

THE
KINGDOM
IS HERE

matthew

sermon series

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WE MUST BE READY: MATTHEW 24:1-44

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The words of Matthew 24-25 are the famous Olivet Discourse, Jesus' last final great discourse in the book of Matthew. Certainly, after reading these verses, we likely had several significant questions arise. It is an understatement to say that scholars disagree on the details of this text, so it is helpful for us to remember the text's main point. The main point functions as an anchor for us as we sail throughout these verses. We might not understand all the details, but if we get the main idea right, then we'll be going in the right direction. The main idea of this passage is simple: the coming of the Lord is unexpected; therefore, we must always be ready (44).

This idea should sound familiar since this is a major theme of Holy Week. Matthew has emphasized from several different angles the fact that the king is here, but the people are not ready. The people shouted "Hosanna to the son of David" as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey. Indeed, the king is here. Yet, he cleansed the temple, cursed the fig tree, and silenced the religious elite. Truly, the people were not ready. A transition happens now in Holy Week. In these verses, Matthew shifts the focus from the religious elite unto the crowds – the generation present at Jesus' death – and unto us – the current readers of the book. Will we be ready for our coming King?

My hope should be obvious, church family. I hope that we, unlike the religious elite, would be ready for the coming of our King by continuing the work of Jesus.

Let's now explore this idea together.

The Disciples' Question

When approaching difficult passages, understanding the text's main point and the context of the passage are very important. The context are two questions (Matthew 24:3): 1) When will the temple and the sacrificial system be destroyed. This question arises because of Jesus' words in verse 2. 2) What is the sign of your coming and the end of the age? In the disciples' minds, an act like the destruction of the temple would bring about a new era because of the nature of the temple. The temple is the place in the OT where God communed with humanity. It was engraved with trees and plants since it was a picture of Eden in a fallen world. Indeed, the destruction of this place would signal a new era. These are the disciples' questions, so let's look at Jesus' reply now.

Question #1: When will the Temple be Destroyed? (24:4-35)

Jesus discusses the future destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:4-35, and we should be aware of several details here. First, Jesus explains in verses 4-14 the beginning of the birth pains. He describes the events leading up to the destruction of the temple as involving the appearances of false christs (5), the rumors of war (5), and natural disasters like famines and earthquakes (8). Birth pains are used throughout the OT figuratively to describe distressing times. Hezekiah described a potential conflict with Assyria using this word because birth pains communicate distress (2 Kings 19:3//Isaiah 37:3). Jesus' idea is that the near future for Jerusalem will be very troubling as it was historically.

Second, in verses 9-14, Jesus transitions from talking about “global” difficulties such as famines to discussing how these difficulties will affect his disciples. Persecution, the influence of false teachers, and the effect of increased sin will lead many to give up and not persevere until the end (11-13). Trials will come and they will cause many “disciples” to give up. Yet, notice the glory of verse 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” (14). The success of the gospel will not be hindered by disciples who give up. Although many among us might give up, the gospel will go forth in power to all nations. Historically, this is exactly what happens. The book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome on house arrest in the year AD 62 and tradition indicates that Paul was released from prison and beheaded a few years later. Between his release from imprisonment and his death, he seems to have taken the gospel to the ends of the Roman world, Spain. By the end of his life, Paul had spread the gospel to the ends of the Roman Empire. Although many “disciples” give up, the gospel continues to spread.

Third, Jesus becomes more specific about the “when” of the destruction of the temple in verses 15-28. Jesus says that the destruction of the temple will coincide with an “abomination of desolation.” An abomination is an act of false worship, and Jesus says that this act will make the temple desolate. In other words, this act of idolatry in the temple will lead to God judging the temple (see Daniel 9:17). Moreover, the destruction of the temple is preceded by great alarm. People will flee the city and those who are pregnant will be distressed (21). Tribulation will arise (21) as will false christs and prophets (24). The result of increased persecution will lead many to fall away, a reality we see in the books of 1 Peter and

Hebrews. The presence of false prophets and christs will also be a threat to the church, an idea we see in the books of 1 John and Jude.

Fourth, in verses 29-31, Jesus is more specific about the date of the destruction of the temple: it will happen after the tribulation of verses 4-28, and this event, the destruction of the temple, will be utterly distressing. Notice the language of verses 29-31. The ideas of the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling is found in several passages in the OT like Isaiah 13:10, 24:23; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31. These symbols occur in contexts where God is intervening in history to judge people, and I think the symbols communicate the terrifying fact of the creation coming undone. The sun and moon going dark is an undoing of creation since God gave them as lights (Genesis 1:16) and God gave the stars for light (Genesis 1:16) and for signs, seasons, days, and years (Genesis 1:14). Thus, for them to go dark indicates an undoing of creation, light, and time. The coming judgment of Jerusalem will be like undoing creation!

The appearance of the Son of Man in heaven refers to Daniel 7:13 which does not refer to the Son of Man coming to the earth but coming to God (30). This fits the context super well since we have seen throughout Holy Week that the religious elite challenge Jesus' authority. So now Jesus utters the words of verse 30: Jesus coming to God. Indeed, Jesus' authority is vindicated at this moment when he receives the everlasting kingdom promised in Daniel 7 and proves that he has the authority to overturn tables in the temple and to curse a fig tree. Jesus is the king.

This context is vital for verse 31 since the idea of the angels gathering the people does not refer to the second coming, but how Jesus establishes a new kingdom of people from every tribe, nation,

language, and tongue. The future destruction of the nation of Israel and the religion of Judaism does signal the end for the kingdom of God. Rather, the kingdom of God is now made up of a new people: a multiethnic people. Jesus has won the kingdom by crushing the curse and has invited sinners and tax collectors to enter it as kingdom citizens and children of the king. These are who are gathered as the Church.

Finally, in verses 32-35, Jesus explains how these increased tribulations, the enthronement of Jesus before the Father, and the gathering of sinners as citizens of the kingdom of God all precede the destruction of the temple. When these things occur, Jesus' audience should know that the destruction of the temple is near (33).

Church family, the religious elite loved power and position more than Jesus. Therefore, they were judged with a judgment described as cosmic undoing. What a terrible reality and this is the reality that awaits all who reject the Lordship of Jesus for any other lord. Pursuing the lordship of money, sexual freedom, or happiness leads to a judgment like Jesus just described.

Question #2: When is the End of the Age (24:36-44)

Jesus transitions from talking about the destruction of the temple to talking about his second coming in verses 36-44. Interestingly, his discussion of this event is very different than his discussion in verses 4-35. When talking about the destruction of the temple, Jesus described in detail things that precede it. He doesn't do that when discussing his second coming. Instead, Jesus explains his second coming as completely unexpected. People continued with life as normal during the days of Noah and will do so at Jesus' second coming. In other words, we do not know when he will come.

Jesus' emphasis, then, isn't on the date of his second coming. Rather, since his second coming is unexpected, we should be alert (42). This point is significant and repeated in verse 44. We must be ready for we do not know when he will come.

Application

Are you ready for Jesus' second coming? We ready ourselves by being actively engaged in kingdom work. Jesus has modeled this work to us throughout Matthew. Jesus' ministry is characterized as led by the Spirit and Kingdom-minded. Jesus is constantly working to undo the curse; are we? In our marriages, do we actively seek to put to death sin and shame? Is the tone of our families grace and forgiveness or disappointment and anger? How about our church? Do we see each other like little children in need of care or rivals to compete with? Let's spend some time, church family, evaluating our life. Is it an extension of Jesus' ministry or not?

Non-Christian, would you come to trust in Jesus today. Coming to Jesus involves trusting him. We trust that he is who he says he is: our savior. It involves trusting that he can do what he says he can do: take away our sins. Would you put your trust in him today? He can do this because he died for sinners. Would you turn from pursuing other lords like happiness, success, and status, and turn to follow Jesus? If so, please let us know. We want to care for you and disciple you as you begin this new life in Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, help us to be ready for Jesus' coming. Help us to be active in your work for your glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

