

*A Study of the Book of Matthew
Sermon # 83*

Living In the Last Days

Matthew 24:1-14

In Revelation 22:7, Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming quickly (soon)! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” The question that Christians have been asking over 2000 year now is; “Just How soon is soon?” In other words, how soon will Jesus return for His church? In fact in today’s text Jesus ignores the “when” question and deals with the “how” to be prepared for His coming.

*I always approach teaching on prophecy with a certain amount of trepidation, for several reasons. First, because I am afraid sometimes that people are more interested in trying to predict who the Anti-Christ is than they are with having a vital relationship with the risen Christ. And secondly, my second concern over prophecy watching is that I have encountered people over the 30+ years that I have been a pastor who seem to be caught up in trying to determine the end of time that they are failing to live in the time God has given them. **I believe that the study of future should always spur us to godly living in the present.***

Let me set the stage for you. Chapter 24 and 25 constitute what is called “the Olivet Discourse” because it took place on the Mount of Olives. It had been a marvelous day of teaching in the Temple. Jesus had encountered and put in their place the smug religious leaders who had tried to entrap Him. He had answered every one of the questions that the Herodians, Pharisees and Scribes had thrown at Him. And in so doing He has revealed the hardness of their hearts.

Matthew tells us that Jesus had just finished His indictment of Jerusalem by saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (38) See! Your house is left to you desolate; (39) for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:37-39)

The day is now drawing to an end and Jesus and His disciples are making their way back to Bethany to spend the night. As they are walking the Disciples are still reeling from Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. The road from Jerusalem back to Bethany crosses the Mount of Olives, giving a spectacular view of the Temple behind and below them.

The Disciples look back over the city and point out the beautiful buildings of the Temple to Jesus. According to Mark's account they exclaim *"Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"* (Mark 13:1- NIV)

First, The Setting For the Message. (24:1-2)

"Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. (2) And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

When Matthew says, *"He went out and departed the temple,"* or **"He left the temple,"** He is conveying something very profound. Jesus has not merely walked out of the temple, He has abandoned it; He will never set foot in it again. He now departed from the temple never to return!!!

Jesus and His Disciples leave the Temple and make their way back to Bethany Matthew tells us that as they went out of the temple and stood looking back on Jerusalem and the Temple Jesus said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (38) See! Your house is left to you desolate; (39) for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"* (Matthew 23:37-39)

Jesus brushes aside their awe of man's building achievements and thoughts of its permanence. There is an important principle to be seen here: God is not impressed by buildings no matter how beautiful or ornate they may be. What impresses the heart of God is faithfulness.

What Jesus says in response only perplexes and disturbs them even more than they were. Although some of the stones used in building the Temple weighed over 100 tons, He tells them that they would be cast down and the Temple destroyed.

In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was leveled, including the temple – just as Jesus said. It is said that at the fall of Jerusalem, the last surviving Jews of the city fled to the temple, because it was the strongest, most secure building in the city. Roman soldiers surrounded it, and one drunken soldier started a fire that soon engulfed the whole building. Ornate gold detail work in the roof melted down in the cracks between the stone walls of the temple, and to retrieve the gold, the Roman commander ordered that the temple be dismantled stone by stone. The destruction was so complete that today they have true difficulty learning exactly where the Temple stood.

Secondly, The Stunned Inquiry of the Disciple's. (24:3)

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?””

*Sitting on the mountainside over-looking the Temple the disciples waited until they were in private with Jesus to ask, **“When will these things be and what shall be the signs when it is going to happen?”***

*I believe that when the disciples voiced this question they viewed it as one event. When they said **“when will these things happen”** they saw the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Lord in power and the end of the age as essential one event. In their minds the destruction of Jerusalem could only mean one thing. It would be the end of the world and the fulfillment of the kingdom of Jesus that they had been learning about.*

*But if one looks closely at Matthew account you will see that in reality it was three questions; **“When will These Things Come To Pass** (the destruction of the temple and the city)? (2) **What Will Be The Signs Of Your Coming?** And (3) **What Will Be The Sign Of The End Of The Age?”***

Secondly, The Specific Warning. (24:4-5)

Jesus ignores the question concerning timing and first gives a specific general warning.

- **Deception** – Beware of False Teachers
(vv. 4-5)

*“And Jesus answered and said to them: **“Take heed that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”**”*

*In answer to the Disciple's **first question, “When will these things come to pass?”** Jesus gives some signs that any observant person can look for. But first He warns don't be deceived by these things! All of these signs are signs of the degeneration of society in general but do not signal His coming.*

*One of the definite signs of Christ coming is that in the last days there will be more and more false teachers. These teachers propagate their own version of the truth. Taking advantage of people they will use their teachings to control others and to enrich them-selves. Paul describes the climate that will produce these false teachers, in his second letter to Timothy, **“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.”** (2 Tim. 4:3)*

Religious charlatans can be found in any age. Our own generation has only to think of men like David Koresh and Jim Jones. And the more we drift from the truth found in God's Word the more susceptible people will become.

The history of the church is filled with stories of those who came claiming to be Christ but the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of course will be the appearance of the Anti-Christ. Paul says warns *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, (4) who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2Thess. 2:3-4)*

Third, The Signs To Watch For. (24:6-14)

After giving a specific general warning Jesus gives the Disciples some signs that He wants the Disciples to be aware of.

- **Destruction** – Wars and Rumors of Wars
(vv. 6-7a)

*“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, **but the end is not yet.** (7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”*

Jesus says, *“see that you are not troubled”* – various versions have translated this; “take care not to be scared out of your wits” (Williams) “don’t panic” (NLT) and “be sure that you are not alarmed” (NIV). If you look “alarmed” in the dictionary you will find that it means “to be overcome with **fear**.” When everything looks like it is coming apart remember where your hope is.

I would invite you to underline that last phrase in verse six in your Bible, **“but the end is not yet!”** His words make it clear that wars and rumors of wars will occur throughout the sweep of human history but they are not the sign of His coming. Christians are not be terrified by chaotic political upheaval in the world but to remain steadfast.

- **Disasters** – Famines and Earthquakes
(vv. 7b-8)

“And there will be famines, pestilences, and earth-quakes in various places. (8) All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Just nine years after the fall of Jerusalem Mt. Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the city of Pompeii and its surrounding suburbs. [Ron Ritchie. “What is the Sign of the End of the Age?” - www.pbc.org/dp/ritchie/4273.html] And as terrifying as these event and all the subsequent natural disasters down through the ages have been they are not the sign of his coming. Jesus summarizes all of the warning thus far by saying *“these are the beginning of sorrows”* or the beginning of the **“birth pains.”** Like a woman in labor the first pains only signal the beginning of the process. So when the events described by Jesus begin to happen with increasing frequency we know that it will not be long before the end.

Neither earthquakes nor famines especially signify the end of time is immediately imminent. War, famine and earthquakes are merely *“the beginning of sorrows”*– sorrows in literally *“birth pangs.”* The significant thing to remember is that the baby does not come on the first birth pain. Periods of wars, and rumors of wars, famines and tragic earthquakes will continue to appear and each appearance reminds us the end is coming.

- **Persecution** – (v.9)

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”

Only fifty-two days later at the Feast of Pentecost, the church experienced the reality of this prediction. Acts chapter eight, records the beginning for a persecution which spread Christians all over the world. The warning that Jesus gives about persecution is that rather than being blown away, we are to persevere. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. True believers are to keep on going regardless of their circumstances. These verses indicated that believers will be hauled into court, beaten and brought before worldly authorities that as a testimony to them.

- **Defection** – vv. 10-13

Jesus mentions three reasons for their defection: The cost is too high, the deception of the false teachers will be too convincing and sin will be too attractive. [John McArthur. The McArthur NT Commentary: Matthew 24-28. (Chicago: Moody, 1989) pp. 25-28]

- **The Cost Will Be Too High (10)**

“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.”

In those days the conditions will be so severe that individuals will not be content to just abandon the Christian community they will betray them to the authorities and join in the persecution. But Jesus declares that the reason that the pretenders leave the Christian ranks is, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”* (1 John 2:19)

- **The Deception Will Be Too Convincing (11)**

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”

Just as there are those who defect because the cost is too high, there will be those who defect because they are deceived. As the numbers of deceivers grows, so will the number of vulnerable people who desperately look for the answers to calamities that they are witnessing everyday. The Apostle Paul says of those days, *“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* (2 Timothy 3:13)

In every age, false teachers have and will continue to offer false comfort and false hope. The prosperity gospel says, *“God wants you to be comfortable, if you have enough*

faith it will be so!" The liberal gospel says, **"All religions are equal and all roads led to God."** Cults and false religions continue to distort the truth and lead people into error.

➤ Sin Will Be Too Attractive (12-13)

"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (13) But he who endures to the end will be saved."

The Apostle Paul also wrote about the wide-spread wickedness that would be prevalent in the last days in his second letter to Timothy, **"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: (2) For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, (3) unloving, unforgiving, slander-ers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, (4) traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) having a form of godli-ness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (6) For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, (7) always learning and never able to come to the know-ledge of the truth."** (2 Timothy 3:1-7)

According to (Revelation 9:20-21) the Top 7 Sins during the Tribulation are:

-Rebellion against God

-The Worship of Demons

-Idolatry

-Murders

-Magic –(sorcery) I think that it is interesting that the word translated (magic or sorcery) is **pharmakia**, from which we get the English word pharmacy. It is suggestive that increased drug use will be a part of end time life and worship.

-Sexual immorality

-Thefts

It is important to remember when it says in verse thirteen, **"But he who endures to the end will be saved."**

It is not a person's endurance that produces salvation it is a person's endurance that proves salvation.

- Declaration of the Gospel To the Whole World (v. 14)

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Although I believe that the increase of the events predicted indicates that the second coming is near, the only explicit condition to be fulfilled is the proclamation of the gospel to all nations.

Conclusion

How then should we respond or as the late Francis Schaeffer has said, **“How then shall we live?”** Jesus told us in Matt. 24:6 **“See that you are not; for this must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”**

I believe that there are a few applications that should stand out to us. First, we should not spend our time on pointless speculation on predicting who the Anti-Christ is to be; we should be consumed with having a vital relationship with the risen Christ. And secondly, so caught up in trying to determine the end of time that they are failing to live in the time God has given us. And third, **I believe that the study of future should always spur us to godly living in the present.** A true study of prophecy should move us from speculation to application. John says that Christians should live in preparation for His coming, **“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”** (1 John 2:28)

Third, our confidence in our Lord’s return should fuel a vigorous involvement in missions, evangelism and church planting. Jesus tells us that the end will come after the gospel has been preached as a testimony to the nations (24:14).

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