

# Global impact and the end of history

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[ 0 : 00 ] Grab your Bibles and turn to Matthew 24. It's a passage that Sam read out to us right at the beginning.

It would be really good to have it in front of you if it's not in a Bible, an iPad or iPhone or whatever it is that you use nowadays. And I'm going to pray. Father God, we thank you for what we've been learning and engaging within your word in the last three weeks of mission month.

We pray that tonight as we wrestle with a difficult passage, Lord, I pray that you would speak regardless of my inadequacy.

And I pray, Father, that we would see something of your global agenda and the end of all time and how your purposes exist and ours are to surrender to it.

So, Lord, I pray that you would move us in a way that we need to be moved, whether it be encouraged, whether it is repentance. Father, we ask for your spirit to be working through your word.

[ 1 : 15 ] Give us such a vision of how great you are, that we would give our lives to your agenda, for your gospel to go to the nations, for people to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. Amen. A few weeks ago, Chris used an illustration. It was an illustration about a life-saving station.

And I wish he hadn't have used it because I want to use it. It's a great illustration. And I wrestled over this for a while. I thought, well, who cares? You probably don't remember anyway.

And so, well, you might not have been here. And so I'm going to tell it anyway. And I'm going to do it in a shortened version because it just fits so well with what we're doing tonight, the passage we're looking at.

It's called The Parable of the Life-Saving Station. It was written back in the 1950s by a pastor. It goes, They gave their time and their money and their effort to support the work of this life-saving station.

[ 2 : 49 ] New boats were bought. New crews were trained. Some of the new members felt that a more comfortable place should ought to be provided as the first refuge for those who are safe from the sea.

And so they replaced the emergency stretchers with some beds and put some furniture in the enlarged building. And now the life-saving station became a comfortable and popular gathering place for the members.

And they kind of furnished it like a club. Less of the members, however, were now interested in going out to sea on life-saving missions.

And so they hired lifeboat crews to do the work for them. Most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the life-saving activities personally.

As time went by and a meeting came around, there was a split in the club membership. Some members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they still were called a life-saving station.

[ 3 : 53 ] But they were voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all various kinds of people who were shipwrecked on the shores, then they would need to begin their own life-saving station just down the coast.

And so they did. And then as years went by, the new life-saving station experienced the same changes and difficulties as the old one. They evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded.

And so if you visit the seacoast today, you'll find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in the waters, but most people drown.

It's a great parable, I think, as we come to Mission Pledge Sunday today. It's also a great parable about ancient Israel.

You see, the temple, the center of their worship, was meant to be the center of their activity in God's bringing blessing to the world.

[ 5 : 04 ] Israel was God's people. Jerusalem was his city. In the middle of the city was the temple. And from there, the presence of God would go out and bring blessing to the nations. And so it's been a tense couple of days for Jesus and his mates as they have come into Jerusalem, Matthew 21 through to 23.

It's a fairly tense time. During these days, after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, Jesus prophesied destruction on Israel by cursing the fig tree.

He has cleansed out the temple by a weapon changing over tables, turning over money-changing tables. And he has entered into debates with the religious establishment, which is what we looked at a few weeks ago.

Debates which he consistently won. And in chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus passes judgment on the religious leadership of Israel.

Curse after curse after curse upon them and does away with them. And see, for the disciples of Jesus, they've sort of heard Jesus engage in all this conflict in the temple courts.

[ 6 : 22 ] They all think it's a little bit tough. You see, for the disciples of Jesus up to this point, his mission isn't clear to them. They really have potentially not understood the first thing of it yet.

You see, for them, the temple was still very important. You see, when the disciples look at the temple, they see coming glory.

Have a look at it there in chapter 24, verse 2. Jesus left the temple and was walking away. This is his final... He's rejected the temple.

He's rejected the old Israel system. He's walking away from it now for the final time. And as he's walking away, it says, His disciples came up to him to call his attention to the buildings.

The equivalent passage in Mark 13 has the disciples saying to Jesus, Look, teacher, what magnificent stones, what magnificent buildings.

[ 7 : 27 ] Luke 21 says a very similar thing. The disciples are saying, basically here at this moment, Oh, come on, Jesus. Lighten up a little bit.

Have a look at it. It's not that bad. It's a pretty spectacular building. And in actual fact, it was. The temple was magnificent.

It was built on a half an acre of marble slab with an imposing dominance over ancient Israel. It was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world until the Romans themselves smashed it. But unlike the disciples, when Jesus saw the temple, he didn't see coming glory. He saw judgment. And so Jesus says something really unexpected to the disciples.

In fact, something that would have potentially chilled their blood. Verse 2. Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth.

[ 8 : 33 ] Not one stone here will be left on another. Everyone will be thrown down. So you can imagine the stunned silence at that point as they wander out the gate, if it had one, out the gate and down the pathway, down the slope, up the other side of the slope and camp themselves on the Mount of Olives.

You see, from there, they were 50 meters higher than Jerusalem. And they have a dramatic view of the temple with the massive stones and the marble and the ivory and the gold.

And then the question comes, verse 3. Tell us, they said, when will this happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

Let me just give you a heads up here. From the rest of Matthew 24, the rest of these verses, Jesus' reply to that question is by far the most difficult passage in Matthew.

And along with its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21, most commentators agree that they are the most difficult texts of the New Testament to understand.

[ 9 : 58 ] So I'm not pretending here in any sense that we're going to nail it tonight. What we're going to do is we're going to take a bit of a big picture look. So what is particularly difficult is the rich nature of the language and the intertwining of multiple ideas.

You see, in this Jesus' answer, he is looking to the future, answering the question, when's it going to happen? But to what future is he looking? The verses could refer to the destruction of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

They could refer to the end of history. They could refer to the second coming of Jesus. They could refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus. What is Jesus looking to? My answer is this.

I think it's referring to all those things. Now that's just not having a safe bet. I think it is referring to all those things. The question is, which bit's referring to which bit?

That's the hard bit. Trying to work out that stuff. You see, often one section will have multiple fulfillments. But the context for us is verses 1 to 3.

[11:11] The disciples were concerned about the physical temple as they saw it. And they pointed out the buildings to Jesus, most likely for them, hoping that Jesus will cut the leadership some slack.

And say, hey, it's a good building. But he says it's going to be destroyed. And so the disciples side up beside Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

And they want the inside goss on when the physical building of the temple is going to be destroyed. When's it going to happen? And Jesus' answer is that this terrible thing will happen within a generation.

Verse 34. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. And it did.

It happened in 70 AD. After a four-year siege where the Romans came in to squash a rebellion, which had happened.

[12:10] And it was a terrible siege that involved unimaginable hardships. The Romans made a sustained attempt to starve out the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Parents were reduced to cannibalism as they ate their own children. The city and the temple were eventually reduced to rubble. So much so that not one stone lay on top of another stone.

The carnage and the slaughter were terrible. More than one million Jews died in the operation. And that is why Jesus mentions here, flee to the hills.

Don't even come down and grab your coat. Get out. You just want to hope that you're not pregnant on that day. You don't want to be in the city at all when this happens. It's going to be an unimaginable catastrophe.

But why were the disciples keen to know when it was all going to take place? Did they actually care about the building? I think they actually cared more about what the building stood for.

[13:26] You might remember a number of weeks ago when we did our series on the kingdom of God. And the connection between the destruction of the temple and the judgment of God on Israel.

You see it particularly in Ezekiel. The destruction of the temple was linked to God departing.

Remember, God's presence was left the temple and the temple was nothing more than a bunch of stones.

And the temple was going to be smashed as a result. And it did happen. And what also happened was that when God's presence departed, the temple was smashed.

The people were exiled. It meant judgment for them. And so when Jesus says here that the temple is going to be destroyed, they go, oh no, not again.

Not another trip to Babylon. Not the spiritual wilderness that we're being in. Not again in our history.

[14:30] Not again in our history. Not again in our history. And so Jesus answers their question about the temple destruction. But he also goes far beyond them into instructing the church about his kingdom, his return, and what his people are meant to do in the between times.

The bottom line is the destruction of the temple in 70 AD will not be the end of the presence of God. It will not be the end of the kingdom of God. Likewise, he says, earthquakes, famines, wars, and persecution, all those sort of things that you experienced in the previous exiles, it will not be a signal that the kingdom of God has ended.

It will not be a signal that Jesus is not on the throne. On the surface, it will look like there is no hope and there is no future, but Jesus is the king.

He is the Messiah. He is the Christ. Don't be confused what you see, what you hear, and what you experience in the world. The key for us is there in verse 4 and 5.

Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name claiming I am the Christ and will deceive many. In other words, Jesus says here, don't chase after other messiahs who appear to promise safety and salvation.

[15:50] Why does Jesus say that? Because when times are really tough, it will be hard to see that Jesus is still the king.

And others will come along and you will put your faith in those others. And Jesus says, don't do that. It happened in 70 AD with the destruction of the temple.

In that time, a prophet rose up in Jerusalem and said, I'm your leader. Come follow me into the temple and you'll have safety and security from the siege.

And 6,000 men and women, sorry, women and children went with him into the temple for safety. Romans came in and burned it to the ground while they were in there.

I think that's what Jesus is referring to in verses 23 to 26. In Matthew 24. He says, watch out for false messiahs who promise safety and security and ease.

[17:02] And they especially rise in times of calamity and hardship. Verse 6, you will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed.

In other words, he's saying, don't be alarmed when the world is crashing down around you. Don't think that God's not off the throne. Continuing on in verse 6, such things must happen, but the end is still yet to come.

Verse 7, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. You see, Jesus' basic advice here to his disciples, who are clearly distressed about the destruction of the temple and what it means for them as the people of God, is to stay calm.

Calamity and hardships will come, and they will go, but they will come, and they will be there until the end. Watch out, he says, that no one deceives you.

Watch out that you were not led astray into thinking that Jesus isn't the Christ, that he isn't king, that he isn't in control, that he's not the savior of the world. Catastrophes will call it all into question, especially the closer those catastrophes come to home.

[18:17] You see, I think the siege of Jerusalem would have caused the people of Christ to question everything because of the nature of that calamity, as I suspect it would for our brothers and sisters, as we just heard a moment ago.

13 baptized, 11 dead in a week. What are you doing, God? But don't be alarmed.

Don't let your faith be rocked. Let me say that I think that this little chap on the side of Mount Olives, the Mount of Olives, is so timely and so pastoral of Jesus.

Because the destruction of the temple was actually going to happen within days. The actual building would stand until 70 AD.

But the end would be determined within a couple of days. John chapter 2 records the encounter where Jesus clears the temple. And it says this, Then the Jews demanded of him, In other words, Show us, Show us your authority that you're in charge of this place and you can do what you like at the temple.

[19:48] And Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days. And the Jews replied, It's taken 46 years to build this thing and you think you can raise it in three days?

Then verse 21 says, But the temple he spoke of was his body. What happens here is Jesus links the destruction of his body and the destruction of the temple.

These words of Jesus are going to be thrown back to him within a couple of days. And so in Matthew 26 verse 62, This is what he said just after his arrest. Finally, Two came forward and declared, This fellow said, I'm able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.

And again, After Jesus has been nailed to the cross and he's there bleeding and dying, Matthew 27 says, Those who passed by hurled insults at him, Shaking their heads and saying, You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, Save yourself.

You see, Within days of instructing his disciples about the destruction of the temple, Jesus' body will be destroyed. He is preparing his disciples for the destruction of his body by crucifixion, Which coincides with the destruction of the temple as the way that you have access to God.

[21:25] And it will look like a calamity. It will feel like a calamity. For the disciples of Jesus, Their king, Their Messiah, Their teacher, Their leader, As he hangs on a cross and he's bleeding in a painful death, And as the sky goes dark, Read on the rest of Matthew, You'll see the links here.

The sky goes dark and the earth shakes, And as the disciples disperse and run to the hills, It will look like a failure.

His disciples will see him and it will appear that all is lost. They've lost. Jesus is lost. The kingdom is lost. And the temptation in that moment will be to abandon Jesus and go, Well, that one's dead.

Where's our next Messiah? Where's our next Messiah? And Jesus is here getting them ready for it. Hang in there.

Because three days later in his resurrection, A brand new way to God will be opened up, A new hope, A new life. You see, What looks like a failure in this moment will be turned around for success.

[ 22 : 45 ] And this is the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel means good news. It is the good news that the death of Jesus on the cross was not lost, But in fact, Gain.

The death and resurrection are the victory of the king, Not the defeat of the king. The good news is for all people, For all nations. And this, My friends, Is Jesus' mission.

The disciples have not yet picked it up. The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that at the coming of Jesus, God moved into this world in an unprecedented way.

And he dealt with sin in a new way on the cross. He is gathering a people in a new way. He's empowering his representatives in a new way. And in all this, He reigns as king.

This is the coming and the advancement of his kingdom. And so they are not to be afraid. They are not to be rocked by the circumstances that look like failure and loss. The destruction of the temple, And the death of Jesus, Are all part of God's eternal plan.

[ 24 : 01 ] And they will be part of it too. They will be scared. They will be frightened. They will be weak. But they are not to give up on Jesus' mission.

God's plan and purposes surround this gospel advancing to the ends of the world. Verse 14, In this gospel of the kingdom, We preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

And then the end will come. Notice here, The end of history is linked to the advancement of the gospel.

Jesus links the two together. The proclamation of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. He's linked to the end of all history.

That is God's agenda. This is the great hope of the mission's enterprise. This is the great work of mission. Cannot fail.

[ 25 : 02 ] The gospel will not fail. And so I think Jesus' pastoral encouragement here is very timely for his mates. Because what they will soon discover is that the price of the mission's enterprise will be very high.

Not so high that it's not worth it, but very high. The promise of the kingdom not failing will not happen without the price of opposition and suffering and sacrifice.

Did you hear that? The promise of the kingdom not failing, the promise of victory, of the gospel going to the ends of the earth, will not happen without the price of opposition and suffering and sacrifice.

As Christ suffered, so all will his followers as they get on with his agenda. Verse 9, Then you'll be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you'll be hated by all nations because of me. The disciples will face persecution at the hands of the local religious groups. They would also suffer at the secular state and bear witness, powerful witness to Christ. They would experience intense personal hatred.

[ 26 : 28 ] And as that persecution comes, they will be propelled out of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And the gospel will be proclaimed to all nations. And it will come at the high price of their suffering. And so these are dangerous times for the disciples because when they suffer and sacrifice, it will feel like Jesus isn't king.

How can Jesus be on his throne and ruling all things by his powerful word when I rot in a prison cell?

And so the warning here is watch out, verse 12, because the love of most will grow cold. See, again, in the midst of all this is the gospel advance is the temptation to abandon Jesus.

Quite literally, it means the lawlessness, the wickedness will lead to the cooling off of love. And the shock here is it's the majority.

[ 27 : 42 ] It's the love of most will go cold. The love of the majority will cool off. And quite noticeably, it is the cooling off towards love for God and love for his purposes to love people.

It is the picture of gradually moving away from Christ and a lack of compassion for people who are lost.

It is a sad picture of a church in decline. A church that's no longer engaged in mission. It is the picture of a life-saving station that's forgetting to save people.

The contrast of those who cool off are those who stay with Christ through thick and thin. Verse 13, he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

It's interesting that this verse is the repeat of Matthew 10, 22. Again, it says there in Matthew 10, 22, All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

[ 28 : 50 ] In chapter 10, Jesus says that in the context of his 12 disciples going out to mission in Israel. And here the context is again mission.

This time it is on the grandest scale of the mission to the nations and until the end of all time. Verse 14 again, And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come.

So, let me just stand back and tell you what I think this passage is saying for us. The basic teaching here is quite pastoral of Jesus, I think.

And the basic teaching is keep watch. Remember the question of the disciples? They say, what will be the signs?

What do we need to look for? And Jesus says, keep watch. But, in other words, be vigilant. Look hard. But, not vigilant keeping watch for signs of the return of Jesus.

[ 30 : 07 ] Because Jesus says, as you go through Matthew 24, that there will be a number of things which will happen, but don't trust any of the signs.

None of them are conclusive in themselves. There is only one, one sure sign that you can trust in terms of the timing of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And that is this. When he comes. That's it. That's when you know he's come. It's when he's here.

And he says, don't be sidetracked by all the signs.

Be vigilant, he says. Keep watch. Be ready for his return. What all Christians must be vigilant at and watch for is their relationship with Christ.

They are always to be ready to meet their maker. The rest of chapter 24 and end of 25, I think Jesus outlines what is really important to watch.

[ 31 : 19 ] So, read it when you go home, the rest of 24 and 25. In the parable of the faithful servant, Jesus told his disciples to avoid worldly sin and the threat of being overcome by the attractiveness of living in this world, the attractiveness of sin in this world.

End of chapter 24. In the parable of the ten virgins, some of the virgins are not ready when the day of reckonings come and they are shut out of the kingdom. The parable of the talents, Jesus spoke of himself going away on a journey and in the meantime, the servants are to be fruitful with the talents in which they have been entrusted, getting on with the king's business.

He says, watch out for those things. Watch out that your agenda is aligned to my agenda for the world.

And so the question that I have for us is, are you cooling off? Have you gone cold? It will most likely be reflected in cooling towards people, especially reflected in God's global agenda for his gospel to go out in the world, whether you actually care whether people are actually one.

On one level, the apostle Paul could have said that his missionary endeavors were fulfilled. That is, on one level, you could say the apostle Paul filled verse 14 by 70 AD.

[ 32 : 51 ] That is, he took the nation, the gospel as far as Rome. The gospel did go out to the nations. But how do I know it's not fulfilled?

Completely? Because the end hasn't come. And because the end hasn't come, we're to keep going on with it. We are to keep doing it until the end comes.

That's the job. It doesn't matter whether, how we view it or how we interpret it. The reality is, until the end comes, we're to keep getting on with it.

God's agenda. And how do I know that? Because Brian really helpfully pointed me on Saturday to 2 Peter chapter 3. It links our mission enterprise again with the end of all things.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises.

[ 33 : 56 ] Some understand slowness. So in other words, hang in there. God is still on his throne. He's working out his purposes. Maybe not in your time, not in your pace, but he's working it out.

And why is he so slow? He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And then verse 10, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. It talks about the end of history and why is it delayed?

Because God wants people to come to know Christ. Massive words of encouragement would appear that God isn't doing everything he can to save people.

Massive words of encouragement when you hear 13 people that get baptized and 11 of them are killed. Billions of people moving into a crisis of eternity.

[ 34 : 59 ] God has all the power and sometimes you wonder, what are you doing, God? You could do it just like that. God doesn't want anyone to perish.

And he wants us to align our priorities with his. That is, the end doesn't come because, it's not because he's waiting for me to fulfill my plans.

He's waiting for me to work towards fulfilling his plans. That's really what he wants to see. And so I want us to call us as a church. This is Mission Pledge Sunday.

And I want to call us as a church to align ourselves with God's agenda, to walk towards his goal, to make the sacrifices. If the gospel is to go to the nations, it will be the result of hardship and persecution and sacrifices.

For some of us, it may be including that number of 11. But for all of us who are in Christ, it certainly means, at the very least, sacrifice of prayer and giving.

[ 36 : 05 ] So I want to call you to give today. Don't allow the events and the affairs of this world to distract you, you know, because the finances aren't reaching and the kids aren't compliant and things are tough at work and the relationship ain't working out so well, to distract you or cause you to question the kingdom rule of the Lord Jesus.

Revelation just reveals to me that Jesus is sitting on his throne and it looks out the scope of history and he has never lost control of his world.

And his plans, even though they don't look like it to me in the minutia of details here in Chatswood, his plans are always proceeding and advancing.

That is the hope of the missions enterprise. He sits over all of histories. His purposes are coming to fruition. And so, my friends, join him in global impact and speed his coming.

May we all be able to say, not just with our mouths, but with our lives, come Lord Jesus, come.

Amen.