Matthew 24:15-35

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[0:00] To tell the truth. Let me say that again. To tell the truth. Now, does that phrase sound familiar to you?

Do any of you remember the TV program by that name? Versions of the program were referenced, remade, and spoofed as recent as 2017, even though the first episode aired way back in 1956.
I know some of you were born then. I wasn't, but some of you can maybe remember that program.
For those of you who are not familiar with the program, or those who need to be reminded, this is how it went.
Three contestants claimed to be a certain person. Each contestant then submitted evidence to that fact. And celebrity panelists then were given a period of time to question the contestants.
And after a period of question, the celebrity panelists then cast a vote for who they believed was the real central character, who they claimed to be. And then after some playful posturing, a real figure then rises, right, while the other pretending ones remain seated.
[1:17] Now, today's reading is actually a little bit similar to that one. I wonder if you noticed. And I'm going to pay attention just mostly to Matthew chapter 24, verses 15 to 35.

But did you notice how it was different? After the pretense and deception of the religious leaders from the past weeks and their exposure, and after Jesus issues some stark warnings, by the way, of seven woes, he reveals his great wisdom of God and returns to this big question of the section that comes way back in chapter 22, you know, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
And it says, And when he entered, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this? And the answer to the question is revealed in verses 23 through 24.
You can look down with me now if you want. It reads like this. Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders.
So as to lead astray even the elect. Who is this man? There are pretenders or false prophets.
[2:38] And then there is the real or the true Christ. Jesus is the Christ. And below this section, we'll learn that he is also, as he claims, the Son of Man.

Confusion will surround and confound. But let's be clear. Jesus is the one they long to know. He is the one that we long to know.
He is the Christ. He is the Son of Man. He is the real one. The true one. And who is he? Well, in verse 15, Jesus referenced Daniel 9.
He reads this. He says, So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, let the reader understand.
Jesus is showing his disciples, including us, two things in this great declaration and claim about himself. First, the circumstances. He says, This is a desolation and tribulation.
[3:39] This was prophesied by Daniel way, way long ago. This is the circumstances that are pointing to the very time that Jesus is speaking of now. This desolation. This tribulation.

Daniel 27 reads like this. I won't have you turn there, but just listen. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week. And for half of the week, he shall put an end to sacrifices and offering.
And on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. In verse 15 of chapter 24, prior to that, Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple.
And now he's saying to us in verse 15, pointing back to Daniel that it was prophesied long ago. There would be this great desolation of abomination. It would come actually in the form of the destruction of the temple.

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But it's not only about the circumstance. It's also about the Christ. The Son of Man is pointed to and fulfilled in Jesus throughout this whole passage. Jesus is drawing attention to himself.
[4:50] He's directing us to him who is the Christ, the Son of Man. But in Daniel verse 24, unless you kind of read the verse 27 in the context, it's really important that we know this.

And this is what he says about the Son of Man. Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and profit and to anoint a most holy place.
That's who the Son of Man is. That's who the Christ is. Back in Daniel chapter 9. Everything that's taken place up to this point is to point us towards the Son of Man, both in Jesus' day but also in our own reading of Scripture.
The past circumstances and our reading of the Word direct us to Jesus. He is the Son of Man, the one that I've just read about from Daniel 9.24.
He is the one who represents and restores humanity as prophesied and described by Daniel. The description given by Jesus seems catastrophic and chaotic as we read through chapter 24.
[6:09] There's fleeing, there's going down, there's rising up, there's turning back, there's taking flight. There are signs, wonders, listening, death, vultures.

It could have even been eagles. It's all quite cataclysmic and in some way sounds a little bit like the beginning of creation, save the death part.
It all sounds confusing. And it is. The destruction of the temple would be very confusing for the people in that day.
And Jesus is saying then as he is today, don't be confused. And actually we get confused when we are actually fused with the circumstances.
And the antidote to this confusion then is union with Christ, with the Son of Man. And Jesus is making reference to before this, but even now in this destruction, this abomination to the destruction of the temple.
[7:14] And the abomination of desolation and tribulation was then exactly what was going to happen at that time, though probably 40 years later.

However, tribulation continues to a greater or lesser extent from then even up until now. Even today, whether it's an impeachment trial or a downing of commercial planes or viruses, it is important that we don't put our heads in the sand or lose our heads.
And it is critical that we look to Jesus who is the Son of Man. He meets our greatest need, greater than other causes of anxiety or the effects of them.
And there won't be relief through politics, medicine or militaries. But through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, his redemption, his salvation, his reconciliation of his people to him.
That climactic event that he achieves those things, the redemption, the salvation, the reconciliation, is through the cross.
[8:25] And it has already taken place. We know that historically, definitively, demonstratively. Yet we live in between the times.

The Son of Man has already come, and yet he is coming again. This language of coming comes over and over again in this passage. It's in verse 3 and verse 27.
It's in verse 30. The Son of Man has already come, and yet he'll come again. And it's not over yet, because the Son of Man, while having done his work of salvation through the cross, is ascended and completing his work.
Until when? Well, look down with me at verse 30. It reads like this. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn.
They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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.
[9:34] How did you hear that? The Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. It's a really fascinating thing. And the other language of coming in this text, it's about Jesus' return, what's called his parousia, his advent, his second coming.

But the English language doesn't capture, but it's not that word that's used in verse 30, but another one. It's actually one of vindication that was to happen at that time.
So we should ask, what might this coming be like? Well, it's easy to get lax and lethargic and even loiter in this life of ours.

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But even more than the love of God, it's the lordship of Christ that stirs us to faith and good works. And why is that? It's because the lordship expressed through Jesus' power and glory, which Jesus says there, captures and compels us.
So listen for the Son of Man's voice and to lean into that heavenly vision already realized in his resurrection, in his ascension, in his lordship at the right hand of God.
[10:52] Even if he weren't to come again, this great power, this great glory would bring about that kind of effect on our life. And that's what Jesus was talking about then when he said that he would come.

And there would be this heavenly sign of the Son of Man. And all the tribes on earth would mourn. And they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory.
What's happening then? That's what moves us now, even before he comes again. Even before he comes again, that compels us to be about what it is that he calls the church to do.
And so what are the implications of this? Jesus is clear that all he described, the dire straits, the darkness, would all come to pass in that generation.
And surely it did in 70 AD with the destruction of the temple. Now, we lost a building, and we know the impact of that. But imagine losing a temple.
[11:59] However, the resurrection of Christ meant a new habitation. His new holy people, his new holy place. Right?

Now, this surely is meant to comfort and compel that generation, but surely it will also compel this generation. Which turns us from worry to wonder.
From panic to praise. And from whatever our character traits are, to surely curiosity about who this Jesus is and what it is that he came to do, will come again when he returns.
But in the meantime, is still about something glorious and powerful. And that is surely rooted in how Jesus actually ends this section with his word.
Look at how he ends this. Heaven and earth will pass away. Imagine that. Heaven and earth will pass away. But then he says, But my words will not pass away.
[13:04] This is the great promise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Things will come and go. Even the things that we think that are the most enduring in life.

And in the end will not, because of God's great power and his great glory, and certainly his great word to us. His word spoken to us and his word signed to us in the sacraments.
That's God's great promise to us. And all the catastrophes, all the chaos, all the confusion in the world in which we live. And isn't that a great promise?
I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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