

“I am with you always.” It was a whirlwind of a week. We rode into Jerusalem with the crowds chanting that Jesus was the king, the **“Son of David.”** Jesus shut down the temple and stopped the sacrificial system. He debated with the authorities in the temple. Jesus then left the temple for the final time, saying, **“not one stone will be left on another.”** We sat with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, as he told us we needed to be ready for the **“end of the age,”** for we did not know the **“day or hour”** it would strike like lightning.

We celebrated the Passover meal with Jesus, as he told us he was laying down his body and blood, giving himself to us, and that he wanted us to do the same in his memory. He told us we would all abandon him and fall from faith. We argued with Jesus and told him we were ready to go to death with him. Then we gathered in the Garden of Gethsemane and he told us to be ready—to **“stay awake and pray.”** Jesus said, **“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Jesus prayed, over and over, saying, **“Father, not my will, but your will be done.”** And we slept. Three times he tried to get us to wake up and pray, but we kept falling asleep.

Then the hour Jesus had warned us about, **“the end of the age,”** came upon us like a **“thief in the night.”** Judas, one of our own, brought a crowd armed with swords to arrest Jesus. We hadn’t prayed, so we had no strength. Our flesh won the victory over our spirit and we lashed out in violence, trying to fight to protect Jesus. Jesus told us, **“Put your sword away. If you live by the sword, you will die by the sword.”** Jesus had prayed and so he had the strength of the Creator himself within him. Jesus said “yes” to his spirit and “no” to his flesh. He reminded us that the Lord’s angels were all around us and would protect us when the Father wanted. But our flesh was too weak and we again gave into its desires, as we fled into the night. We all abandoned Jesus—we were living by fear. Jesus stayed steadfast to the Father’s will—he was living by faith.

Then Peter followed Jesus from a distance, wanting to fulfill his promise to die with Jesus. Jesus was brought to trial before the Sanhedrin Council. Jesus was silent and refused to defend himself. After Peter saw Jesus condemned to death by our own leaders and authorities, he was scared again. The flesh overpowered him again as three times he was accused of being one of Jesus’s followers and three times he lied, denying any connection to Jesus. Peter said “no” to Jesus and “yes” to his flesh, over and over. Judas also was crushed and overwhelmed by the feelings of his flesh—he gave into his sorrow and killed himself. Then the crowds and authorities gave into their flesh, into their fears, and pushed Governor Pontius Pilate into crucifying Jesus.

But Jesus refused to be moved from his Father’s will. Jesus kept saying “yes” to his Father and “no” to his flesh. Jesus was flogged half to death and then they took him out of the city and crucified him. They nailed him to a cross, sentencing him to death as an enemy of the state. Over and over those who passed by, including the authorities and even those crucified next to Jesus, mocked him. They told Jesus, **“Come down from the cross”** and **“save yourself!”** But Jesus said “no” to his flesh and its desire to survive, so he could say “yes” to the Spirit and his Father’s will. Not once was Jesus moved from his faith. He died with a loud shout as darkness covered the earth and earthquakes broke open the rocks around us. It was a terrifying spectacle.

Then they buried Jesus and Rome sealed his tomb and put soldiers in place to guard it. But on Sunday morning, the third day, the women who had been following Jesus with us went to the tomb and found the soldiers like dead men and an angel sitting on the giant stone which had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. Jesus’s body was not there. The angel told them that Jesus was **“raised from the dead”** and that if we wanted to see him we would have to follow him—follow him back to the mountain in Galilee where he had taught us his Way. So we traveled the 70 miles back to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had first taught us. And there we saw him, raised from the dead. Jesus told us, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** Then Jesus looked at us one last time and said, **“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

We desperately needed to hear that. The **“end of the age”** had happened and we had failed to be ready. We had forgotten the Creator’s presence over the last week. We had failed to pray. We had given in to the sadness and fear that possessed our hearts and flesh. We had said “yes” to our flesh and “no” to Jesus. But Jesus had never given up on us, he had never abandoned us, even as we abandoned him. When he said to us, **“I am with you always,”** he was assuring us that his calling for us was still there, that his forgiveness for us was real, and that we were again being called to repent, listen, and practice his teachings. Our failure was not the end of our discipleship journey. In fact, our failure taught us some of the most important lessons we would learn. There would be more failure ahead of us, but Jesus assured us, **“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The end. Jesus walked the road of faith, all the way to the end, to the end of the age, to death. Our heavenly Father was with Jesus, every step of the way, and brought him through death into resurrection life. Now we are called to follow Jesus. We are called to walk the road of the cross, to the end, to the **“end of the age,”** to death. We are called to set aside our fear and enter death and trust that Jesus will go with us. He has been there and he tells us, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

We cannot avoid the end, we cannot bypass the **“end of the age,”** we cannot skip around death. Sure, we can say “yes” to our flesh and try to fight death or run away from it, try to survive at all costs, but we will not get away and we will only make things worse.

The end is coming for you, death is coming for you. And Jesus calls you to turn and face it in order to conquer it. He urges you to return to the mountain of his teachings and obey everything he has commanded. If you listen to Jesus’s teachings, you will be facing and embracing death. You will be lowering yourself to lift others up. You will be laying down your life and sacrificing yourself for others. You will be **“loving your enemies,” “turning the other cheek,”** and **“not resisting the evil person.”** You will be saying “yes” to the Spirit and “no” to the flesh. This will lead to the end, to the loss of your life, to the cross, to your death—just as it did for Jesus. But you must not fear death. It has no power over you. **“Whether you live or whether you die, you belong to the Lord.”** He is with you. He is good and therefore whatever happens—even death—will be for your good, because he is with you.

Do not give up on the journey. Return to the mountain of Jesus’s teachings and listen and practice his Word once again. Yes, this will lead to the end, to the **“end of the age,”** to your death. But Jesus promises you, **“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.**