secured anything which will promote your happiness a hundred years after death?** Have not all your cares and labors had respect to the present life? And if this be not folly what is? Surely the folly of him who wastes his childhood and youth in idleness and play, is wisdom itself compared with the folly of him who lays up his treasure on earth, and makes no provision but for the present life.

That you may be still farther convinced of this, contrast your conduct with that of **the real Christian, who has diligently sought, in God's appointed way, for glory and honor and immortality beyond the grave.** He has laid up something for eternity, something which will render him completely happy when time shall be no more. And the portion which he has secured is not only valuable but safe; for it is laid up in heaven. This world, with all which it contains, may be burnt up, without diminishing his treasure in the smallest degree. Death may come, the end of time may come, and his happiness, instead of being diminished, will be immeasurably increased; for at death he goes **to** his portion; while you, at death, will go **from** yours forever. Is not his conduct then wisdom and yours folly? Would it not be folly to invest all your property in a bank which you knew would fail, or embark it without insurance on board a vessel which you knew would founder? If any of you are convinced that it would be, remember that it is not yet too late to be wise. The end of time is not yet arrived to you; and until that arrives, you will enjoy the day of grace and the means of salvation. O, then, improve them while you may. Whatever you do must be done quickly, for your time is short, and there is no work nor device nor knowledge in the grave whither you are hastening (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

2. My hearers, in full view of the end of time let me ask, are you prepared for it?

Are you prepared to part with your friends, to leave all your temporal possessions, to be removed from the means of grace, to enter the world of spirits, the eternal world, to have the stamp of eternity placed upon your characters? In a word, are you prepared to meet your God, to stand before Him in judgment and see the earth sink from under your feet in the flames of one wide-wasting, all-devouring conflagration? If you are not prepared, nay, if you have the smallest doubt of your own preparedness, give yourselves no rest till all scriptural cause of doubt is removed.

3. My Christian friends, proper views of the subject before us will be useful to us in approaching the table of our Lord.

In approaching that table, we shall act a part in the great work which God is carrying on, and commemorate an event which constitutes its cornerstone. **We shall scarcely assert more than the Scriptures will warrant if we assert that the world was created to serve as a spot on which the cross of Christ might be erected.** In approaching this table, we shall also observe an institution which forms a connecting chain between the first and second coming of Christ, or between his crucifixion and the end of the world. The return of each communion season adds a new link to this chain; and though we shall all be laid in the grave long before its completion, yet the work will be carried on by successive generations of believers, and the Lord's supper will be observed for the last time on earth but a few days before His second coming. But for an eternity of ages after that event, the blessings which are here symbolically represented and received by faith will continue to be enjoyed by all who ever worthily partook of the Lord's Supper.

My brethren, are you prepared to come and observe in a proper manner an institution so sacred, so interesting, so intimately connected with the most important event of time, and taking hold in its consequences of the remotest ages of eternity? Can you come and by faith look back along this chain to the cross of Christ, as the foundation of your hopes, and then look forward to the end of time and see Him coming in the clouds of heaven to fulfill, and more than fulfill all your hopes? Surely if you can do this, you will be ready to say with Paul, *"I am crucified to the world and the world to me"* (Galatians 6:14). What have I any more to do with its idols or its perishing objects? What indeed have I to do with it, or in it, but to perform the appointed duties of my station and finish the work for which I was placed here?

Too long have I run in the race with men of this world, who have their portion in this life. Too long have I been a competitor for the worthless prize which they are pursuing. But I will be so no longer. I forsake the race, I stand aside, and say, let others pursue and obtain, if they can, the pleasures, the applause, the possessions, which this world offers to her votaries. I resign them all. I have another race to run, I have nobler objects to pursue; and to this race, to these objects, to the service of my Savior, and to the pleasures, the honors, the possessions of eternity, I now, in the presence of God, consecrate my future life and all my powers. My brethren, can you hesitate to adopt and carry into effect this language?

Do not those of our number, who died the past year now wish that they had adopted it? Could you be assured that to you the end of time will arrive before the conclusion of the present year, would you not aim to adopt it? Why not then adopt it now? He whom you call your Master requires you to be always ready, and waiting for His coming, because you know not when He will come, and because He will come at an hour when He is not expected (Luke 12:40). Is He then really your Master, or is He not? **You can prove that He is only by obeying Him.** Before you approach His table, then, and seal your covenant engagements afresh, inquire whether it is your present fixed purpose to obey this command. Inquire whether you are proving that you truly repent of the sins of the past year, by sincerely resolving that you will endeavor not to bring them into the year on which you have entered.

To conclude: On the last new year's day, many who are now gone from us were in your situation. They sat in your seats; they heard such truths as you are now hearing; they saw the Lord's Table spread before them. And now, after the lapse of one year only, one short year, they are in eternity; some of them, we hope, in heaven; others, we fear, not. Such a change, such a mighty change can one year make. And as one year since they were in your situation, so before this year closes, some of you will probably be in theirs. Yes, some of you have heard the last new year's sermon.