

Matthew 24:1-35 The Return of the King (Part I)

I've got three little girls. I'm already experiencing anxiety of them growing up and getting into relationships. You better believe that we are going to have a number of talks prior to them dating. There will be some ground rules... you can't date until your 30 and all dates have to take place in the house while we are home. I'm kidding. But seriously, there is a lot that I do feel I need to communicate to them... what to expect, what to watch out for, what to pursue. I want to spare heartache, and want to maximize the chance they get into life giving, God glorifying relationships. When you have the right orientation going into something, you aren't thrown for a loop, can rightly interpret what's going on. You remember, oh dad told me this would happen.

When we come to Matthew 24, Jesus has a similar motivation in speaking to his disciples about a time when He will be gone. And primarily, his instruction is answering the question, "how do we live between the time of Jesus first coming and time of Jesus second coming?" That's where we all find ourselves today, in between the times. Jesus is going to help us know what to expect and mistakes to avoid so that we are not alarmed, and can be faithful. Responding to significant consequences for this life, so how we operate between the times can have eternal significance.

We get the setting of His teaching as we start the chapter. **24:1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."**

3 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?"

For the next two chapters Jesus answers their question. There are two parts to this question. The first is when the temple is going to be destroyed. And second, when will be Jesus coming and the close of the age?

As a disclaimer, we are getting into difficult waters here in chapter 24. One of the world's leading scholars says this chapter is "immensely complex" which leads there to be a lot of disagreement. There are several ambiguous terms, as well as difficulty sequencing the two answers that Jesus gives to the disciples. It's not clear when Jesus is talking about which. Some take them to be interwoven, some separate them out at different parts. What we do know is 1. The temple is coming down and Jerusalem with it. 2. Jesus is coming back. The point of this morning is not to get lost in the weeds of speculation, we want to hear and apply the main thrust of the passage. In Jesus answer, we'll see three applications...

1. Persevere in the power of the King. 2. Proclaim the gospel of the King. 3. Hope in the return of the King.

Before we take these one by one, let's pray for the Lord's help.

1. Persevere in the power of the King

4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.

So one main goal for the disciples of Christ here—endure to the end. If you endure, you will be saved.

Endure what? Jesus tells us we will face various trials. do not be alarmed, this must happen, the end is not yet.

1. false messiah’s and prophets

These are people that literally claim to be the Christ, or to speak in the place of Christ. They might be attractive. Signs and wonders. Charismatic, winsome. Don’t be led astray by them. Test the spirits. Listen to their doctrine. If they say they are the Christ, don’t believe them. We will get into this in a bit, but when Jesus comes back, there will be no mistaking Him. If you have to ask, is this the Christ, than its not Him.

2. wars and rumors of wars

We deal with these. There’s some sort of threat in the paper every day. Always on the brink of a next world war. Rumors of a nuclear holocaust. Serious stuff. But we aren’t to despair when we hear stuff like that.

3. natural disasters

Shortages of food, earthquakes. The earth is not a paradise. It’s troubled. I think of Romans 8 that the whole creation groans for redemption.

3. persecution

You will be hated by all nations for the name of Christ.

2 Tim. 2:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Matthew 5:11-12, “11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

4. wickedness

Lawlessness will increase and many disciples of Jesus (not true disciples) will walk away from the faith. Their “love” will grow cold. Enduring means keeping the faith and keeping love warm.

Do not be afraid. Do not worry about where Jesus is. Things are going to go bad and get worse. Don’t be afraid. Don’t be led astray.

Jesus goes on... and this seems to be a direct prophecy about the Temple and Jerusalem.

15 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

This prophecy is about what most people think the overtaking of Jerusalem by the Roman army. What the abomination of desolation is, is not clear. Readers of the Jewish Bible would have known about Daniel's prophecy from several texts about a foreign ruler who would come in to the Temple and defile it. We aren't sure what exactly this is. But ultimately it would lead to the desecration and destruction of the Temple in AD 70, that's when the stones come crumbing down. It was a horrific time, in terms of its concentration of evil and tribulation, Jesus says no other time rivals. It was a slaughter house. Blood everywhere. Famine. Distress. Parents forced to eat their own children. Millions die. This is why Jesus says when you see these things happening, run for the hills. Don't stop for anything, get out!

So Jesus is talking to His disciples, all these things must happen. Don't be alarmed when you see them. Keep holding on to the faith. Keep persevering.

And there's no connection between these signs and Jesus, just that they have to happen. The command is not to figure out if the end is here, its to keep enduring knowing the end has not come yet.

2. Proclaim the Gospel of the King

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Though there will be great pain, persecution, and difficulty, we see one thing that will not be stopped—the gospel. The gospel message of the kingdom of Christ *will be proclaimed* through the whole world.

We should not be preoccupied with the coming of Christ but be passionate in proclaim the cross of Christ.

First we need to see God's heart for the nations. That begins knowing God created all mankind to know Him. Adam and Eve sinned. The curse is let loose. God says through the line of Eve would come the Messiah to fix everything. Abraham is called, he was blessed in order to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. God's heart for the nations, very clear in Gen. 12. His family becomes Israel. Israel fails to worship God and fails to be that blessing. Sin and idolatry prevent the blessing reaching the nations. Jesus comes, forgives sin, restores righteousness to His people. This is the great blessing of God through the gospel. In doing so, He supercedes the Temple and Israel. It's no longer through Israel you are blessed, its through Jesus.

He is, as the book of Matthew has made clear, the light to the Gentiles. God's heart is clearly for the all the nations. That's been His plan from the beginning.

But next we see God's means of reaching the nations... through His people.

Jesus commissions His people, as we will see in chapter 28, ***“18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

Jesus ascends to heaven, and sends the Holy Spirit to empower His people to proclaim the good news. And the gospel begins spreading. And absolutely nothing can stop it!

Col. 1:5-7, “Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.”

The gospel is bearing fruit and increasing in all the world. But notice, how did it get to the Colossians? As you learned it from Epaphras. Epaphras opened his mouth and shared the glorious, unstoppable, message of Jesus Christ with them. Faithful, beloved Epaphras.

God's plan is to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus, through His Spirit-empowered people. It will happen. The gospel will be proclaimed to all the world, and then the end will come.

"God alone knows the definition of terms [here]. I cannot precisely define who all the nations are, but I do not need to know. I know only one thing: Christ has not yet returned; therefore, the task is not yet done. When it is done, Christ will come. our responsibility is not to insist on defining the terms; our responsibility is to complete the task. So long as Christ does not return, our work is undone. Let us get busy and complete our mission."
George Ladd

A missionary and hymn writer says it this way...

*Facing a task unfinished, that drives us to our knees.
A need that, undiminished, rebukes our slothful ease.
We, who rejoice to know Thee, renew before Thy throne,
the solemn pledge we owe Thee to go and make Thee known.*

Difficulty - Devoted, Stare persecution in the face and praise and proclaim.
Christ reigns. WE know the end of the story.

3. Hope in the Return of the King

27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The King's return will be visible and unmistakable.

Like lightning in the sky... all will see, from the east to the west. You aren't going to miss it. So you don't need to be wondering where He is. He surely isn't going to be in some remote cave or some hidden room like the false messiahs. He came the first time humbly and quietly as a baby in an obscure stable in Bethlehem. He's coming back on clouds of glory, with a trumpet call, in sovereign splendor.

Jesus is quoting from **Dan. 7:13** ***"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.***

The goal is not to diminish zeal for the Lord's return, but to warn of premature acknowledgment.

His return is certain and it's near.

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Son of Man will come back to His people. The world is not out of control. We are not spinning into oblivion. There’s an appointed end to this world. King Jesus has not left us. He’s with us, and He’s coming back.

The signs are precisely not connected to His return, other than that they must first happen. This generation will see the signs, but doesn’t necessarily mean they will see the Son of Man, just that they will see the signs.

But His timing is uncertain.

24:36 “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

We have here a remarkable statement about the humility and humanity of Jesus, and His submission to the Father. Jesus submits to the Father. The Father and the Son are one and they are two. I can’t explain it. But here we see them as two, as distinct from one another.

Jesus finally gives the answer to the question the disciples are asking, and its, I don’t know. He knows certain things that are going to happen. Tribulation, distress, deception. And He knows what He’s going to do at that time, come in the clouds like lightning. But He doesn’t know when. So we shouldn’t be too concerned about it. You can throw away the charts and the diagrams and secret patterns in the Scriptures. Not our business, right? The Scriptures are not asking us to figure it out the future. They are asking us to be faithful in the present. Jesus is not concerned with dates. He’s concerned with devotion.

Broadus, “If the Son Himself does not know the time of the 2nd coming, how cheerfully should we his followers rest in ignorance that cannot be removed, trusting in all things to our Heavenly Father’s wisdom and goodness, striving to obey His clearly revealed will, and leaning on His goodness for support.”

His return will be glorious (and worth the wait)

Our hope rests in Him, its not in this world. He says, **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.** There is a shotclock on this earth. And the earth has no pleasure that can rival the pleasures of Jesus. His return brings us peace and joy to the max.

As He comes He ushers in the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God. This is the day we’ve all been waiting for. As Romans 8 says, all of creation, include we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for this day.

In the eternal kingdom in the new heavens and new earth there will be no sin, sickness, suffering, or death. Satan and the kingdom of darkness will be judged and removed from our experience. Righteousness will reign in Christ and in each of our hearts. In the new heavens and the new earth there will be the perfection of our existence in the full glory and presence of the Lord.

Do you long for this day? Or are your eyes and affections and desires still tethered to this world? This is our trouble. We are fascinated with the things of this world. At the beginning of 24, when Jesus and the disciples are leaving the Temple, its emphatic how the disciples are looking at the Temple, its not, oh there it is, its more of a marvel, look how amazing the Temple is. And Jesus responds, yeah, and its all coming down. Not one stone on top of another. It’s all crumbling. You need to catch that this is the pinnacle of everything for these

disciples. The Temple was the most glorious, magnificent, and central structure in the world. These stones were like 40 ft long, 12 ft high and 12 feet wide, weighing over 200,000 lbs. That's a brick! And Jesus says, its coming down. They had forgotten, Jesus already told them in Matthew 12 something greater than the Temple was here. Christ is replacing the Temple. The Temple is no longer the mediating place between man and God And you know what also is coming down, Jerusalem. If the Temple is the center most structure, Jerusalem is the center most city. Jesus says, its passing away.

Everything is passing away. What stands forever? Christ's Word. To hold on to this life is to hold on to something that will vanish. Repent. Illustration: monkey

When life is tough, do you place the joy of eternity up against it? You should. It's like the early christians who had all their stuff stolen and they rejoiced that they had a better and lasting possession.

Paul would say again in Romans 8, this present suffering does not compare to the glory that will be revealed.

And the climax of His argument and confidence lands on the love of God given to us in Christ...

Romans 8:31, If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.