

# Gospel of Matthew

## 24:22~51

### *The End of the World As We Know It! - Pt2*

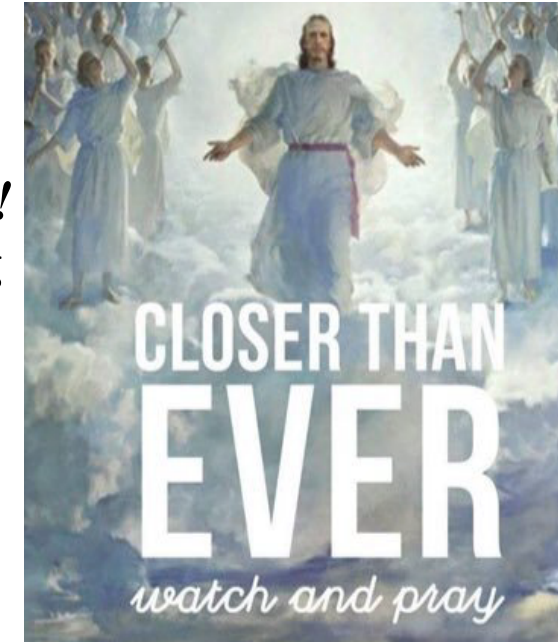


Jesus is now pronouncing judgement upon Israel, Jerusalem, and even the temple for their part in His upcoming death. They are acting according to their fallen human nature as God had known they would, and are already plotting to use the Romans to send Jesus to a horrible death by crucifixion. But although it was the plan of God was to unleash His righteous and holy indignation and wrath against the sins of humanity and direct it against His own son, He was none-the-less holding men responsible for their brutal, heinous behavior! He was not making them do this against their will! They WANTED to do this horrible thing! In 24, Jesus prophesies that there will be a devastating fallout from this! “***Not one stone*** (of these magnificent buildings) ***will be left upon another! They will all be thrown down!***” We know from written history, and archeological studies, of course, that this happened as He said.



**Josephus**, the famous ***and infamous*** Jewish historian wrote of this terrible event in 70 A.D. He had actually gone over to the Romans and had tried to negotiate a deal – a peace pact - to minimize the devastation of the war (without success). But in the aftermath of the Roman victory, he wrote “...*but for all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem], it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations (revolt); a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.*”<sup>[18]</sup> And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor if anyone who had known the place before, had come to it now, would he have known it again. But though he [a foreigner] were right there at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it (Where did it go?).<sup>[19]</sup> - **Wikipedia – The Siege of Jerusalem (70 A.D.)**. Josephus also writes that before Jerusalem was finally overrun, they had long-before turned on themselves. All the residences in the city were broken into, searched and looted of food and supplies by the city’s own defenders, and anyone caught hoarding food for themselves and their families were killed. The city’s wealthy residents were especially decimated by this policy. The other notable thing is that there was no central resistance but a number of zealot factions involved that would not take orders, nor even cooperate with each other – of course, greatly weakening their efforts to resist the Roman siege. It was a culture of belligerence to each other, in the guise of who could be the most zealous for<sup>2</sup> God!

Matt. 24 the “***end of the age***” – a term his disciples use to ask Him about what comes next. But those last days did not begin in our lifetimes – ***far*** from it. Many Christians are under the impression that the last days are about to begin. But they actually began when Jesus lived and died. That marked a transition in the plan of God. From the time of the fall of humanity in Eden, God had been moving His plan toward its pinnacle – and that was the entrance of the Word, second member of God tri-unity onto the planet earth! He was named Jesus the ***Christ!*** And now that plan was just about to cross over the top – it’s zenith, and begin traveling down the other side. At the point of the cross - we can safely assume that it was closer to the end than to the beginning. The countdown of “**last days**” have continued through until today. But here we are 2000 years later with a strong sense of “*we’re finally in the “end times”, or “it won’t be long now!”*”. “***The last days***” were a huge topic in the Evangelical church in the late 1960s. I was 11 and 12 yrs old, and scared to death that the preachers were right and Jesus would return any day now and the church would be snatched away – and entire generation taken out of the world without having to die first. It was actually scary for me! I was looking at the clouds,.. a lot! But there was real expectancy in the church during that time – almost a fevered pitch! The return of Jesus and the catching away of His church was very real to us all! But that was in 1967! If you could have traveled back in time to the early church – that first generation of Christ-followers, the apostles included – and if you would have informed them of what we know in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that “***the end times***” had two millennium - 2000 years to go (and counting) – they would have thought you were crazy! They too were ***certain*** that they would see the return of Jesus within their lifetimes! It would not be until decades later, when many of the early Christians and original apostles had already been captured and killed, and ***most*** of the eyewitness of Jesus had died of old age, that they began to realize that the church might be in this for the long haul – that God’s timetable was far different from theirs!



In contrast, the return of Christ has seemed distant to American Christians today. The world has seemed to us to be impervious to attack, here in the protective cushion of the interior of the great U-S-of-A, with its unmatched **military**, with protection from attack by a vast **nuclear arsenal**, held up by an **economy** that has been reasonably stabile and quite robust, held up by an **electric grid** that has proven to be amazingly reliable - (and, that s a very good thing because just about every life-sustaining essential service - every one of them - depends completely upon it)! Our **food chain** infrastructure has been unbelievably stable. Starting at the ground level, farmers and agricultural industries, have been able to counter all manner of pestilences with *pesticides* and anti-fungals, and herbicides, with **genetic engineering** of our crops to make them far more productive, to make them hardier, able to stand up better to the rigors of the extremes of climates and attack by pests and disease! Then there is the **processing and manufacturing of our food** down to its protective packaging. Our **transport industry**, mainly trucking, runs on a highly efficient and a generally well-maintained highway system, daily taking the finished product right to our **grocery stores**. Most people have not even had to think of, for instance, the rather gruesome process of our meat production. It is just there on the shelves of the refrigerated meat section of the local store, all nicely packaged in plastic! Half the country's children think nothing of where it comes from! It has always just magically appeared on the shelf for our parents, and now us, to put into our shopping cart! A large percentage of our young adults seem to have no concept of the fragile complexities of our food chain much less manufacturing. Until now they have had no real concept from where food comes and how it gets on those shelves - and until now they have had no reason to look into it!



Except for now they do! A tiny virus has evolved from the animal world to take the human world by storm, destabilizing most everything that we could previously rely upon – even our solid and dependable medical system, and our economy, and our manufacturing, and our jobs, and our EVERYTHING! The empty shelves of many of our grocery stores give stark metaphorical testimony to the truth of how fragile it all actually is, and how absolutely dependent our lives are upon the entire system!

Some people have sensed the system's fragility long ago, and have stockpiled at least some food and goods for years to insulate themselves and their families against the possibility of a major system's shakeup or even its collapse! Where once they were looked down upon as pessimists and alarmists, now they look like geniuses! **But I think NO ONE was genius enough to have predicted a major toilet paper panic and the resulting shortages 😞!** What a bizarre, strange, human thing!



In our text this morning Jesus speaks to a terrible time - close to the end of the end times, when all things become unstable, when all things are being crushed, when the wrath of God is no longer mainly expended by the cross but is being directed at a rebel earth, a wicked planet! We see from the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years after the cross that God can and will hold humanity accountable for their arrogance and wickedness if He so chooses. The Bible tells us that in the end He *will* so choose! Now don't get me wrong! I'm not saying these perilous times that we are presently experiencing *are* the end that the Bible speaks of, or that this new flu virus is anything other than the natural disasters that hits the nations like a sledgehammer from time to time. This may just be like some of the other flu epidemics that have plagued the world in just this past century *and* the regular death plagues of every century before that! And I'm also *not* saying it is *NOT* the end, or the beginning of the end! We will certainly find out – given time - as this crisis will play itself out! I *am* saying *there is an end!* I believe in Jesus, and He says that there is a plan in place, and the plan will follow its projected course, and that plan has an end to it! In the end, God will win, and Jesus will be the power on earth! I believe Him when He says that! And I believe Him when He says that end process looks awful for those who are caught up in it, first to those in rebellion to the Creator/God Himself. But for the Christ-follower He gives words of hope in this chapter!

The first part of chapter 24 seems to be about the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus promises that judgment is coming to Judea and that it will be as bad as any man-made devastation that has ever happened *anywhere* – especially in Jerusalem! And the second part of the chapter is the return of Jesus – and He makes it clear that when He returns to earth a second time, it will be in great power!



[Vs. 23-26] say that there will be a lot of deception going on. It is not a guess that Satan will be upping his game toward the end! He lies and deceives like it is his first language. It is just what he does! He is so predictable. And He is relentless! He lies, and he deceives! Before the real Christ appears, false ones will rise up and say “*It’s me! I am the Christ, returned!*” And they will be given dark power to even do miracles! I mean, Satan is not messing around anymore here! He will be pulling out all the stops! He realizes his time is short! And so people will say that it must be the Christ because the Christ did miracles! But it will be a fake Christ – with real miracles – utilizing the power of Satan! Jesus says that even the elect, or true Christ-followers, will have difficulty telling the difference, at least at first. The true Christ-followers *will not be* deceived, but almost! But many *will be* deceived!

[vs. 27-29] Here we see Jesus, the Son of Man and Son of God, Creator of the earth, finally returning to His earth, and the pomp and circumstance of His coming will prominently stretch across the horizon like east to west lightning, He says! His coming will be accompanied by disturbances in the cosmos. Jesus combines some passages from **Isaiah – 13:10**, and **34:4** to say that there will be eclipses or eerie blockages of the light of the sun and moon!



In vs 30,31 – Jesus tells us that when He returns the nations will “mourn”. Somehow they will know that what they are seeing in the skies signals the end of an era and the beginning of another, and it does not bode well for the status quo! Jesus tells His disciples that at this coming in the clouds He will send His angels to gather those who are His own through faith – the elect - from the ends of the earth!



The elect are the favored ones, those that have responded to God’s call by humbling themselves before God, repenting of their offenses against Him – especially repenting of the “social distancing” they have enforced between God and themselves for years, and who at some point *changed their minds* and have given themselves over to the rule of Jesus Christ in their minds and in their lives. They have received/welcome Him into their lives, and He has given them the Spirit of God to live in them, to accompany them, to teach and empower them to live lives that honor God. It is these “*elect*” that will be caught out of the world, and it seems that it will happen before the wrath of God descends upon the nations at the “end of days”! (If you want to know about that – read the book of John’s Revelation!) But these words of Jesus here seem quite clear. He is not using the more mysterious apocalyptic language, but rather clear language! And describes a catching away of the church! Obviously He spent time teaching the apostles of this! [1 Thess. 4:13-18] [1 Cor. 15:50-53]

This is referred to as the catching away/ or “rapture”/ or “gathering” of the church which is immediately preceded by the first resurrection – the resurrection of the saints – those who have died over the centuries who have put their hope in Christ, who have loved and lived for Jesus! There will be no body, no **BODY**, left behind! It seems unreal to today’s Christians, *unlikely* even - (before today, at least) because of the relative stability of the last 50 years and more! Most Christians today have barely give the return of Christ a thought. Many theologians have appeared, to debunk the rapture and explain it away! I believe they do the words of Christ here and of the Apostle, a gross disservice. You can’t just explain this away! It is stated in quite plain language! If Jesus is to be believed about *anything*, He’s coming, (*He said so*), and before the earth is bent to His will *in spectacular fashion*, He will take His followers out of it so that they do not suffer the wrath of an indignant God along with those upon whom His righteous anger will be spread!

**Vs 36-41** – Are devoted to two issues. Christ’s return is the best kept secret of all time. For some reason, even Jesus does not know! There cannot be many secrets kept between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but this is one of them – and the only one that we actually know of! Only the Father knows! Secondly, Jesus tells us that humanity will be surprised – even the elect – the Christ-followers!

So He urges His followers to not be surprised – to prepare for the certainty of His return. He urges us not to be caught at His return in the state of unpreparedness! Chapter 25 contains examples of those who will be unprepared - the parable of the ten virgins, the parable of the talents, and the separation of the sheep from the goats – all about the faithful vs. the unfaithful



He urges us to remain faithful, to maintain a vigilance – to live with a sense of urgency in our lives and our faithful service to Christ that speaks to the fact that we expect His return and are not being lazy and irresponsible and self-indulgent with our lives! The great value of times like these is the wake-up element of it! Today in the midst of a world-wide health crisis, we have been given an opportunity to stay home. At home we have the opportunity to step back and re-evaluate our lives. The Creator has greater expectations of us than we by nature have for ourselves. After giving our lives to Jesus, most of us inevitably drift back into living for ourselves like everyone else – focusing on our own consumptions – **jobs, homes, transportation, food, entertainments and play-focused activities, hobbies, our electronic devices** have become increasingly prominent in our lives, even our **children** have taken priority over the purposes of God and our service to Christ – all the things that we cannot take with us when our time here on earth is over! Even our children will not follow us but will follow the culture that opposes Christ, because they have not seen that Christ is real in their parent’s lives.

So – can a time like this prove to be valuable? You bet it can. I have told this congregation many times that God will not let our personal disasters, our failures, our tragedies, go to waste! He will use them to change our minds, to refocus our energies onto the things that really matter for eternity – if we are wise enough to let Him!

If you have extra time these days, why be one of the hang-wringers?! It will not add an hour to the span of your life and it will certainly diminish the quality of the days and nights you have remaining to you! Those are the words of Jesus, actually! Worry will eat away at your relationships like dripping acid! Instead, ***pick up your Bible and read*** – I mean substantial portions - chapters, pages at a time. There is nothing so calming as reading God's word. It is solid, it does not change, it is assuring, it is the beginning of wisdom – wisdom from your Creator! You can start anywhere – the beginning, or the middle, in the Psalms, or in John's Gospel. Review the book of Matthew and what you have learned there over the past 2 years. Read the apostle Paul's epistles and letters to the churches for the most practical Christ-focused instructions to the believer – but read!



**Pray** – Jesus says here to watch and ***PRAY!*** Talking with God is fellowship with Him. Talk over your life with Him. Confess your fears, your sins. It will cleanse your soul! And thank Him. He is the one ultimately responsible for the good things in your life! Those good things we KNOW are His doing – His blessings! So spend time going over what you know you need to really thank Him for! It is this fellowship with Him we were created for! Like a loving parent hopes one day that their child will be their closest friend one day, so God waits for us to commune with Him – talk with Him – to love Him. I invite you in these trying days to go where God is waiting for you to go. Go to Him!