

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

NOV 14TH-NOV 15TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

COMING ON THE CLOUDS (MATT. 24:23-31)

Jesus is speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives concerning God's coming judgment on Jerusalem, the return of Jesus as King, and the "end of the age". (vs. 3)

- Much of Jesus' prophecy predicts an event of God's judgment (the destruction of Jerusalem) that would set the stage for, and foreshadow, a 2nd event- the coming of the Son of Man in final judgment.

While there are many schools of interpretation related to these prophecies, two things are very clear:

- Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. (A.D. 70) Jesus was going to return "at the end of the age" to judge the nations. Some of the prophecy had an immediate fulfillment, while some of it will have an ultimate fulfillment.

During the time of prophesied tribulation, people will be desperate for an end and for a Savior.

- Now Jesus gives His disciples guidelines for discerning what it will be like when He does actually return. During this time of tribulation, there will be reports that the Christ (Messiah) has returned. (vs. 23-25) But there will be false Christs and false teachers.

Some of them may even be able to perform miracles (vs. 24), but no matter what we see or hear, we're warned by Jesus not to listen to the lies.

- Jesus will not come back in a desert or in the "inner rooms". (vs. 26) When He does return, there will be no question that He's here. It will be a cataclysmic event, like lightning moving across the sky. (vs. 27) Verse 28 is a popular idiom that reads like, "where there's smoke, there's fire".

With verse 29, everything changes- the imagery is no longer earthly, but decidedly apocalyptic and supernatural.

- There will be cosmic signs that involve the sun, moon, and stars, and then the Son of Man will come in the clouds accompanied by angels who will gather the elect from all over the earth. (vs. 30-31) All the tribes of the earth will see Him! (vs. 30).

"The tribes of the earth will mourn"- to those who have rejected, opposed, or ignored Him in this life, His return will be a terrifying reality that the time for receiving His salvation has ended.

- What if this happened today? Would you be ready? Is there something you're doing today that would cause you to be ashamed before Jesus if He were to come at this moment?

Does the return of Christ bring you joy, fear, or despair?

- So often our attention and affections are so connected to the temporary things of this earth- so the thought of this all ending brings us sorrow. Sometimes we can't imagine a greater future for ourselves and our families than a blessed life here on the earth- but the future that God has planned for us will exceed our wildest expectations!

NO ONE KNOWS THE DAY & HOUR (MATT. 24:32-41)

Green leaves on a fig tree are a sign that "summer is near" (vs. 32), and in the same way when these signs appear, the disciples were to know and understand that Jesus is near, "at the very gates". (vs. 33)

- This is a similar idea of some of these signs being like "birth pains". (vs. 8) This implies immediacy and expectancy, not an exact date setting.

In verse 34 Jesus promises the disciples that in this very generation they would see "all of these things take place".

- There's tremendous discussion over what's meant by this verse, and good scholars have reached different conclusions. But what seems clear is that Jesus did not mean that He'd return before His disciples died- He explicitly told Peter in John 21:18-19 that Peter would be put to death.

But it's also clear that Jesus was prophesying of a "day of the Lord" that would occur in the disciples' generation.

- All of these things Jesus talks about- tribulation, deception, temptation, and persecution- would come upon the disciples and others in their generation in the destruction of Jerusalem. This day of judgment and great tribulation would be a foretaste of the return of Jesus.

We're to know, just like the disciples, when we see the signs Jesus gave us that season for His return is near.

- But what about the exact date of Christ's return? No-one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (vs. 36) We don't try to guess the date when Jesus is returning or line up unclear things in Biblical texts to current headlines.

When Jesus does return, it will be like it was "in the days of Noah", when no-one ever thought the world was going to come to an end by the flood. (vs. 38-39)

- Even though the world will be in a state of chaos and lawlessness, most people will simply

be carrying on as they always have with their daily lives. His return will be sudden and cataclysmic.

By way of specific application and illustration, Jesus gave two examples from the contemporary lifestyle of His day- two men at work, and two women at the "grocery store". (mill) (vs. 40-41)

- One of each pair was prepared because they knew Jesus' teaching, had watched the signs, and remained obedient. The other in each pair was not- either because of ignorance or indifference.

FAITHFUL SERVANTS (MATT. 24:42-51)

"Therefore, stay awake!"- because Jesus' return will be sudden and unpredictable we're not to allow indifference, apathy, or the cares of this world to lull us to sleep to the reality of His coming

- We don't know when it will be, and so we're to live each day of our lives in obedience and action as if Jesus could return at any moment. (vs. 42) Most of us lock our doors at night, set the alarm, and stay careful and prepared against any intruders who may try to break in.

Thieves don't announce to homeowners what time of night they're showing up to rob them- they just show up. (vs. 43)

- If you're not prepared, it's not going to go well for you- you must be ready! (vs. 44). Whenever we spend most of our time, energy, affections, finances, and lives primarily on temporary, physical things while we ignore what is spiritual- we're not prepared.

Now Jesus tells a parable (vs. 45-51) that illustrates in greater detail the principle that we must always be ready for His return.

- It tells of a "faithful and wise" servant whom the master set over the household. This servant had responsibility- He was to "give them their food at the proper time". (vs. 45). You and I have responsibilities as servants of God- we're not saved by them, but we're not saved from them either.

You and I have been given commands by Jesus to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19-20), love the "least of these" (Matt. 25:40), and to love your enemies (Matt. 5:44-46).

- We can pretend like these responsibilities are optional and aren't that important- but Jesus will make it clear in the next chapter (Matt. 25:33) that the actions of our lives and our willingness to obey reveal our true character and identity.

Our behavior over our lifetime is a window into our true identity. (Matt. 7:17)

- The servant that was obedient and responsible is the one that is blessed and rewarded by the master when He returns. (vs. 46-47) But the servant who is lazy, indifferent, and mistreats those that He's been called to take care of (vs. 48-49) is punished by the master when He returns (vs. 50).

A self-centered existence that displays no obedience to Jesus, and no compassion or care for anyone other than ourselves is an indication that we're in danger of eternal judgment from God. (vs. 51)

- Keeping watch for the Master's return involves not just being spiritually ready on a personal level, but also being faithful, diligent, and obedient to the Master's commands.

Am I keeping watch/Am I trusting in Christ?

- The "signs of the times" are intended to stir my affections and expectancy for the Kingdom to come, not to cause me fear, anxiety or anger. This world is not my home- and if all I'm doing is looking to it for satisfaction, salvation, and meaning, I'll be taken by surprise when the flood comes to "sweep this all away". (vs. 39)
- In the end, our close associations with people who are ready won't matter if we're not- our lives will stand alone, our hearts will be exposed and what it is that we're truly trusting in will be revealed. For some of us, our sentence of judgment will be surprising because we'll have a false assurance based on works and religion. (Matt. 7:21-23)

Am I being obedient, faithful, and wise as I follow Christ?

- We have a Gospel to preach, disciples to make, and a broken and dying community in need of care, love, and hope. If we respond to our responsibilities with indifference, apathy, and coldness to those whom we're called to love- maybe we're not who we think we are.

Urgency - time is running out. We don't have time to play church anymore.

Responsibility - we can't afford to be lazy, indifferent, calloused, and unmoved by the commands of King Jesus.

Expectancy - the pain, suffering, wars, diseases, disasters, disorder, and chaos of this broken world will someday disappear- and we wait with expectancy for that day.

Hope - the future that God has planned for us will exceed our wildest imaginations and anything we can possibly dream of.