

Spoiler alert: I'm going to talk about two of my favorite mystery stories – both were great books that became great movies – and I'm going to give away the plot. The first is MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS. While a luxury train is stopped by a snow drift a man is killed. Slowly we learn that all the other passengers have both motive and opportunity but only at the very end did it finally become clear – everyone took part in the killing.

My other favorite is SIXTH SENSE. The story opens with a disgruntled patient taking a shoot at his psychiatrist and then committing suicide. Later the doctor takes on the case of a troubled little boy who claims to see dead people. With the doctor's help the little boy learns to use his gift to help some of those dead people find peace and only in the last 30 seconds does everything fall into place when we figured out that the psychiatrist is dead and all along has been one of those seeking rest.

These are my favorites because the clues were right there in front of you the whole time but the situation only fits together in the last few seconds of the movie or the final page of the book – that's a great mystery. Now religious folk sometimes talk about mystery but they seem to mean something "that you're never going to figure out so don't bother trying."

But mystery isn't what we will never understand – it is what holds surprises for us because it is so unexpected.

Today faith is presented as the mystery and like all great mysteries all the clues are right there in front of us but just haven't taken hold of us yet, the mystery that Paul says was hidden before all ages but revealed in Christ. Even if they don't immediately fall into place, the readings today are full of clues about what God intends.

The coming of the lord is a like a blazing oven. That is a powerful image if you have ever lived in a steel mill town as I did. The sky lights up like sunrise in brilliant colors of red and orange -- at a distance it can be breathtaking, but if you don't take the proper precautions it can be deadly. But does that mean we are supposed to keep our distance from God, that getting too close is dangerous?

Another clue: to those admiring the work that had gone into the lord's temple, Jesus remarks that it won't last. Quite concerned now they ask if there will be signs of when this will happen. There are always signs, he says. Should we spend our time looking for mystical signs? Does it mean that what goes on in this world is of little importance? On the other hand, the evidence from Paul clearly seems to say that **we need to be busy about the work of everyday life;**

it is important that we earn our keep and be productive.

The last clue from the gospel only adds to the confusion: in the same breath the Lord says that **we will be delivered up** even by our own parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends -- that we might be put to death -- at the same time the gospel says that not a hair of our head will be harmed, that **by patient endurance our lives will be saved**.

So what are we supposed to make of all these clues? Is there a way to bring them together? If you ever watch some old classic B/W movies you might know the oriental detective Charlie Chan. He typically might start off by saying something inscrutable like: "He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever." Everyone in the room then says, "huh" and then he would need to go on to explain.

Here he would explain that the healing rays of the sun of justice is the same brilliant light that burns away evildoers. Whether the light is welcome warmth or a dreaded inferno depends on us. It depends on how we live the life given us.

Paul was right it does matter a lot how we live each day. But it matters not because we build something that will last but it matters if we have allowed to lord to do the building.

What matters is not my will, not my works, not my desire to do what is best. The lord doesn't need our plans, our designs, our suggestions. What matters is that we turn ourselves entirely over to him.

He will give us the words and wisdom needed, he has plans that are not ours and work to do that we have not imagined. When he is alive in us, the world will treat us as it treated him. It will reject and even persecute us. But ultimately we are victorious as he was victorious. And our life, just as his life, becomes one with the Father forever.

This life matters when it has God as its center, everything else will pass away and be forgotten. The harm that this world can do is passing, the good that God can do through us is forever. You really don't have to be a detective to figure that out.