

Will it happen?

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[0 : 00] Jesus left the temple, and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 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.

As he sat in 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 close of the age?

And Jesus said to them, See that no one leads you astray, for many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ. And they will lead many astray. 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. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. 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.

[1 : 08] And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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. Hey guys, well let me pray again as we begin. Father, we thank you for this time to open your word, and we pray that your spirit would work among us.

Thank you that the word is the sword of the spirit. And we pray that your spirit would take his word into our hearts now. In Jesus' name. Amen. But if you keep that passage open, we are, in the city, we're thinking about the return of Jesus for five weeks.

And I think you're doing the same. Three weeks. Three weeks. Well that's pretty good as well.

Three's good. And I'm going to be giving two of those talks, and then someone else is going to come in and give the third one.

[2 : 19] And it is a basic Christian belief that Jesus the Messiah, God's king, is coming back. And he's coming back to bring the kingdom of God.

When he does, it will be the end of time and the universe, as we know it. There will be a judgment day for all humanity, and Jesus will be the judge.

And then he will reign forever as God's eternal king over God's eternal kingdom. That is a basic Christian belief. Why?

Because the Bible speaks again and again of the everlasting rule of God's king. And secondly, because Jesus taught a lot about his return.

I don't know if you knew this. Someone's done some counting, and has said that they reckon that in every chapter of the New Testament, his return is mentioned.

[3 : 29] I haven't done that counting, but he talks a lot about his return. A lot. A lot more than we think about it. Many of us Christians, I think we'd have to admit that we live as if his return is either of little or no importance.

So what a great place to be for three weeks. And this section of Matthew's gospel, Matthew 24 to 25, is probably the most prolonged and focused body of teaching on his return in all four gospels. Just look at verse 3. It is a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples. Verse 3, they come to him privately, and then Jesus speaks for two chapters, all the way through to the end of chapter 25.

And so therefore, in this section, Jesus takes his disciples aside, and he teaches them privately about his return and the implications for them.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you've got to understand this, Jesus says. Now, I assume in a group like this, there will be a spectrum of different kinds of questions about the return of Jesus.

[4 : 47] Will it really happen? Can we be sure? Why have we waited 2,000 years and counting? Seems a long time, especially given the urgency of some of these words in the New Testament.

Has something gone wrong? What will happen? What will it be like? Why is it necessary for him to return?

What does it mean to live wisely in light of his return? And all of these questions are answered in this section. But the first thing that Jesus tells his disciples is that there will be a delay.

There will be a delay. And that delay will be a time of great trouble before the end. So that's our subject today. There should be an outline perhaps coming up. Yeah, we'll get to that in a second. That's the diagram that took me. You don't want to know how long that took me to draw on a computer. But that's our subject for today. The delay. The delay.

[5 : 53] Now, just look down with me at verse 3. The disciples come and they ask him two questions that set up the rest of these two chapters. Verse 3. They say, tell us, when will these things be?

And what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? So when will these things be? They mean there, when will the destruction of the temple be?

That's a natural question off the back of verse 2. Jesus said, you see all these? So they come to him. They say, look at these temples. Look at these buildings. Aren't they great? Jesus says, you see all these?

Do not. Truly I say to you, there will be not left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. They ask, when will these things be? And then separately, the second question they ask, what will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?

In other words, how will we know that you're about to come and reign? What will be the signal? Basically, they're asking, they want to know when the Messiah Jesus will come back and bring his kingdom.

[7 : 03] And that is a question that we should all have. But I want us to notice that Jesus doesn't immediately answer either of their questions directly. He will get to that in verse 15 next week.

But not yet. Just look down at verse 4. See his first words. See that no one leads you astray. Now, isn't that strange? Why does he say that?

Well, because the first thing he wants them to understand is that there is going to be a delay. And that that delay will be a time of great trouble and danger for his people.

That is what verse 4 to 14 is about. So in these 10 verses we're looking at today, the period in view is on the diagram. Or if you just go back to the diagram for seconds.

There we are on the diagram. The period in view is between his resurrection and his return. That's the period in view in these 10 verses. And what's it going to be like?

[8 : 09] You can see that from verse 4, how it begins and how it ends. Verse 4, see that no one leads you astray. And then verse 14, and then the end will come.

This whole period is bracketed by the resurrection and the return of Jesus. Now, why am I saying that this is about a delay? Well, three things in the text make it very clear that there will be a delay. Firstly, Jesus says all of these things will happen first from 4 to 14 and then the end will come. There will be a delay. Secondly, if you look at what these things are, there will be a significant delay, it seems.

Because they're not things that can happen overnight. Verse 5, many false Christs will come.

Verses 6 and 7, wars, global wars, apparently multiple.

All nations will hate you. Verse 9, well, they will need time to do that. Verse 14, the gospel going global. And so, just to think about this for a second, it doesn't seem like we're talking about a period of weeks or months, but years, decades, possibly even centuries.

[9 : 25] Thirdly, I just, if you look at the rest of these two chapters, Jesus mentions three times explicitly that there will be a delay. Okay, I just want to show you this.

So, chapter 24, verse 48. You just flick there. The wicked servant says to himself, my master is delayed. 25, verse 5.

As the bridegroom was delayed. And then 25, verse 19. Now, after a long time, the master of those servants came. And so, Jesus taught from the start that there would be a significant delay before

his return.

I just want to come back to this issue of 2,000 years. The fact that it's been 2,000 years is no reason to suppose that his promise of return has in any way run out of steam.

He said there would be a delay, a significant period. And one of the things we're going to see in this section is that his promise of return is as live as it ever has been.

[10:40] Okay, so firstly, there will be a delay. The second point today, and most of our time. Second, what will it be like? And the delay will be a time of great trouble.

But I want us to see that it's not going to be any old kind of trouble. It is trouble that is spiritually dangerous for the Christian. Just look again at that headline in verse 4.

See that no one leads you astray. It is trouble that calls for endurance, verse 13. The one who endures to the end will be saved. Okay.

There are five features that will mark this period of delay, Jesus says. And the follower of Jesus must understand these things if they're going to make it to the end.

And we're going to go through them briefly together now. Five features that will mark this period of delay. Number one, false teaching. Just look at verse 5 again.

[11:41] For many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ and they will lead many astray. He says it again in verse 11. Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

Now I just want us to notice two things about these false teachers. Firstly, they will be successful. You see that? Verse 5, they will lead many astray.

And verse 11, they will lead many astray. They will have a great following. Whole flocks, whole movements will follow them.

They will be successful. Why will they be successful? And that's the second thing I just want us to pause on. They will be successful because they are subtle.

Verse 5, just have a look again at those three words. So easy to miss. Many will come, in my name. These men and women will wreak havoc among would-be followers of Jesus because they will be subtle.

[12:54] They will come in his name. That is Jesus' name. They will not come saying that they are anti-Jesus. They will come saying they are with Jesus.

but then as they do that, they will lead people away from him in flocks. They will lead people away from him and his words in the Bible.

as if they are the Messiah and not him. And so I just want us to get a picture of this.

The picture that Jesus is giving is that throughout this whole period, the church will be assailed by successful and subtle false teaching.

Generation after generation. Time after time after time. Right up until the return of Jesus. there will be no respite.

[13:56] I wonder have you realised that? It's interesting in these words Jesus of course predicts the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad came in Jesus' name actually.

He came saying that he was building on what Jesus had done. He said he was the next prophet. But really speaking as if he were the Christ.

he's been pretty successful. More recently Joseph Smith in the 1830s from the founder of Mormonism hugely successful.

Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s the teacher from whom the JW Jehovah's Witnesses have come. We see them on our streets today.

He's been pretty successful. closer to home right now in the Church of England with breathtaking arrogance and soft enticing voices the bishops are leading people away from Christ and his words.

[15:08] The Archbishop of Canterbury himself. It's all in Jesus' name. It's subtle. I don't know if you've heard the language that is often used in the Church of England.

People will talk about this. They'll say we need to listen to the Holy Spirit in this generation because he might be saying different things to us now to what he said in the past in line with our culture.

by which they mean listen to us and not Jesus and his unchanging word in the Bible. As if they are saying I'm the Christ with authority to tell you how to live.

well the Church of England itself seems to be on the brink of collapse after 500 years. Somebody put out this meme of a picture of a train careering crashing through a wall and falling into the depths and captioned underneath the Church of England.

Well that may well be happening. Of course our temptation is to be surprised as if something strange was happening. Jesus says no I told you this would happen.

[16 : 26] See that no one leads you astray. Well firstly false teachers second feature of this time before his return major global upheavals and you see that in verse 6 and 7 we've just been praying about verse 6 you will hear of wars and rumours of wars see that you're not alarmed for this must take place but the end is not yet for nation will rise against nation kingdom against kingdom there will be famines earthquakes in various places major global upheavals this is the stuff that fills our newspapers Ukraine and Russia Israel and Palestine but I just want us to look at those words in verse 6 see that you are not alarmed in other words Jesus says don't be swept up by the hysteria surrounding major global upheavals the world around will be alarmed and the temptation for the church will be to join in

Jesus says no you my disciples can keep it all in perspective these things are not of any ultimate importance just imagine this for a second just imagine this time next year you're not meeting in this school you're meeting in bunkers on zoom because world war three has begun now this isn't a prediction by the way I'm not suggesting that I know but it is of course possible at that point how should the Christian react but we have to remember this it is just normal you'll be saying to each other over zoom it is just normal for this time of delay these global events are the beginning of the birth pains Jesus says that means the background rumble that tells us in a general way that this world is heading for judgment day but it is nothing to worry about for the Christian the Christian who knows that Christ is their saviour and in whom they have eternal life actually there's an inversion here it's interesting isn't it so far more dangerous than world war three in this period is false teaching you might think it was the other way around and perhaps as the church we do think it's the other way around far more dangerous Jesus says see that no one leads you astray that's the headline don't be alarmed about world war three be alarmed about false teaching see that no one leads you astray okay secondly major global upheavals the third feature of this period and that's in verse nine persecution of the church 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 this is a troubled period for the church I've just got two observations on this one firstly you see there you will be hated by all nations not much is going to unite the world in this troubled chapter before the return of Jesus there will be wars and rumours of wars but one thing will unite the world and that is hatred of the true followers of Jesus by all nations including this one suffering and even death do you realise that even in Dulwich a second thing I want us to notice is why will the world hate the church because of his name for my name's sake so in other words the world will turn its anger at Jesus onto his people through this period of history

Jesus says you'll be hated but you will be hated because they hate me and that's important it is Jesus the world hates as it expresses its vitriol against the church we see that becoming even clearer in Britain you may find if you're working you may find that in your workplace the more that you stand openly as a Christian a Bible believing Christian the more they will hate you you may find that don't be surprised it's normal for this period of delay you will not be loved for standing for the gospel in Dulwich they may even put us to death one day in this country verse 9 are we prepared for that will you stick with Jesus then fourthly desertion doesn't get better that is

[21 : 50] Jesus repeats that many who begin following him will fall away do you see that in verse 10 to 12 he says then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another and then verse 12 because of lawlessness will be increased the love of many will grow cold men and women who once seemed so confident in the faith devoted to Jesus will desert him under the intense pressure of the world I think verse 12 sums up the reason for desertion you see that verse 12 because lawlessness is increased the love of many will grow cold in other words because of the increased intensity in this period of everything that is anti-God in the context what is that false teaching persecution because of those things many will fall away from Christ you see what's happening because of pressure from without persecution infiltration from within false teaching a deadly pincer movement lawlessness many will grow cold and fall away well it really happens

I've just had news of another person who used to be on staff at St Helen's Bishop's Gate who I knew no longer calling himself a Christian it seems I get news and I guess you might as well every few months notice as well that this will cause trouble and heartache within the church you see that in verse 10 many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another in other words those who fall away from Christ will hate those who remain with him and betray them don't be surprised

that when there is trouble and heartache within the church as many fall away from Christ it was ever thus and it will be until he returns fifthly and finally the gospel must go global the fifth feature of this delay before the return of

Jesus verse 14 I think this stands out structurally from the others this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed notice not believed but proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come I think this stands out structurally from the others because in verse 13 you get the kind of application of the section the one who endures to the end will be saved and then verse 14 and that is because I think finally Jesus reaches here the reason for the delay there is a reason that there must be a delay before the son of man returns once and for all to reign on his glorious throne and that is because God in his love and compassion will not bring judgment until the world has heard the call to repent and be saved the reason for the delay God is patient he doesn't want anyone to perish but all to come to the knowledge of salvation and so the gospel must be proclaimed to the whole world it must go global but as soon as that task is finished notice then the end will come why because at that point there is no reason for delay anymore no more reason for this broken rebellious world to continue as soon as that's done the end

I just want to pause on something here sometimes in churches we hear the idea that as the kingdom of God comes now in this age so society will kind of get better and be transformed the world will slowly get better more godly as we as things go and as the kingdom grows well I think there is such a thing as being more optimistic than Jesus and I think that is an example I don't see how we can believe that in light of these words I don't see how we can believe that the world is going to get better how is that possible with wars global wars continuing right until the end persecution rather he said that nothing would get better before his return the only thing that will progress in this period of history the last chapter is the message of the gospel well one implication for us very simple implication for us as

Christians and that's in verse 13 the one who endures to the end will be saved that's the application it is not the one who starts but the one who makes it to the end who will be saved for me the word dogged comes to mind so I'm reading Lord of the Rings with my eldest son Alfie which is a great pleasure and we've just entered the minds of Moria by the way if Lord of the Rings is not your thing you can switch off for just a couple of seconds we just entered the minds of the minds of Moria and it says that they kept on doggedly in the dark knowing that all kinds of dangers lay ahead the word dogged literally means having or showing tenacity and grim persistence well there is something about that here the person who makes it to the end and doesn't desert will be doggedly committed to Christ and his words in the face of many dangers and so the question to all of us this morning are you a dogged

[28 : 12] Christian I think of all the Christians I know who have many more miles on the clock full of joy and grace and love but dogged after many battles and struggles close Christian friends that they had close Christian friends falling away over the years but not them periods of wrestling with real confusion some false teaching is not easy to spot and difficult to grapple with doubts that go with that have I really understood the gospel this is so confusing was I taught it right and yet doggedly holding on to the words of Christ in the Bible even in the confusion many many social costs big and small precious relationships that have been lost being sidelined in the workplace but doggedly committed to Christ and his word a great prayer for you to pray

Lord help me to be wise about the present and to make it to the end through many dangers toils and snares I have already come Lord please keep me just a brief word as I close for someone who perhaps is here and not a Christian and it's great that you're here among us I just want to pause on three bad reasons I often hear three bad reasons for dismissing the claims of Jesus number one it's been 2,000 years he said there would be a delay number two the world around seems to have got no better since he came he never said it would number three there's so much confusion so many different versions of Christianity it was ever thus in fact everything has happened just as he said it would be and the promise of his return is live let's pray father we pray that you would help us to be wise in the present and we pray that you would help us to be dogged and to hold firm to Christ as our saviour and lord right until the end and we ask it in Jesus name amen you