

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

NOV 7TH-NOV 8TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

THINGS TO COME (MATT. 24:1-3)

As Jesus and His disciples leave the temple and the heated conflict with the Jewish leaders, the disciples draw Jesus' attention to the buildings in the 35-acre temple complex (vs. 1).

- For many, it was a symbol of national identity.

Many looked to the structure and beauty of the temple as the primary indicator that they were God's chosen people.

- In reality, Jesus was more concerned with Israel's inward condition and covenantal faithfulness to God than the structures of Jewish nationalism.

Jesus and His disciples made their way across the Kidron Valley and up onto the Mount of Olives, which overlooked the 35-acre temple complex and the city of Jerusalem (vs. 3a).

- The disciples were probably still reeling from Jesus' shocking revelation about the temple's destruction. To them, the destruction of the temple could only mean one thing- the end of sacrifices and the Old Covenant.

So they ask Jesus two questions to which He provides two answers- 1) When will these things be? 2) What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

- What follows is Jesus' discourse on the end times (known as the Olivet discourse, Matt. 24-25). There are many schools of thought concerning the interpretation of this passage.

Two things are very clear

- Jerusalem was going to be destroyed in that very generation (vs. 34).
- Jesus was going to return at the "end of the age" and judge the living and the dead
- These two events prophesied by Jesus are intended to be seen like two progressive mountain peaks.

The 1st event (the destruction of Jerusalem) sets the stage for and foreshadows the 2nd event- the coming of the Son of Man in final judgment.

- However, the continual fulfillment of these prophecies- false Christs & prophets, wars & rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, a "great tribulation"- will continue as precursors to Christ's final return (vs. 29-41).

"How is this supposed to help me??"

- We need to be reminded that none of the structures or fixtures of this world are permanent. We need to be reminded that the truth of God's Word and reality of His Kingdom IS permanent- and if we're not living for Him, our hope is built on nothing.

SIGNS OF THE END (MATT. 24:4-14)

Followers of Jesus will face deception (vs. 4-5).

- We can expect Satan to continually work to deceive and lead people astray through false teaching, prophets, and even false messiahs.
- This was prevalent in the early Church and certain individuals from modern times, like David Koresh and Jim Jones, who have all falsely claimed divine status.
- Deception is more subtle- in our day it usually begins with a denial of God's Word.

Followers of Jesus will face tribulation (vs. 6-8).

- Jesus speaks of the "beginning of birth pangs" (vs. 8), which will include "rumors of wars", famines/earthquakes in various places" (vs. 6-7).
- Jesus tells us to expect these things, not so we can necessarily pinpoint an exact date for His coming based on one particular event, but so we can be reminded that this world is fallen and passing away. Ultimately, we will be taken out of this world before it is destroyed, but we're not immune to the continual tribulation of this broken world.
- The hardships and tribulations of these life remind us that we were made for someplace else.

Followers of Jesus will face persecution (vs. 9).

- The Book of Acts (and the history of the Christian church) tells us about the realities of persecution that surrounded the early Christian movement.
- Even now, 8 Christians worldwide are martyred every day. 182 church buildings are attacked every week and 309 Christians are imprisoned unjustly every month.

Followers of Jesus will face temptation (vs. 10-13)

- Many who claim Christ will fall away, many will betray one another, and hatred will abound even as more deception continues (vs. 10-11).
- "Lawlessness will increase"- society will be marked by an abandonment of God's law- during the siege of Jerusalem, some families resorted to cannibalism of their own children.
- Now in our nation, we resort to similar atrocities in the name of convenience and "reproductive rights". As a result of lawlessness, "the love of many will grow cold" (vs. 12).
- The deadening of people's love for others will manifest in a devaluing of human life, a focus on one's own pleasure and protection, and a complete lack of empathy for others. We

will be tempted to join in- but we must endure to the end (vs. 13).

Followers of Jesus will proclaim the Kingdom (vs. 14)

- Even as persecution, tribulation, temptation, and deception abounded in the 1st century, the Church proclaimed the Gospel and Christianity spread like wildfire!
- Right now in places like India, Iran, China, and Sierra Leone disciple-making movements are EXPLODING in spite of some of the heaviest persecution on planet earth.

Inconvenient Truths.

- You are facing deception every day and constant temptation to live by your own rules, hate whoever you want, and live only for yourself. You are not promised an exemption from suffering or hardship- if you attempt to actually live for Jesus, you will be persecuted. You are invited to be a part of proclaiming this "gospel of the Kingdom"- and if you won't, God will use someone else (and He already is!).

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (MATT. 24:15-22)

Now Jesus gets specific concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem as He cites key prophetic Scriptures.

- "The abomination that causes desolation" (Dan. 9:27) and "a great tribulation" (Dan. 12:1) are two significant events in Biblical prophecy. Remember- these prophecies had an immediate fulfillment, but they will also have an ultimate fulfillment before the final judgment.

"The Abomination of Desolation"

- This was some kind of defiling, destructive incident that was prophesied that would occur in the temple and signal a turning point in the events of the end times.
- Most Jews in the 1st century recognized a fulfillment of this prophecy occur in 167 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes set up a statue of Zeus on the altar of burnt offerings in the temple.

But Jesus is signaling that it will happen again before Jerusalem is destroyed, and when it does, it's time to flee Jerusalem and head to the mountains (vs. 16).

- During the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 68, the zealots anointed a high priest in the temple.
- Still there is a future fulfillment of this prophecy when a leader called "the man of sin" will blasphemously demand all to worship him in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4).

When this generation flees Jerusalem, they're not to retrieve their goods from their homes or their cloaks from where they left them in the field (vs. 17-18).

- This flight will be difficult for pregnant and nursing women, and they should pray that it doesn't happen in winter or on the sabbath (vs. 19-20). There will a time of "great tribulation" such as has never been (vs. 21).

"Great Tribulation"

- This time that Jesus speaks of is a period in prophetic literature known as "Jacob's Trouble" (Jer. 30:7), a period for God's people that will be the worst suffering in all of history up until that point. So much so that if God didn't cut it short, no human being would be saved. This Tribulation will not reach its full destructive potential because of God's intervention (vs. 22).

As bad as the events of 70 A.D. were, that destruction has been multiplied in intensity on a number of occasions in the 20th century alone- so there is still a warning of another Great Tribulation that is in the future.

- This Great Tribulation will be a period of judgment and suffering before Christ's ultimate return. This future Great Tribulation is the final act of God's judgment before Jesus' returns.

"There will not be left here one stone..."

- None of the structures or fixtures of this world are permanent- they're passing away. This world- despite all of its beauty, glory, comfort, pleasure, and culture- is not your home. Those who only want to live for this world will be destroyed along with it. 1 John 2:15-17

The Kingdom of Earth is a place where we're told to indulge in what feels good, looks good, and promotes our own causes, opinions, and mindsets.

- It's a place where we're told that the greatest virtue power, beauty, being "true to ourselves", "following our hearts" and giving in to every desire of our flesh. It's temporary and will be destroyed-along with those who count themselves citizens of it.

The Kingdom of God is a place where we're told to deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24), crucify our flesh (Gal. 5:24), and to submit to God (James 4:7).

- It's a place where we're told that the greatest virtue is "losing our lives" to be about His mission in order to find real life; we're told that the greatest and most enduring treasures and pleasures are not on this earth, but in the presence of God.

The choices we make, the priorities we assign to our lives, and what we find our hope in are simply reflections of the Kingdom in which we have residence.

Have you been deceived, tempted, and lead astray by the lawlessness of the Kingdom of this age? A sign that you "thirst" for God is that you're losing your thirst for the things of this world. Are you thirsty yet?