

Matthew 24:1-8 – “Sign Of The Times”

At the end of chapter 23 we saw Jesus dismissing the religious leaders and the many Jews who followed them instead of Jesus. He announced that their house is left desolate. They're going to come to ruins. And from that point on Jesus no longer spoke to the crowds or addressed the nation of Israel publicly. They were sadly now in a time of judgment. But this didn't mean that Jesus was silent. In fact, in these last few days before He went to the cross, He spoke many things that are incredibly important for His disciples and us. Today we get into the Olivet Discourse, a section of Scripture that is prophetic in nature and revealing the days leading up to Jesus' return.

- Remember, Matthew's Gospel is very Jewish in nature. He's writing to the nation of Israel and so we see that reflected in what is said and how it is said (ie. Sabbath mentioned in Matt 24:20). The other Gospel's wrote with a different focus or audience in mind. Both Mark and Luke include this Olivet discourse but John doesn't. John is writing with more of a universal focus and He includes teaching from Jesus that's not included in the other gospels. John 13-17 is taking place during these last few days of Jesus where He talks about the relationship of the church in these last days and how Jesus will come and return for her. He talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the church in His absence and prays for the unity of all believers.

Matthew 24 is a fascinating chapter. I believe we are living in the days that are not just leading up to, but pointing to the nearness of Jesus' return. Who's looking forward to Jesus' return? Silly question to ask in a church like this. But there are those that can live more with fear than anticipation in these days we find ourselves. But I love what Jesus said during this discourse in **Luke 21:28**, *"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."*

- May that be our attitude as we look at what Jesus lays out for us as the characteristics of these last days. Not to cause us to *run in worry*, but to *respond in worship*.

Summary Statement:

The disciples approach Jesus with questions about things to come. Jesus answers them revealing what the last days will be like for the nation of Israel before His return.

1. The Review from the Disciples – 24:1-3

24:1-2 - *Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. ² And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

Now remember the context we are dealing with. Jesus has just come off a lengthy talk with the scribes and Pharisees and really exposed them for the frauds they were. And then Jesus said in **Matthew 23:38–39**, “*See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’*”

- Now to say that their house will be left desolate means that they will be abandoned. The house is most likely speaking specifically of the temple, and as great as it was, it will come to ruin.

Now after Jesus said these things He went out to the Mount of Olives that overlooks the temple mount. And His disciples come up to Him and they point out all the incredible buildings of the temple

Now the disciples are pondering these words of Jesus about their house being desolate, and wondering how anything can happen to the temple. And so they begin to talk to Jesus and show Him the grandeur of these buildings in case He missed something, or didn’t realize the strength of these buildings.

And Jesus responds to them saying, ***not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.***

Now this would have been utter shock for these disciples to hear. You’ll realize why when I give you a little background of the temple.

The temple was originally built by Solomon. It was a thing of beauty which brought the Queen of Sheba to inspect for herself, and left her saying, *the half was not told me* (1 Kings 10:7). That temple was sadly destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It was then rebuilt by Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. When Herod the great became king over Israel, ruling on behalf of Rome, he set out to renovate the temple. This was not for religious purposes, but more political, seeking to garner the favour with the Jews. Herod was good at building, but he did so for selfish reasons, thinking it would bring greater fame to his name. Herod’s temple project began in 20 B.C. and wasn’t fully finished until 64 A.D.

It took over 80 years to complete, and six years after its completion it would be demolished.

But while Jesus ministered, this temple was in operation and it was a beautiful structure. ~~Josephus tells us:~~

- "...so he fixed on them plates of gold, which had sculptures upon them: so that the whole temple shined, and dazzled the eyes of such as entered, by the splendor of the gold that was on every side of them. (69) Now the whole structure of the temple was made, with great skill, of polished stones, and those laid together so very harmoniously and smoothly, that there appeared to the spectators no sign of any hammer, or other instrument of architecture, but as if, without any use of them, the entire materials had naturally united themselves together, that the agreement of one part with another seemed rather to have been natural than to have arisen from the force of tools upon them." ¹
- "Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. (223) But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white." ²

So the disciples are trying to get Jesus to see the wonder of this structure and bring perhaps a positive outlook to what is going on in Jerusalem. *It's not all that bad is it Jesus??*

But then Jesus says, ***"Do you not see all these things? ...not one stone shall be left here upon another..."***

That statement would have left the disciples in shock and confusion. People saw the temple as God's stamp of approval; His blessing over Jerusalem. With the temple there, nothing could happen to Jerusalem, so they thought.

¹ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged* (p. 216). Hendrickson.

² Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged* (pp. 707–708). Hendrickson.

- That's what the false prophets in Jeremiah's day thought (**Jeremiah 7:4**, *"Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.'"*).

Now for every stone to be thrown down would have been a feat hard for the disciples to wrap their brain around.

Some of these stones used by Herod weighed well over 100 tons. Josephus says there were stones 25 cubits long (35.5 feet long) 8 cubits high (12 feet high) and 12 cubits thick (18 feet thick)³. Many thought that this was a big exaggeration by Josephus. But when we've taken groups to Jerusalem we get to go into the Rabbinical tunnels at the western wall and see some of these foundational stones, one of which measures 45 feet long, 12 feet high, with its depth or width hidden within the wall. Because of that, its weight is only approximate, but it's been said to be anywhere up to 600 tons! It's massive!

- So this statement by Jesus becomes all the more significant and hard to fathom.

It's interesting that Jesus doesn't refer to the buildings by name, He just says, **these things** (24:2) as if they're only things, and nothing to put our stock in.

When the Romans laid siege to the temple under Titus Vespasian, the Roman general, orders were given to not destroy the temple. One soldier accidentally let a flaming arrow go and it landed in the temple catching it on fire. The temple burned and the gold melted and ran between the stones. The temple was toppled to get every bit of gold out of it.

Why hasn't Israel built another temple for themselves? Because they've always been under foreign domination since they were driven out of Jerusalem in 70A.D. They had no freedom to rebuild their temple. Until 1948 when they were once again an independent nation in their homeland. But even then through various wars and peace deals, they still do not have control of the temple mount where the temple sat. That's under Muslim control. So they've not had the freedom to rebuild their temple.

³ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged* (p. 424). Hendrickson.

24:3 - Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

So based on what Jesus just said, His disciples come with some questions. Mark records that it was Peter, James, John, and Andrew that asked Him privately (Mark 3:3).

These questions were probably asked by the disciples as though the impending results would all happen simultaneously. We'll take them as 2 separate questions.

The 2 Questions:

1. When will these things be? (regarding the destruction of the temple).
2. What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (they figured that Jesus would return if the temple was destroyed and it would certainly mean this present age was done and a new age, the kingdom age, would be inaugurated).
 - Some group these questions into 3 separate questions. I have taught that before, but it seems to fit best as 2 questions.
 - Answering this second question is what the remainder of the chapter revolves around.

In fact, only Luke's gospel really deals with the events of the destruction of the temple (Luke 21:20-24). Matthew and Mark skip over that and focus on the events leading up to the coming of Jesus and the end of this age.

Some have fit the beginning of Matthew 24 into an inter-advent period, known as the church age. But again, Matthew is writing to the Jew. The context of this chapter is very Jewish in nature.

I see in this chapter Jesus pointing ahead to the Tribulation period. A time where God is directly intervening once again in the nation of Israel.

Warren Wiersbe outlines this chapter as follows:

1. The Beginning of the Tribulation – 24:4-14
2. The Middle of the Tribulation – 24:15-22
3. The End of the Tribulation – 24:23-44 ⁴

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 89). Victor Books.

Let's look at the things Jesus says to be watchful of and we'll make a comparison to the seal judgments in Revelation 6 that are released at the beginning of the Tribulation.

2. The Response from Jesus – 24:4-8

24:4-5 - *And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.*

First of all, deception is a big characteristic of the end times. When Jesus says to **take heed**, He's saying to look; take note and beware. The enemy loves to bring confusion and lead people astray. He's the father of lies. So his tactic is to deceive people. And as the days draw closer to an end, there will be many that will come saying they're the Christ, the Messiah. Many will come saying they are the ones to follow and that they will bring deliverance and hope. But they will deceive many.

- We know from Josephus that some rose up in the decades after Jesus. Theudas led hundreds out to the Jordan believing he was a prophet. They were slaughtered by the Romans.
- In recent years we've amassed quite a list of people that have claimed to be a Messiah like figure and have garnered a following.
 - Jim Jones
 - Sun Myung Moon
 - David Koresh
 - Sergey Torop – a former Russian traffic cop and now has a 4000 member cult in Siberia
 - José Luis de Jesús – a Puerto Rican who convinced 100,000 people that the resurrected Christ integrated Himself in him.
 - Alan John Miller – he claimed to be the reincarnated Christ and his partner was the returned Mary Magdalene. They led the Australian based Divine Truth movement.
 - Marshall Applewhite – leader of the Heaven's Gate cult who he led in a mass suicide in 1997.

That's just to name a few. Why do so many claim to be Jesus? We don't hear many claiming to be Mohammad, or Buddha. Because the devil knows you need to counterfeit that which is true.

And we see the ultimate false Christ at the onset of the Tribulation when the antichrist comes onto the scene. He will deceive many to think he is the true Messiah and bringing peace.

This is the first seal released in **Revelation 6:1–2**, *"Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see."² And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer."*

24:6 - *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

Wars have been fought since the days of Genesis. This is nothing new and we should not think every new war means that Jesus has one foot out of heaven ready to return.

Don't be **troubled** by these things. Sadly, they're to be expected because we live in a sinful fallen world.

- From 1500 B.C. to the year 1860 A.D. there were over 8,000 peace treaties signed, and over 90% of those treaties in the last century have been broken.
- With the amount of money spent on the military, you know every country is looking to be prepared for war.
- One scientist was asked what weapons he believed would be used in the event of WWIII. He said I'm not sure, but I know what will be used in WWIV – rocks! That's all that will be left.
- But Jesus tells us to not panic. These things **must come to pass**. They're all a part of the Lord's positioning and moving of the countries. When you hear of these disputes and wars, don't sell all your goods and say the end is here. The end is near, **but the end is not yet**.

24:7-8 - *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.⁸ All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

Nation against nation and kingdom and kingdom certainly seems to have a global aspect to it. Though we're seeing conflicts and tensions rise among nations, it will only grow in greater intensity leading up to the time of Christ's return.

- A global war was quite unprecedented until the 20th century. WWI pulled 88% of the world's population into battle. It was called the war to end all wars. But we know that wasn't the outcome.

- WWII came along and pulled even more people into it and bringing a greater casualty. These kinds of threats will increase in the last days. But again, with the advancement in weaponry, we won't survive much more of this.
- **Revelation 6:4**, *"Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword."*

Famines are another sign. Though there is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone, 733 million people still go hungry. Nearly 1 in 11 people go to bed hungry each night. It's a crisis that is not ending. Part of that is due to conflicts. It's not something that's going to get better.

- **Revelation 6:5–6**, *"When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'"*

Pestilences speaks of diseases. Isn't that a major focus in our world right now in bringing government control and fear over these things? Measles is a major concern today. When I was a kid, measles meant you got to stay home from school and watch tv. It didn't result in a trip to emergency for the latest vaccine.

- Now infectious diseases are certainly a real thing, and is a mark of the beginning of the tribulation.

Revelation 6:7–8, *"When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' ⁸ So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth."*

Earthquakes may seem that they are intensifying and increasing in number. Many of us felt one just a few weeks ago which is quite rare around here. But stats show that they're not on the rise in a great way. They may be happening in more diverse places, but we can't say right now that they are increasing in an alarming way.

- Again, they will increase, and in those last days they will be very destructive.

- **Revelation 6:12**, *"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood."*

Jesus says, ***all these are the beginning of sorrows***. It means birth pains. And let me tell you, this is something I'm very familiar with. Been through it 4 times. This is a difficult thing, I'm still a little scarred from the ordeal. But you know when those birth pains come, those contractions, they're mild to begin with. They may jab you here and there and you're wondering if you ate something weird or have gas. But then they start to come a little quicker, and with greater intensity. Jesus is saying these are the beginning of these things. It doesn't mean the baby's head is popping out, but it is getting ready. So take heed!

- And just as birth pains are never enjoyable, it's bringing about something wonderful – life! It's the same with these things. They're not enjoyable things, but it's leading to the second coming of Jesus and the ultimate life!

Points to Ponder:

1. How does this discussion of signs of the times prompt you to live today? Are you living in worry of the events around you, or living in worship of the One who's got it all in control?
2. What sorts of deception do you see at work in the world today? We counter these things by knowing the truth. How well are you grounded in the truth?