

The Message of Matthew 24

April 25, 2010 AM – Pastor Dr. Ronnie Wolfe

INTRODUCTION

The book of Matthew Chapter 24 is one of the most fascinating chapters of the Bible. In this chapter Jesus captures eschatology that extends from his own day in the flesh to the day when Jesus comes again to receive us unto himself. Of course, this chapter, as well as several other portions of Scripture in the Bible are controversial; so if you do not agree with me, that is all right, especially on the chronology of events. We do know one thing, however, and that is that Jesus is coming again; and that will be a glorious day. In this study we will consider the first 35 verses of Matthew 24.

As their wont was, Jesus and his disciples departed from the temple; and this time the disciples, as usual, began a discussion with Jesus. They wanted Jesus to admire the buildings of the temple, for their luster was beautiful, perhaps the golden shine of the top of the temple glittering in the sunlight.

Jesus replied to them in verse two (2) that a time will come when “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” This was discouraging to the disciples, so naturally they wanted answers to the when and wherefore of the subject that had been brought up. Jesus and his disciples reached the Mount of Olives; then the disciples came 2 to him, asking him in verse three (3) concerning what he had said on the way. They asked him either two or three questions depending upon how the conjunctions are interpreted in verse three.

The first question was, “Tell us, when shall these things be?,” no doubt referring to Jesus’ mention in verse two that “. . . There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” The second question is, “. . . and what shall be the sign of thy coming . . .” (3). There is only one sign of Jesus’ coming, and that is the coming itself. My father used to say, “Expect me when you see me coming.” That is the way it is with the coming of Jesus Christ. There are many signs of the times, but there is only one sign of Jesus’ coming. Matthew 16:3 says, *And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? Matthew 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

The next question can be either a reiteration of the second question or a separate question altogether. If it is a separate question, it would be the question, “What shall be the sign of the end of the world?” To me this seems to be a reiteration of the previous question, and that is why it says, “. . . and of the end of the world?” When Jesus comes again, God will begin the events that will culminate in the end of the world, that is, the world as we know

it. There was an antediluvian world, mentioned by Peter as “the old world” (2 Peter 2.5) and “the world that then was.” In the same verse Peter mentions the “world of the ungodly” meaning the world as it was when the flood came upon the earth. Mark 10:30 *But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.* In our text, it all goes together speaking of the same event: “and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and (or even) of the end of the world

THE CHRISTIAN TRIBULATION (24:4-14)

In verse four (4) Jesus begins to explain three significant tribulations in a small manner of detail beginning with a tribulation that will affect all believers. Let us read Matthew 24:4-14, which will give some detail about what I call The Christian Tribulation. The first thing Jesus mentions is false Christs (5). Remember that even in New Testament times a man named Simon made himself out to be “some great one” mentioned in Acts 8:9. Perhaps this was the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy by Jesus.

The Second thing mentioned in this Christian Tribulation is the fact that wars and rumors of wars will come, but it is not the end (6-8). Thirdly, there will be personal persecution and hatred of God’s people for the name of Jesus Christ. Fourthly, false prophets will deceive many (11). These are they who take the truth of God’s word and pervert it (Gal. 1:7) “pervert the gospel of Christ.” They pervert not only the Gospel but also other foundational doctrines that lead many into false religion. Then Fifthly iniquity shall abound and get worse and worse (12): 2 Tim. 3:13 *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.* Sixth, the love of many shall wax cold (12). Revelation 2:4 *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* In this church at Ephesus the people had left their first love. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy mentioned here in Matthew 24. Has your love for the Lord grown cold? Read your Bible. Pray to your God. Assemble with God’s people. It is the only way to warm up Christianity. Believe with all your heart that God sent Jesus Christ to pay for sins, that he died on the cross and was buried, and that he resurrected from the dead the third day after his death. The faith in that transaction should never grow old or cold, not just for Christ but for one another. Our love for God should continue. John 15:9 *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

In verse 13 Jesus states that those who are genuinely saved will endure unto the end. That is the very nature of our salvation. John 10:28 *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* The Gospel of the kingdom (the only Gospel that there is or ever was or ever shall be) will be preached in all the world unto all nations, and then the end will come.

THE JEWISH TRIBULATION (24:15-28)

Jesus, talking to the people here present as well as giving a message to generations to follow, warns of the abomination of desolation (or literally, the abomination that makes desolate) in regard to the nation of Israel itself. This is not a statue put in the temple of God, this having happened before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, but the Roman army that is going to come upon Jerusalem to plunder and make desolate the temple and the city of Jerusalem: Luke 21:20 *And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.*

When this abomination is seen, those in Judea were to flee to the mountains (16), and those on the housetop were not to go inside to pack for their trip out of the city (17-18). The trip will not be an easy one, so there is a woe pronounced upon those who have little children (19) and a woe in case this abomination come in the winter or upon the Sabbath day, which would make traveling very difficult—weather in the winter and legal restrictions on the Sabbath day. This Jewish tribulation, verse 21 tells us, is one that is greater than any tribulation which has ever come upon the Jewish nation, and one that is unlike any that will ever again come upon the Jews. This is greater than the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt, greater than the captivity at Babylon, greater than the calamities which happened under the Maccabees, which happened in the period between the Old and New Testaments. The only historian who witnessed and gave the history of this destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD is Josephus, and his description is very graphic regarding the details of this horrible, unsurpassed cruelty by the Romans upon the city of Jerusalem. Notice some quotes by Josephus:

...the famine was too hard for all other passions...children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and, what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants...but the seditious [Jews] everywhere came upon them immediately and snatched away from them what they had gotten from others...they also invented terrible methods of torment to discover where any food was... (Jewish Wars 5.10.3)

Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world. (Jewish Wars 5.10.4)

...but they [Romans] ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. (Jewish Wars 6.8.5)

...but for all the rest of the wall, 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 had ever been inhabited (Jewish

Wars 7.1.1)

Even the holocaust in the second World War against the Jews was not as seriously wicked and destructive as this one in 70 AD against the city of Jerusalem and the temple of God. Some may be offended at that statement, but it is simply a statement of fact, not an opinion of emotion, disrespect or prejudice. Even though the whole world hate and turn against Israel, there will never be a time again on this earth that the Jewish nation will experience the cruelty and destruction that took place in this historic event.

In our text verse 22 explains that, if the days of this tribulation had not been shortened, there would be no flesh left in the city of Jerusalem; they all would have been eradicated. For the elect's sake, the days were shortened. We can call this, perhaps, prevenient grace for those in Jerusalem who would later come to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior. During that time of Jewish tribulation, there will be some who say, "Lo, here is Christ." They will try to persuade people that Jesus has returned and that he is in the desert or in the secret chambers, 23-26. But the disciples of Jesus Christ are not to believe it, and the reason they are not to believe it is because of Matt. 24:27-28 (Read).

THE GREAT TRIBULATION (24:29-31)

Immediately after the Christian and Jewish tribulations have ended, at the end of this age, the sun and the moon will be darkened, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (verse 29). Then, or at the same time, Jesus, the Son of man, will appear, which is the sign of his coming, the tribes of earth will mourn, because they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. At the same time other scriptures call it "that day." The angels will come with the sound of a trumpet, and they will gather God's elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (31).

Let us turn to Revelation 7:13-14 -- *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, hat are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation (literally, tribulation, the great one), and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* God's elect will be brought "out of," "out away from" the Great Tribulation; so the believer does not need to worry about the Great Tribulation.

What will this tribulation be like? Well, we can read about it in Revelation Chapters 8-9: These are called the seven trumpets: (1) Hail and fire upon the earth, and the trees and grass burned up. (2) A great mountain burned, and a third part of the sea became blood, and a third part of creatures in the sea died and a third of the ships destroyed. (3) A large star fell from heaven upon the rivers and fountains of water. It was called

Wormwood (bitter), and a third of water became bitter, and many people died from drinking it. (4) Fourth part of the sun was smitten and a third part of the moon and stars did not give their light. Then the last three parts of the Great Tribulation are called Woes. (5) A Star (probably Jesus) came to earth from heaven, and he had the key to the bottomless pit. When he opened the pit, smoke came from the pit like a great furnace, darkening the sun and the air. Then locusts came out of the pit like scorpions with great power. They were not to hurt any part of earth itself but only lost men. They were to torment men for five months, which is the normal life of locusts. This torment is so bad that men will seek death and cannot find it. (6) Four angels were loosed from the River Euphrates prepared for war with 200 million horsemen. This battle killed a third of the men on the earth. Of the men who were left from this slaughter, not even one repented of his evil works, and they continued to worship devils and idols (9:20) (7).

When the seventh angel sounded (11:15), the kingdoms of the world become "the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever."

LEARNING A PARABLE (24:32-37)

This is a parable of the "fig tree." On the fig tree we want to notice the tender leaves, not the full-grown leaves. The things that Jesus tells "this generation" is that the leaves of the fig tree are just beginning to grow, and there are many things that this generation can see (be fulfilled) that will give evidence that what Jesus is teaching is true. If the events in this generation are true and be experienced by this generation, then they should believe those things that are future, or those things that will take place after "this generation." Jesus declared that his words shall not pass away (verse 35). They are true and can be trusted. However, this generation needs to know, as well as our own generation, that "that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Many in that generation lived to see the Christian persecution which came upon the churches of God through Saul, through the Roman government, and from the Jews themselves. Many, such as some of the apostles, and especially the apostle John experienced the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. John probably wrote the book of Revelation around 90-95 AD, some 20 to 25 years after this second prediction of the Lord in Matthew 24. Therefore, if these two tribulations are true, then we must believe that the third one is to come. John spends much of his book telling us about the Great Tribulation that will come upon the world. That tribulation is yet to come.

We cannot do anything about the two tribulations that have already come, but the one that is to come is to be preached, and we are to warn people to flee the wrath to come (Matt. 3:7). Now we must know that God has delivered us who are saved from that wrath that is to come: 1 Thessalonians 1:10 *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

Have you been delivered from this wrath to come? If not, you must *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*: (Matthew 3:8). That is, faith in Jesus Christ, his death, burial and resurrection. Will you trust him today?