

## **Intro**

This morning we're looking at the "end times." The last events of history. There's a diversity of "end times" understanding represented here this morning.

Some of you might be very staunch, with very specific convictions you've held for years.

Some of you know the issues but remain undecided. You're familiar with every millennial view but have a hard time fitting the pieces together.

Some of you are familiar with only one "end times" scheme. Questions remain. You might not know how to get there from the Bible.

Some of you know the basic events and aren't caught up in all the controversies. You know the big picture and you're content with that.

Some of you find the "end times" very confusing and have lots of questions.

In the midst of whatever disagreement and confusion exists in this room, some things are clear:

- 1) God judges sin
- 2) God directs history
- 3) God will resurrect his people

Let's turn to Matthew to see what Jesus taught about his return.

**READ MATTHEW 24:1-31**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

- 1) Interpret 24:15-26
- 2) Two applications
- 3) Interpret 24:27-31
- 4) One application
- 5) Goal: to handle eschatology well without division

### **Theological triage**

Disagreement over precise end times details is a third rank matter.

- Some eschatology is essential: a literal, physical return of Christ, imperishable bodies for the just, hell for the unjust, new heavens and new earth, sin and death eliminated.
- There's other details we can disagree on while still fellowshiping together. The timing of the rapture doesn't affect church practice or how we obey the Bible or compromise the gospel.
- This is a confusing, hard to understand passage. Given the various interpretations, I'm presenting what I think best represents Jesus' words.

## Recap of 24:1-14

- 1) Herod's glorious temple will be destroyed.
- 2) This happened in 70 AD.
- 3) Jesus' disciples ask two questions.
  - a) When will the temple be destroyed?
  - b) What sign will accompany Jesus' coming and the end of the age?
- 4) I argued he began by answering the first question.

## 24:15-21

Jesus continues answering the question, "when will these things be?" When will the temple be destroyed?

*"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), <sup>16</sup> then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." – 24:15-16*

When you see the abomination of desolation, get out of Judea. Immediately. No time to climb down from your roof and get your possessions inside (24:17). No time to walk across the field and retrieve your cloak (24:18). How awful for pregnant women and those with young children (24:19). How awful if they had to flee during winter or the Sabbath (24:20). Sabbath = everything shut down or opposition from strict Sabbatarians?

The point is get out immediately. Hardship's coming.

## Abomination of desolation

- 1) Daniel mentioned an abomination of desolation three times (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).
- 2) The abomination of desolation in 11:31 was fulfilled in 167 BC when Antiochus IV Epiphanes entered the temple, stopped the regular offerings, erected an altar to Zeus, and sacrificed swine on the altar.
- 3) History will repeat itself in the days leading up to 70 AD. These events fulfill Daniel 9:27; 12:11.
- 4) Luke 21:20-21 adds: flee when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.
- 5) The desolation likely refers to events in 68 AD where Zealots unlawfully entered the most holy place and installed their own high priests. At the same time Roman armies were beginning to advance against Jerusalem.

The early church heeded Jesus' warning. In *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.3, Eusebius of Caesarea noted that the early church heeded Jesus' warning by leaving "the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella."

*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. – 24:21*

Speaking of tribulation in 70 AD in apocalyptic, exaggerated language. This tribulation was horrific:

"the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. As for burying them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it; and those that were hearty and well were deterred from doing it by the great multitude of those dead bodies, and by the uncertainty there was how soon they should die themselves, for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their coffins before that fatal hour was come! Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were

just going to die, looked upon those that were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths.” Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 5.12.3

Josephus recounts mothers taking food from infants to save themselves, robbers catching wind of food proceeding to beat men, tear out the hair of women, and lifting children and shaking them down upon the floor. Women even roasted their infants (*Jewish Wars*, 5.10.1-3; 6.3.3-4).

Josephus said 97,000 were taken as captives. 1.1 million perished because of the siege (*Jewish Wars*, 6.9.3).

Those who experienced the seige would have agreed with Jesus’ description.

## **24:22-26**

Those days, the great tribulation of 70 AD, will be cut short for the sake of the elect. The verb “to elect” means someone who has been chosen, picked out from a larger group. Like children in gym class designated as captain choose which players will be on their team. The elect would be the players they chose. God will cut short the tribulation for the sake of his chosen people. Meaning perhaps Christians trapped inside Jerusalem or otherwise affected by the siege?

“*Then*” (24:23) = if supposed Messiahs pop up in the days following 70 AD, reject them.

“*If possible*” (24:24) means it is finally impossible for the elect to be deceived by false christs and false prophets because God strengthens their faith and he completes the work he begins in us (Phil 1:6).

“*See, I have told you beforehand.*”

In other words, pay careful attention to what I’ve revealed. Jesus has answered their first question.

## **Application 1: God judges sin**

The Roman siege in 70 AD was God’s judgment on Israel’s sin. We saw this at the end of chapter 23.

*Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, <sup>35</sup> so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. – Matt 23:34-35*

Israel historically opposed God’s prophets. The Pharisees continued the tradition by persecuting the apostles and the early church. **God’s pent up wrath for Israel’s persistent rebellion would fall on this generation!** Judgment was certain:

“*Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*” – Matt 23:36

God judged sin/rebellion in 70 AD = the God of the Bible avenges sin. God will judge sin again.

*So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. – Matt 13:49-50*

## **Appeal**

God is holy = doesn’t tolerate sin

God is holy = doesn't tolerate rebellion

70 AD is the proof

God's wrath needs to be satisfied

God is merciful = sent Jesus to die in the place of sinners as a substitute

Resurrection = claims verified...death vindicated

Response = if we repent and believe

Judgment remains if we persist in rebellion

- 1) Consider your sin
- 2) Consider God's mercy in Christ
- 3) Consider...one day mercy will run out

## **Point 2: God directs history**

### **Explanation**

*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. – 24:6*

Don't be troubled because "*this must take place.*" In what sense must wars and rumors of wars happen?

- 1) God permits wars
  - 2) Wars serve God's purposes
- God used Rome to punish unfaithful Israel.
- 3) God acts on his timetable (wisely determined these would precede 70 AD judgment)

*And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. – 24:22*

Who will cut the days of great tribulation short? God will. Why? For the sake of the elect. My point is this: God determines the duration of this great tribulation and he does so to benefit the elect = his people.

God has control over how long an international dispute lasts!

History is loaded with purpose because God is directing it.

- 1) God withholds his actions until their appointed time.
- 2) God acts to ensure events don't last longer than the duration he's appointed.

### **Application**

We trust a powerful God who is directing history towards its appointed end. While we wait, we can trust God is wisely directing the affairs of our world today. Our world, as loaded with sin and confusion and suffering as it is, isn't out of control, isn't without God-ordained limits. God intervenes for our benefit!

### **Non-Christian**

The God who created the world hasn't left the world to itself. This gives us hope. Why? If God's still directing history, he's still concerned about what's taking place. And he's still intervening in human affairs. If we seek this God, if we turn to Jesus in faith and repentance, if we turn from rebellion to trust, this God will intervene in our lives in surprisingly and spectacular ways!

## **24:26-31**

Now Jesus transitions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question: "*what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*"

The Messiah won't be found in the wilderness or inside someone's home (24:26). The Son of Man will be visible for all to see:

*For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* – 24:27

Lightning from east to west = clearly visible and covering a broad area = can't be missed. Not in a secluded and obscure area. Sudden like lightning.

*Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.* – 24:28

This builds on 24:27. So meaning something like the vultures give away where the corpse is = Jesus' coming is impossible to miss.

*"Immediately after the tribulation of those days"* – 24:29

*"those days"* = the days when Jesus comes.

*"tribulation"* = tribulation in the days just prior to Jesus' return. The time period in which Jesus returns will be marked by tribulation.

Signs of his coming:

- 1) Sun darkened
- 2) Moon without light
- 3) Stars falling
- 4) Heavens shaken

Then the Son of man's sign (= Jesus' sign) will appear (24:30). The four signs in 24:29? An unstated sign that can't be missed? Jesus' glory appearing in the clouds? Whatever it is it will be clear.

*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.* – 24:31

Jesus' return will be accompanied by a loud trumpet, and he will gather the elect from wherever they're located, whether heaven or earth.

Jesus' return to raise his people to imperishable bodies will follow a period of tribulation rather than precede it. I take a post-trib position.

## **Caution**

I'm okay if you don't agree with me. I'm not looking for a fight. I'm assuming I'm teaching something new to some of you. I don't expect someone to give up a view they've held for 50 years after listening to me for five minutes. I'll trust your motives. Please trust mine. If you have questions I'm available after service.

This is a lot. Let's try to draw a final application.

### **Point 3: God will resurrect his people**

#### **Explanation**

Jesus will gather his elect on earth (four winds) and in heaven (one end of heaven to the other) with a loud trumpet call. 1 Corinthians 15:52 describes the event:

*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. – 1 Cor 15:51-52*

At Jesus' return the believer's body will be set free from death and its effects: decay, disease, physical pain. That's good news.

Last trumpet = can't be before the trumpet in Matthew 24:31.

The trumpet in 24:31 occurs at the end of the age = it is the last trumpet.

When the last trumpet sounds we'll be reunited with deceased loved ones who believed (1 Thess 4:13-18).

When Jesus returns we'll experience relief from persecution, which will be a thing of the past (2 Thess 1:5-10).

Imperishable bodies, reunited with deceased loved ones, persecution a thing of the past. Good news we can agree on.

*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. – John 5:28-29*

#### **Conclusion**

**God judges sin.** Be ready before it's too late.

**God directs history.** God intervenes in human affairs. Including our lives. Days shortened for the elects' sake.

**God will resurrect his people.** Death, mourning, crying, pain no more.