

Matthew 24:15-35

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] Matthew 24, page 829, if you'd like to follow along in the Bible. You know the Gospel of Matthew finishes 33 AD or so.

Jesus is raised from the dead. He says to his disciples, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

And in the book of Acts, which picks up the story, the early church did. They enjoyed great success in the early days. Thousands flocked in to the church in response to the message.

Even some of the very temple priests who have been fighting Jesus in these chapters became Christians. But it soon changes. And in Acts chapter 4, the mood of the city turns against the early Christians and their preaching of Jesus and the resurrection.

By chapter 7, they take one of the leaders and they stone him to death. And in chapter 8, persecution breaks out and forces many of the Christians to leave Jerusalem to go to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[1 : 1 6] And over the next 30 years, there was sporadic and random persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire. It only really became systematic when Nero became emperor in 54 AD.

And you know from your history that in 64 AD, the great fire of Rome, which some historians say Nero himself lit because he wanted a bigger palace.

Nero blamed the Christians and began to brutally execute them publicly for sport and entertainment. That's 64 AD. During the early 60s, many of the leaders of the temple in Jerusalem decided to revolt against Rome.

So in 66, Nero sent a series of generals to crush the revolt, to subdue Israel. And it took four years before they could finally destroy all opposition.

And in doing so, they destroyed the city and the temple. And the final siege of Jerusalem was five months. It was an absolute siege. And it is horrifying in its details, in its cruelty on both sides.

[2 : 3 7] We have eyewitness accounts primarily from the Roman historian Josephus, who was with the Roman troops, even though his parents, because he was Jewish, lived in Jerusalem.

And he became the chief negotiator for Rome. And when the city finally fell in 70 AD, the Romans raised the temple and the entire city to the ground.

And that temple has never been rebuilt. And in that final siege, it began at Passover. And you might remember that Passover was a time when Jews traveled from all over the world to come to Jerusalem.

So Jerusalem was swollen with numbers, as well as people from the countryside seeing the Roman troops and wanting to take refuge in the city. And Josephus writes a couple of hundred pages on this.

And I don't encourage you to read it. It's just awful. And he tells us that during that siege, there were over a million Jews killed, including 100,000 at the end who were taken to Rome, many of whom became slaves, many of whom were executed.

[3 : 49] And you can go to Rome today and you can see the Titus arch and the picture of the slaves entering Rome. And the destruction of the temple in 70 AD was utterly devastating to the Jews.

It's hard to explain this. The temple was as important as the Garden of Eden. It was as important as the tabernacle in the wilderness. It was the physical symbol of the presence where God made his presence dwell on earth.

It was unimaginable that God would abandon the temple, even though he had done it once before during the book of Ezekiel. And after the attack of 66, when the attacks began in 66 AD, the Christians in Jerusalem saw the signs.

And as a body, they left the city and traveled across the Jordan Valley and up to the hill town of Pella. And most of them escaped the worst of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

And the reason they escaped is because of this passage today. And it's not the easiest passage in the Bible. And I do not pretend to understand it all.

[5 : 00] Dan does, but I don't. You know, since the beginning of chapter 21, Jesus has been in the temple.

He's been preaching and healing, facing vicious hostility. And now in chapter 24, verse 1, for the last time, he severs connection with the temple. He walks away.

He abandons the temple. And the disciples, as they're walking away, point out, oh, isn't it beautiful? What a magnificent building it is. They're not really tracking with Jesus. And it is magnificent.

We know the stones, the original stones were up to 20 meters wide. And Jesus says every single stone will be torn down, thrown down. There'll be nothing left. And the disciples can hardly believe it.

So they then ask Jesus two questions. And these two questions drive the next two chapters. The first question drives our passage today. The second question drives next week's passage.

[6 : 04] The first question is about when does the temple come down? The second question is about when is your second coming and the end of time itself? Look at verse 3.

Just look at these two questions. As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately saying, tell us, here's question one, when will these things be?

When will the temple come down? Question two, what will be the sign of your coming, your second coming in the close of the age? So the first question has a short timeline. When will these things be, the temple coming down?

The second question has a long timeline. What is the sign of your second coming and the end of the age? And in our passage, as I just said today, he takes question one. And then from verse 36 onwards to the end of chapter 25, he takes the second question.

So just look down at verse 36 over the page, please. Jesus says, concerning that day, the second coming, concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son.

[7 : 10] Imagine that. But the Father only. In other words, Jesus is saying, I am going to give you signs for when the temple comes down. But as for my second coming, nobody knows that.

And your task is not to plot out a timeline and a schedule and a calendar. Your task is to be ready. We'll hear about that next week. Now, there are many faithful brothers and sisters who want to nail down Jesus' predictions of when he's coming again.

And they use our passage to do that, which I think is a mistake. You can see the mistake in the heading at the top of verse 3. When I first came to Canada, I used to watch late-night Christian television.

Call me weird. And there were people who used to, they would go through all the current events and they would take some obscure verse from the Old Testament. They would say, you see, this is happening, how exciting it is.

And I think it's understandable wanting to make sense of the world that seems out of control. But Jesus says, the prediction stuff, don't do it. But in our passage, he does warn those who are alive about the coming of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD so they might escape.

[8 : 23] Look down at verse 34 for a moment, please. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

So everything Jesus says up to verse 34 will happen in that generation which took place in 70 AD. Okay, you say, how is that relevant to us today?

If this is just about warning that generation of Christians about the fall of the temple in Jerusalem, why are we even reading it? Well, there's a lot of reasons, but there are two main reasons.

One is, like all of Jesus' words, they have surplus meaning that reach out beyond the immediate context. And right after verse 34, you will see Jesus says, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

There is something living and eternal and life-giving about Jesus' words that make them eternally relevant. And the second reason they're important for us to read and understand is because the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD is related to the second coming.

[9 : 36] It is a picture of God's judgment on the old order of Judaism, and it's a guarantee of the second judgment to come. When Jesus was dying on the cross, God tore the curtain in the temple from top to bottom to say there's no barrier between us because of Jesus Christ, who is the bodily presence of God in his fullness.

There's no use for the temple. And when Jesus rose from the dead, God began to build a new temple. Out of all those people who come to call Jesus Lord, we are being built into a holy temple as a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

That's who we are. And I think the fact that God left the temple for another 37 years is just a mark of his kindness so that people would come to repentance and join the true temple.

And as we come to the passage, there's so much sorrow and anguish and deep distress. But I hope you also saw that Jesus' message is not hopeless or despairing.

It's just the opposite. At every point, the deeper the darkness, the more brightly shines the victory of God. Because when things do look bleak and black, God's kingdom is moving forward in ways we can't imagine.

[10 : 55] So there are three sections. Jesus gives us three points here. And in each section, he tells us what to do. He's completely realistic about the suffering and distress coming.

And then he shines the victory of God so that we might believe, which will overpower. It has the power to more than overpower the distress. So I've got three headings. If you're a note taker, they're very long headings, complicated headings.

Number one, verses four to eight. Don't panic. The sufferings are part of the birth of a new world.

Don't panic. The sufferings are part of the birth of a new world. I had the great privilege of being present for the birth of both our sons. And the midwives were fantastic.

And at the birth of our second son, we had a young intern in the room who was absolutely no help whatsoever. Sorry to tell you. He was anxious and uneasy.

[11 : 55] And he said things that were just a bit frightening. Until someone in the room swore at him and told him where to go. It was a great moment.

And I won't tell you who it was. Except that I've lived with her for quite a long time. See, in the midst of distress and anguish, you don't want someone who's anxious and alarmed.

Jesus is very realistic about the pain in the world. He's the man of sorrows. Look at verse six. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed.

This must take place. But the end is not yet. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All of which happened before 70 AD.

And all these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Now, Jesus has not come just to give us as individuals new birth.

[13 : 02] He's come to give birth to a new creation. An entirely new world. Since Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden, there have been natural disasters.

There has been human suffering and wars and violence and fighting and brutality. And it will be so, not just up to 70 AD, but until Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead.

But in some way that we do not fully understand, all these sufferings are part of the birth of the new creation. Just turn back in Matthew to chapter 19 for a moment.

We flew over this when we did it. In chapter 19, verse 27. Peter says to Jesus, see we've left everything and followed you.

What do we have? And Jesus said to them, truly I say to you, in the new world. That word there is rebirth, regeneration. In the rebirth, the new birth, when the son of man will sit on the glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

[14 : 14] So the birth pains that Jesus speaks about in chapter 24, this new birth is not an evolution from one stage gradually to another. It's a radical remaking of the entire creation, a new heavens and a new earth.

And everyone who has followed Jesus Christ and everyone who has made any sacrifice from him will not just be part of that new creation, but will be blessed with unspeakable blessing in the new world.

That's what he goes on to say. That's why Jesus says don't be alarmed. From Syria to Somalia, from the coronavirus to the catastrophic fires in Australia, from climate change to your own personal cancer diagnosis.

Jesus says do not be alarmed. Yes, the pain is real. Yes, it can feel overwhelming. Yes, we need to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ reaching out and helping each other.

But while everything around you is shaking, you need not shake, he says, because all these things are bringing about something that's eternal and secure.

[15 : 24] These are the birth pains of a new world which I am making for you. And I know some of us feel absolutely overwhelmed.

And some of us ought to feel more overwhelmed. And we need to help each other here in bearing one another's burdens and pointing each other to God and what God's doing.

He's not lost control. He's not surprised. These are the beginning of the birth pains. That's the first point. Do not panic. The sufferings are part of the birth of the new world.

Point two, verses nine to 14. Do not let your love cool down because of the triumph of the gospel. Don't let your love cool down because of the triumph of the gospel.

Now, Jesus shifts the focus from the troubles outside the church to troubles inside the church. And in verses nine to 12, there are three sentences, each with three verbs, and the emphasis is on the last one.

[16 : 27] Just look down at them with me. So, verse nine, they'll deliver you up, first verb, put you to death, second verb, you'll be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

Verse 10, many will fall away, they'll betray one another, and hate one another. Then the third one, many false prophets will arise, lead many astray, and because lawlessness will increase, the third one, the love of many will grow cold.

You see the pattern? Hate, hate, love grows cold. Because the essence of the Christian faith is a burning love for Jesus and for one another.

And because we know the love of God for us, as we sang today, so extreme, we're not conformed to the outlook of those around us.

The world can only live by what it sees. We live by the love of Jesus Christ. We live by the eternal word of Jesus Christ. But it's so difficult to fan into flame that love in the face of persecution, and particularly in the face of persecution from those who used to follow Jesus Christ and have now turned aside.

[17 : 37] Because when people fall away, they don't become neutral. They gradually become hostile. Their former love grows cold, it burns low, and turns to scorn and ridicule and then betrayal, and then they take it out on those whose love continues to burn.

This is so important to us. You will never stand firm without love for Christ. We'll never want to share Christ with others without love.

We'll never pray desperately. We need to strengthen ourselves in the love of Jesus Christ. And in the midst of this terrible stuff going on in the church, the early church, and in the church today.

What is God doing? Verses 13 and 14, he's saving those who endure, and he's using them to bring the love of the gospel and the kingdom to all. Look at verse 13, the one who endures to the end will be saved.

14, this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Aha, people say. Verse 14 sounds like it's talking about the second coming.

[18 : 45] And certainly mission agencies have taken verse 14 to say Jesus won't come back until we reach every language group give to us. That's not the way the New Testament sees it.

He is still talking about the fall of the temple and the end of the old order in 70 AD. Do you know later on in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writing to the Romans in 52 or 55 AD, he says, my gospel has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God.

In 62, he writes Colossians, and he says, this gospel has come to you as indeed in all the world it is bearing fruit and increasing. So the gospel had permeated, gone right to the ends of the empire before the destruction of the temple, and because God is building another temple, a spiritual temple, underneath all the confusing events, the terrible suffering outside, the betrayal inside the church, here it is, the gospel of the kingdom is moving forward in triumph.

And I find that very, very encouraging. It was encouraging to the first Christians at the time and I think it's encouraging for us. Because God's response to false teaching and apathy and betrayal and persecution is to give his people greater boldness in witness, a greater fire of love for one another, and the ongoing growth and triumph of the gospel.

We've seen it in history, we've seen it in China, we've seen it in Iran today. Pray that we would see this in Canada. Don't let your love for him cool down. Fan into flame that love for God and for each other.

- [20 : 33] Because endurance, if it comes from love, is connected to evangelism. They're not separate from each other. If you stand grimly, that's never going to attract people.
- But standing joyfully and firmly for the message of God defies all those difficulties, both inside and outside the church. And Jesus says here the gospel will triumph.
- And in the midst of all these difficulties, verse 3, he is very capable of saving us completely. Okay, so you've been with me so far.
- You've been with me so far? That was the easy part. This becomes more difficult here. So from verses 15 to 31, the focus becomes both more narrow and more broad.
- So you see in verse 16, he's speaking specifically to those in Judea. And then down in 2930, he's speaking cosmically of the rule of the Son of Man in language that is highly symbolic and apocalyptic.
- [21 : 41] So my third point is this, watch and pray because of the triumphant rule of the Son of Man, verses 15 to 28.
- So the disciples ask, when is the temple going to be thrown down? And the most, the clearest part of the answer comes in verses 15 and 16, where Jesus says, when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
- Now the abomination of desolation, it's, that was the name my mother gave to my room when I was a teenager. Not it. It's a devastating pollution.
- It's a sacrilegious, horrifying sacrilege. It comes directly from a verse in the Old Testament from Daniel, where God promises that in the disobedience of his people, he will clear the sacrifices and he'll set up something horrifying in its place.
- And when Matthew says, let the reader understand, he's not talking about you. He's talking about the person who reads out publicly, out aloud. There wasn't any reading, private reading, without reading out aloud.
- [22 : 59] So Matthew says to the, to the public reader, take a moment, go back to Daniel and explain to the people you're reading to what this is all about. We will in just a moment. Now, this abomination of desolation in the holy place, Israel had already seen a fulfillment of this in 167 BC when a Greek king came through and he conquered Jerusalem and on top of the altar in the temple, he set up his own altar and to try and maximally offend the locals, he sacrificed pigs on it.
- And in the years running up to 70 AD, there are a whole string of instances where people set up things in the altar and shed blood in a way that was offensive. And Jesus is saying to these early Christians, when you see it, run.
- And they did. Because verse 25, they believed Jesus had told them beforehand. Well, then, why does Jesus go all apocalyptic in verses 29 to 31?
- Why does he use this highly symbolic language? I think it is because he wants them to understand the power and significance of his resurrection and ascension.
- And it's here I'm worried I might lose you. So, I want to introduce a Greek word. It's very important. Can't leave church without learning this word.
- [24 : 26] It is the Greek word parousia. Parousia. And it's translated often as coming. So when the disciples ask their first question, the second question in verse 3, what will be the sign of your parousia, your coming?
- It's a technical term for the second coming of Jesus. It's not the normal word for coming. It means the presence of a king, a royal visitation, when Jesus will arrive to judge the living and the dead.

And Jesus himself uses that word in verse 27 if you just look back to that verse. for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so is the parousia of the Son of Man.

And the point of verse 27 is that Jesus' second coming will be entirely different from the fall of Jerusalem. His second coming, his parousia, will be instantaneous, immediately visible by all, irresistible and global.

But now in verses 29 to 30, Jesus uses a different word for coming because he's speaking about something different. Let me read the verses to you, 29 and 30. 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 heaven will be shaken.

[25 : 46] That's familiar Old Testament apocalyptic language. 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 it is not the word parousia.

And this coming on the clouds with power and great glory when Jesus uses this language he's not speaking about his second coming he is speaking about his resurrection and ascension because he's not coming to earth he's coming to the Father who is in heaven.

Let me explain. Keep your finger in chapter 24 and go back to Daniel chapter 7 please. Amen. Great news about Alan Burns but I'm concerned if anyone's lost now come to Daniel 7 with me page 745 this is Daniel 7 13 to 14 I saw in the night visions and behold look with the clouds of heaven very important phrase there came this is the coming one like a son of man and who did he come to?

He came to the ancient of days who is God and was presented before him and to him was given dominion glory and a kingdom and peoples and nations and languages should serve him his dominion will be an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall never be destroyed.

So this reference from Daniel 7 that Jesus picks up here is not coming to earth it's coming to the father in his ascension okay so when you come to the new testament Jesus comes first as a baby at Christmas and he's promised that he will come again to judge the living and the dead but when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven he sat down at the right hand of the father he came to the father and God gave him all authority in heaven and on earth and that resurrection and ascension is the most massive reversal the world has ever seen and the implications are so vast they can only be described in symbolic language in the death resurrection and ascension of Jesus it is as though God is rehang the sun moon and stars resetting them in place so that now they can serve and bow down before the son and God's promise is that now he is putting all things under the feet of Jesus Christ that's what's really going on in our world amidst all the suffering and darkness and difficulties

[28 : 32] God is now putting everything under his feet and the new creation is coming as more and more people hear the gospel men and women and boys and girls throughout the world that's why it's just not possible to confine Jesus to a temple since he has been definitively rejected verse 28 the temple is nothing more than a corpse there's much more to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus than just the defeat of death it is the triumph and enthronement of the son of man when he came on the clouds to the father and I know that's apocalyptic I know this is cosmic stuff we're talking about what does it all mean for us I think this is what it means it means that Jesus has the final word for us heaven and earth will pass away everything that seems most permanent in your life and my life including our life will pass away but his word will never pass away and our world and our lives cannot be explained on their own terms it's Jesus word alone that holds the key to the past and to the future and to our present and his kingdom rules over all and will rule over all and it's not a kingdom of violence it's not a kingdom of brutality or death it's a kingdom of grace and a kingdom of goodness in the person of Jesus

Christ the one who holds the future of our lives and of the world in his hands they're in hands that have nail marks in them there's no suffering he doesn't understand that he doesn't enter into there's no pain that he cannot overcome more than overcome that he can remake in the rebirth and I know we feel weak and I know we feel our difficulties but God is bringing to birth a new world and he is using you and me as his chosen ones to give witness to the greatness of his glory he knows the outcome he's told us the outcome and it is completely worth it don't panic be steady stir up your love watch and pray tomorrow morning when you get up and go about your day remind yourself he rules and you're part of his purpose and even though heaven and earth will pass away his words will never pass away and 70 AD confirmed it but even more importantly his resurrection and ascension confirm it and so we wait with patience together knowing that one day this world will become the kingdom of our

God and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever and ever amen