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CHURCH

SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

Hopeful About Tomorrow (Part 2)

Why I Don't Worry: Reading Matthew 24 in Its Context

In Matthew 24 Jesus answers two questions. The signs answer the first, about the temple that fell in AD 70. For His second coming He gives no sign at all, only a command: be ready. So we refuse to be alarmed, and we are found faithfully doing His work.

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SERIES
We're Hopeful for Tomorrow, Week 2 of 2

MAIN TEXT
Matthew 24:1-3

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Sermon Transcript

Well, wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, a continual rise in natural disasters. Should we be on high alert? What does the Bible say? Well, today I want to show you why I'm not worried. I want you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Matthew chapter 24. Matthew chapter 24. Go there with me. Matthew 24. We'll get there in just a moment. Last week, we started a series called "We're Hopeful About Tomorrow." We're hopeful about tomorrow. I'm hopeful about tomorrow. I'm not wigging out and freaking out. I'm hopeful about tomorrow. I'm not hooked to the TV and the newscaster saying what's going to happen.

I'm hopeful about tomorrow. No matter what comes my way, I'm going to be hopeful about tomorrow. And in that series last week, we talked about, or we started with, four orthodox pillars of end times theology, of eschatology. And so I want to just briefly go over those eschatological pillars before we get into today's message, because I am undoubtedly about to challenge most of what you think about this passage of Scripture. We've got to have a good time. Amen. So the four pillars are this. One, the second coming of Christ. Jesus is coming again. It will be a bodily return and it is imminent.

No one knows the day nor the hour. He's coming back at any time. He could come back in the blink of an eye, the twinkling of an eye.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:52** ESV
>
> 52 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.

I heard a preacher say last week that I was listening to that you blink 20,000 times a day. That's 20,000 opportunities for Jesus to come back every 24 hours. And so Jesus is coming back. It's the second coming. Number two is the resurrection of the dead. The righteous and the unrighteous will come back from the grave. The dead in Christ will rise first.

> **1 THESSALONIANS 4:16** ESV
>
> 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Those dead in their sin will rise second. And we will all stand before the Lord at the final judgment, which is number three, the final judgment.

The final judgment is the last moment where those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will be read off, and they will spend eternity with Jesus Christ. But those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will be put into what is called the lake of fire.

> **REVELATION 20:14-15** ESV
>
> 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

It is the second death. It is the final judgment. This will be the annihilation of all evil. I don't know if you know this, but the devil is going to have his day. He's going to have it. And then number four is the new heavens and the new earth.

> **REVELATION 21:1** ESV
>
> 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

We believe that there will be a restoration of all things.

And this is where we will spend eternity if we're born again. Is everybody with me so far? Say a yes. All right. So I want to walk through quite a bit of Matthew 24 this morning. It is a major eschatological text. And hopefully by the end of the day, I'll challenge the way you think about most of it. That's my joy as a preacher, to make you think. Amen. But I will tell you this, that I read an author who was talking about the end times. And he had said that he saw a New York — I think it was a New York Times article — in the sports section. Strange place for this to be, by the way.

But it was an article of eight reasons that the second coming of Jesus Christ was getting near. And of the eight reasons, five of them were from Matthew chapter 24. So Matthew chapter 24, good, bad, or indifferent, has a major influence on our view of the end times. So Matthew 24, if we don't understand it, we'll be grossly off base. But if we do understand it — even though, like we talked about last week, we look through a mirror dimly on these issues, we're wearing sunglasses at night.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 13:12** ESV
>
> 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

We cannot know all of the things that we ought to know about the return of the Lord, no matter how much people on TV want to act like they know it all.

But even though we wear sunglasses at night, Matthew 24 is going to determine whether or not we're closer to being right or further away from being right. In fact, Matthew 24 is going to play the most, or make the most impact, on whether or not you are nervous or assured as you go into these last days. And regardless of where we are on the timeline, we know that Hebrews chapter 1 says this: "in these last days." People want to know when the last days are.

> **HEBREWS 1:2** ESV
>
> 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

That's them. You're in it right now. Breathe in the air. That's last days air. I know people who talk about rare air.

You guys, you're breathing last days air. Amen. So Matthew chapter 24, let's just start here at the top. I'm going to walk through the Scripture quite a bit this morning. There'll be no way to do it all, but I am going to kind of highlight and pick and choose as we go along. Matthew chapter 24, verse 1, it says, "Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

> **MATTHEW 24:1-2** ESV
>
> 1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.
> 2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

But he answered them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'"

And in verse 3, it says, "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?'" Now the disciples are asking one question in their mind, but Jesus knows they're actually asking two questions.

> **MATTHEW 24:3** ESV
>
> 3 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?"

The disciples view it as one question, but Jesus knows they're actually asking two questions. And the two questions are this: when will these things be? That's question number one. Question number two is, what will the sign of your coming and the end of the age be?

It's two different questions. Okay. Two different questions. And the reason they think they're asking one question is, in the Jewish view, especially at this time, the Jewish view of the restoration of the temple and the coming Messiah and the final judgment, all of these are wrapped up into one. So when you look at Acts chapter one, and Jesus says to the disciples, "You'll receive power when the Holy Ghost comes on you," they immediately go, "Hey, are you going to reestablish the kingdom of Israel?"

> **ACTS 1:6-8** ESV
>
> 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Because in their brain, they had still not separated those things.

They thought if Jesus is here, it's about to go down. Look at your neighbor and say, "It's about to go down." Just give him something. Just, you know, be nice, you know, charitable in your responses. It's about to go down. Something's about to happen. "We are here." But Jesus, in answering the question, he separates his answer into these being two different events. When will these things happen? And when is your coming and the end of the age? Separating the two answers. Now, this can be a little confusing and a little tough to parse out for a few reasons.

Number one, we read the Bible faster than we ought. You just might be going too fast. And so it's easy to read some of this stuff as if it's one continuous answer. And it's easy to read it as if Jesus is only saying one thing. Partially it's because we move fast. The other reason is Matthew's answer is a little compressed. We've got to remember, we did not get the full dissertation as it happened in real time. We're getting Matthew's retelling of what happened in this conversation. And he's giving us a lot of information in a little bit of text. Is everybody with me?

The stuff you need to know that Jesus said is written in the Bible. Jesus said more than this. If he didn't, they'd have all thought he was a mute or very shy. It's not a lot of words for a lifetime. Amen. But these are enough words for your lifetime. That's a good preacher line right there. Amen. I told y'all we'll write it in real time today. Amen. Get my jokes in. Hallelujah. So when Jesus is answering the two questions, it takes a little bit of work, but you're able to parse out where the answers shift to the two questions. So before we get into answering both questions, I just want to start here with the first one.

What, or when, will these things be? Jesus gives them an answer to a very present prophecy that we sometimes give too much futurist context. By the way, there are four ways you can interpret prophecy in the Bible, especially when it comes to eschatology. The four ways: it's called a preterist interpretation, a partial preterist interpretation, a historic interpretation, and a futurist interpretation. The preterist interpretation of prophecy is, we look at the Bible and we say everything that Jesus said was going to be, that needed to happen, has already happened and it's over.

I want to tell you that that would be, in mine and quite a few others' view, outside of orthodox Christianity. That would go into the heresy realm. There are still things that need to be accomplished according to the Scripture. The partial preterist would say this. They say some stuff that needed to be accomplished has been accomplished, but there's still stuff that needs to be accomplished. No matter what people say, anybody with a brain is there. There's some stuff that's been done that needed to be done. There's some stuff that still needs to be done.

That's the partial preterist view. The historic view of it, or the historicists, they say that prophecy's kind of just been fulfilling itself over time. That's probably a fair assessment as well. And then the futurist has a tendency to lean a little far toward everything that Jesus said needs to happen is down the road. And it will happen after something crazy happens in the world. That's how the futurist reads it. We have a tendency to be exposed to people who are pretty extremely futurist. So there's some things that Jesus prophesied that have been fulfilled, some things that haven't.

There's some things that still need to be fulfilled. It's not that they're unfulfilled. They haven't been fulfilled yet. Amen. All right. I'm going to try to come down to — I can feel I'm giving y'all a little much, but let me get with you here. I'll just watch the time, and when I'm done — you know, y'all finish before I do, just wait for me at the end. So when will these things be? Well, to answer that question, we do have to look at the context, and we want to look at the context in the Scripture. When we get into Matthew 24, Matthew 24 is in the context all the way back to Matthew 21.

In Matthew 21, we have Palm Sunday.

> **MATTHEW 21:1-11 ESV**
>
> 1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two
> disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a
> colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs
> them,' and he will send them at once." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Say to
> the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a
> beast of burden.'" 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt
> and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others
> cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that
> followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
> Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"
> 11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus enters into Jerusalem. He goes and he deals with the money changers in the temple.

> **MATTHEW 21:12-13 ESV**
>
> 12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables
> of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall
> be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

His authority is challenged by the Jewish leaders.

> **MATTHEW 21:23-27 ESV**
>
> 23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was
> teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus
> answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what
> authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they
> discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe
> him?' 26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they
> answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

In Matthew chapter 22, still in the temple, he's being asked about taxes. And the big issue with taxes — y'all think it's about taxes because we have to pay taxes and we don't like it. Amen. But it's not actually about taxes. It's about the image on the coin. It's about Caesar's image being on the coin, which was tantamount to idolatry for people to come in and tithe.

> **MATTHEW 22:15-22 ESV**
>
> 15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him,
> along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you
> do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it
> lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you
> hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose
> likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the
> things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they heard it, they marveled. And they left
> him and went away.

That's why there were money changers in the first place. He dealt with the money changers in 21. That's why they're dealing with him on taxes in 22. It didn't come out of nowhere. It's for a reason. And so in 22, he's dealing with the tax thing. Then the theology around the resurrection gets challenged by the Sadducees.

> **MATTHEW 22:23-33 ESV**
>
> 23 The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question,
> 24 saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up
> offspring for his brother.' 25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no
> offspring left his wife to his brother. 26 So too the second and third, down to the seventh. 27 After them all, the
> woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." 29 But
> Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the
> resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 And as for the
> resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the
> God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." 33 And when the crowd heard it,
> they were astonished at his teaching.

Jesus' knowledge of the Scripture is challenged by the Pharisees. And then in 23, Jesus decides he's going to just go ahead and let everybody know how he feels. And he starts pronouncing all of these woes over the scribes and the Pharisees.

MATTHEW 23:13-36 ESV

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you
neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him
twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it
is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' 17 You blind fools! For which is
greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is
nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' 19 You blind men! For which is
greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by
everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. 22 And whoever
swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,
hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and
mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining
out a gnat and swallowing a camel! 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of
the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the
inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,
hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead
people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of
hypocrisy and lawlessness. 29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the
prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we
would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 Thus you witness against yourselves
that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. 33 You
serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? 34 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, 35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of
righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and
the altar. 36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

So it's funny how all these things that the scribes and the Pharisees do, while they ignore the big picture of the work of God in the earth. And then it gets to chapter 24 and it says Jesus departed the temple. In 21, it says Jesus entered the temple. In 24, it says Jesus departed the temple. First thing you need to know is that is probably the most prophetic part of the whole chapter, because that is the moment where the covenant starts to shift as he moves into Easter Sunday. This is about Tuesday. So it's about to go down. And so he's going into Easter Sunday and the covenant is going to shift.

So when it says Jesus entered the temple and then he departed the temple, it wasn't just Jesus departing the temple. It was Jesus departing the system that had been in place that kept — by the way, everybody in this room — outside of the redemption of the Lord. But now we're all included because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Amen. Hallelujah. And so at 24, he departs the temple and then they go to the Mount of Olives. Now you need to understand this about the Mount of Olives. You've got Jerusalem. Okay. I want you to think elevation for a moment. Okay.

Sea level. We talk about things like that where hurricanes hit. Amen. So let's think about sea level for a second. And so you've got Jerusalem right here. And on the edge of Jerusalem is the temple. All right. Here's the temple. It's right here.

There is a valley right here. And then there's the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives sits quite a bit above the temple. So when they go to the Mount of Olives, they're sitting on the Mount of Olives looking at the temple. And then they come and ask this question: when will these things be? So let me take you through a little thought process here for a moment.

Okay. Let's press pause on the text. I want you to imagine Thursday comes, and on Thursday you get diagnosed with stage three cancer. It's a bad day, bad Thursday. Thursday comes, you get diagnosed with stage three cancer. You come to church on Sunday and I've got an anointed guest speaker like Pastor Andy McMillan. He's here and he's preaching. And when he gets towards the end of the message, he looks you in the eyes and he says, "You were just diagnosed with cancer, but the Lord said you'll be healed this week." He prophesied that right here in the service. You go to the doctor on Tuesday for a follow-up.

And on Tuesday they come out and they say, "Hey, we don't know what happened, but the cancer is totally gone." It's totally gone. Okay. This is why I want you to reason with me here for a second. When the doctor comes out and says that, is your assumption that the cancer that was prophesied to be healed is the one happening right now? Or would you assume that, because a prophet said it, there is also some future distant cancer that you will get down the road that is actually the one that Jesus is going to heal you from? This one just happened to happen.

But down the road, there'll be another cancer that I'm going to get that the Lord will ultimately heal me from. And it'll probably be worse than this one that I just got. Or would you go, "This is probably the cancer the prophecy was about"? Are y'all with me? Okay. Well, the way we read the Bible is, we overlook that Jesus has been in the temple for a few days. He's addressed the money changers. He's had discourse with several of these Jewish leaders. He's walked around it with the disciples. They walked out of it, and on the way out, probably for no other reason than the disciples are like, "This has been a weird trip."

They go, "Jesus, how about these stones here? Pretty good masonry." You know, that's what they do. They walk out and they go, "Hey, Jesus, how about this? I mean, it's a nice building." The people are rough. It sounds like church today, doesn't it? The people are rough, but it's a nice building. Nice. You know? And so they look at it, and then they go over to the Mount of Olives right after Jesus says, "Hey, by the way, you know, you see all this? There's not going to be a stone left on top of each other. This whole thing is coming down." It's about to be a wreck.

And then they go over and they're sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking at the temple, and they come and they ask for clarity. Wouldn't it stand to reason that Jesus is not about to give an answer that's going to be 2,000 plus years in the future? Wouldn't it stand to reason that when he says to them, this is going to happen in your generation — that's what he says in Matthew 24. This is going to happen in your generation. Matthew 24:34: "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

> **MATTHEW 24:34** ESV
>
> 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Doesn't it stand to reason that if Jesus is looking at the temple, talking about the temple, visiting the temple, staring at the temple, being asked about the temple, prophesying about the temple, that his answer might have to do with — I don't know, let's go out on a limb here, folks —

the temple? Maybe? Well, here's what you need to know. Forty years after this prophecy — 40 years — that temple is taken down to absolute rubble in what is probably the worst assault on the Jewish people, maybe with exception to the Holocaust. And we probably say that because we're so close to the Holocaust. This was bad. What happened in 70 AD, 66 to 70 AD, was a total assault on the Jewish people by the Romans, to the point where people could not escape the city. They wouldn't let the Jews out to go run for their life. They wanted them in. They wanted them in poverty.

They wanted them in a famine. They were starving them to death. And then at 70 AD, they went absolutely berserk on the Jewish people. We're talking probably 100,000 people leading up to 70 AD, Jewish people died. Not to mention what happens when Titus rolls in in 70 AD, when they actually take down the temple, where they go in, make sacrifices to other gods in the temple before they set it on fire. That happens 40 years later. Again, let me ask you: do you think Jesus is talking about the temple, or do you think he's talking about something else in the future?

Kind of sounds like he's talking about — hang on, this ain't for everybody. It sounds like he's talking about the temple. This is important because it's going to give us some clarity on some things that we're about to read. That's the first question. The disciples say, when will these things happen? When will these things happen? So when Jesus answers that question, when Jesus starts answering question number one, the first thing he says — and this is probably the most important thing for you to walk away with — is, do not be deceived or alarmed. Do not be deceived or alarmed.

In fact, this is what he says in Matthew chapter four, verse — I'm sorry, Matthew chapter 24, verse four. It says, "And Jesus answered them, 'See that no one leads you astray.

> **MATTHEW 24:4-8** ESV
>
> 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the
> Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 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. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,
> and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

For many will come in my name saying, "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. 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.'" The end is not yet. The end is not yet. That's an important phrase right there. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pains." Let me just mention this before I carry on. It is amazing to me that we use this chapter of the Bible to create more panic and alarm than any other chapter in the Bible when Jesus expressly says, "Do not be alarmed." This is not meant to cause you alarm. But part of the reason is what he says here when he says there's going to be rumors of wars, there's going to be all of these things that are happening in the earth. He says, this is disconnected from the end. He says, you're going to see this stuff, but the end is not yet come.

One theologian said that what Jesus is talking about here is, he's presenting what happens in the natural course of the world. If you were to drop just any, you know, a quarter into your history book at any time in the world and try to draw a prophetic line around it using wars and rumors of wars, it works everywhere. I mean, my God, we have the United States Army, or the United States military, in major wars throughout all of the 1900s — World War I, World War II, what are they called? Desert Storm, Vietnam, the Korean War.

We've been in the Middle East since the beginning of the two thousands right now. And we're a tweet away from another war every day. Amen. I don't know what's going to happen. Hallelujah. And so you're always in this — you're always going to be in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War. You're always going to have these moments that look like that. What Jesus is saying is, don't let that be the sign. That stuff's always going to be going on. And people will grab it and try to say, "Look, here's the Christ. Look, there's the Christ.

I am the Christ. I see the Christ. I know the Christ. This is from Christ. This is the Lord's doing." And everybody's going to be pointing to that anytime something happens. It's exactly what's happening today. What's funny is that I'm about to show you that this is not about the end times. This is actually about what happens in 70 AD. And so not only do we use it to predict something that's coming in the future — we aren't — Jesus said don't even use it to predict the thing that's coming quickly. Jesus said, this is not a predictor. This is the natural course of life.

And you'll notice a lot of people, as they get older, they feel like the world is getting worse. And there's two reasons for that. And when everybody hears this, let's help you calm down a little bit. It feels like it's getting worse for two reasons. One, you know how to do less stuff than you used to. I have trouble using computers that don't have a mouse. Okay. My kids over here doing it with their finger. My grandkids are just going to look at the screen and it's going to do stuff. You know, I mean, they got the goggles and stuff now. Amen. And so you feel more disconnected.

The TV remote is more complicated than it used to be. Amen. They keep changing the way we watch TV. We cut the cord and now it's more expensive to watch TV than it was with cable. Amen. And so you have all this, so you feel the distance. You feel distant from what's happening in the present, but also you have less to do. The older you get, the more settled your life is. I'm not talking about being 110 years old. Talking about in every generation: in your twenties, you're hustling; in your thirties, you're hustling. By the time you get to 40, where I just got out, things calmed down a little bit.

Got a little bit of money. I don't have to work so hard. Don't have to. I think life's a little bit easy. Life's getting easier as you go to 50 and 60 and 70. And we've got one grandmother in our church who doesn't even have to cook for herself. She has the leftovers coming. Amen. Hallelujah. And so you have less to do. When you have less to do, you have more time to think. And you start watching the news all day long. And Fox News stays on 24 hours a day. And everything that happens is a Fox News alert. I pick on Fox News, by the way, because it's the one y'all watch.

I could do CNN and MSNBC, and we can talk about those people, but I'm not their pastor. I'm your pastor. So I talk about Fox News because that's what you got on the TV all day long. And every time they do something on Fox TV, it's a Fox News alert. Just found a puppy — Fox News alert, breaking news. You know, there's war in Iran. Bow, Fox News alert. Bow, the ice cream truck is coming. You know, it's just happening for everything. And you're on high alert all day long. When you live that way, you can feel like everything's going to pot. But the reality is, like I said last week, things are getting better and better.

Things are getting worse and worse. It was the best of times, the worst of times, as Charles Dickens said. It's doing both. And so let me go back through a little bit of this text here. As you look at Matthew 24, you'll notice that there are three sections. I'm not going to read them all to you, but if you look at Matthew 24, verse four, that we just read, that is an indicator of what you don't need to worry about. That is the natural course of life. They are not indicators of something going to happen. There is a second section that starts in verse nine that talks about the ramp up.

> **MATTHEW 24:9-14 ESV**
>
> 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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.

It uses the word tribulation, but I want to encourage you again, he's answering them about the stuff that's about to happen. And it's a ramp up. You start feeling the pressure. And part of the pressure is they're going to start putting you to death. They're going to come after you. They're going to persecute you heavily. You're going to feel it bad. And then when you get down to verse 15, he says, this is when you're going to enter into a great tribulation period. Again, this isn't about the end. This isn't about the apocalypse. This is about the temple coming down in Jerusalem. And everything that he mentions in this text, you can tie back to what happened around 70 AD.

I don't want to do it this morning, but you can take it all back there. Things like the abomination of desolation, which I want to mention to you here — the abomination of desolation. This is something that throws people off because it sounds very distant in its language, because it's the abomination of desolation. I mean, it sounds crazy, doesn't it? And it's prophetic. We don't know what to do with it. Well, Daniel, which we'll read in a second, lets you know the abomination of desolation just means the abomination that makes desolate. It's not some weird prophetic phrase, just a weird way to say the abomination that makes desolate.

In fact, let's just read it real quick in verse 15.

> **MATTHEW 24:15 ESV**
>
> 15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

It says, "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)." Okay. This is a strange passage, but this means this is when things are going to happen. When will these things happen? When will the temple come down? When you see this. This is what they saw in 70 AD. When Titus comes into Jerusalem, he comes into the holy place. He sacrifices a pig in the holy of holies. They start sacrificing other — I'm sorry, that was not him.

That was someone else. They do sacrifice to other gods in the temple in 70 AD. And so they're in there, they're doing this. And then they set the thing on fire while they kill all the priests and anybody around who's working and doing anything. So when he says, when you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place — it's the abomination. It is someone who is not anointed to be in the holy place. They come in and they desecrate and destroy the temple. That's exactly what it means. That's exactly what that passage means.

Well, when Jesus says it, he's not just saying that this is coming and you'll only know about it. We don't just know this from history. This isn't just hindsight. Jesus is actually using a parlance that the Jews would already understand. In Daniel chapter 11, verse 31, this is where this phrase comes from.

> **DANIEL 11:31** ESV
>
> 31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

It says, "Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate." That's a prophecy from Daniel. The Jewish people at this time thought that prophecy had already been fulfilled.

They didn't think it was still coming. They thought it had been fulfilled about 150, 200 years earlier when a gentleman named Antiochus — I'm so Southern. I call someone who goes in and destroys the temple "a gentleman." Southern. Can't help it. I'm polite. And so, but this man named Antiochus goes in, and he's the one that sacrifices the pig in the holy place in the temple. This is actually that whole event where he goes in. I think he kills somewhere between 10 and 40,000 Jews. When this happens, it's actually what the Hanukkah celebration is all about.

Coming through that, what he did there. So he did it. Well, the Jews thought that was the abomination of desolation. So when Jesus says, "You'll see the abomination of desolation standing in the temple," what he's doing is he's saying, Antiochus — you're going to see something like that again. That's why the next line — it's amazing, stuff in the Bible says stuff for a reason — the next line says, "Let the reader understand." It's a signal that something's about to happen that you've seen before. If I rolled up in here and I prophesied 2008 — look out for 2008.

Everybody in here knows: sell your house today. Sell it now. It's a point to the past. It doesn't mean we're about to have 2008 again. Time travel is not getting invented. It's a signal to something that's already happened. Okay. Are y'all with me? I can tell I'm talking over y'all's head, but this is what happened. Won't have time to write my message. Good. I'll get up here. I'll say whatever I want. Hey, man, I have great jokes coming up later. Hallelujah. Tip your waitress. Anybody? It's no charity in this church at all. Man alive. So this first part of the answer that Jesus gives — or the first part of the question that Jesus answers — is not about something that's going to happen in the distant future.

It's about, when is this temple going to be torn down? So when people start to alert you to all of these crazy things you see in the world, and to expect all of this crazy stuff to come up and happen, and start getting you worried that they're about to come down Main Street and start killing Christians — which, folks, I'm not saying we're not going to go through some persecution in this country at some point, but I just don't think they're going to be released on your subdivision this Thursday. Let's be reasonable to some degree with our end time theology. Amen?

There's some steps we have to take. The second question is this. The second question that they ask is, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? And this is apocalyptic. This is Jesus comes back in a second coming, reigns on earth. There's a resurrection, a final judgment. This is the culmination of all things, the tying up. That's what eschatology is. It's the theology of ultimate things. This is when all of the ultimate things will happen. And when Jesus gets to this question, he answers it and says there isn't a sign. All we do is talk about the second coming of Christ and look at signs and look at things happening in the world.

And Jesus says, point blank, there is no sign. Verse 36, this is when the conversation shifts.

> **MATTHEW 24:36 ESV**
>
> 36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows." The angels don't know. The Son doesn't know. The Father is the only one that knows. We can stand back and we can try to hypothesize day after day after day. You can read every article online, in the newsstand, wherever you want to. We can look at a thousand different things by the end of the day. And if we look at the first half of Matthew 24, we'll come up with a bunch of great answers on when it's going to happen.

But that has nothing to do with Jesus coming. It's about something that's already happened. That prophecy — and this ought to encourage you — has been fulfilled. Why? Because Jesus is right. Like, every time. Amen. So that's encouraging. That means that because those things happened then, we can look forward to the future with hope, because we know that we can trust him. He's good to his word. He's good to his promise. And so Jesus said, when you look forward, when you get to verse 36 and start reading forward, when you start seeing all of these things about the Son of Man returning, you'll notice that all the scary stuff goes away.

There's no more scary talk. There's no more putting to death and they're going to chase you down in the street and they're going to do this and that and eggs are going to cost $28. And I think that prophecy is in there somewhere. Amen. And that's all right. We got the egg lady. Hallelujah. And so when you read the Scripture, you get to where Jesus starts to answer the second part of the question. He says, no one knows. No one knows. There is no sign. It can happen at any time. We cannot believe on one hand that the return of Christ is imminent.

And then on the other hand, try to figure out when it's going to happen every 15 minutes. Some of y'all got more books with the world blowed up on the front of it than you need. I mean, really. And here's the problem. And this is the concern. This is why I'm preaching this stuff. So now I'm here. This is where I was going with all of it. I can't let us be a people that entertain this stuff, because I'm watching people entertain it. I'm watching people fund this stuff. A guy writes a book called 88 Reasons Jesus Will Return in '88, sells bazillions of copies. Why on earth would you sell a book like that?

What are you going to do with the money? Why would you — you don't seem like you actually believe what you're saying. How many times do we let people predict the end and then let them do it three or four more times? It's a whole industry, folks. There's actually a publisher — I don't remember what the publisher is. There's a publishing arm of a company that only deals with publishing end time books, and they keep publishing them over and over again. You know, they re-release a lot of these books with new dates. They change the dates and then re-release them.

Folks, Jesus starts with this. He says, see that no one leads you astray. See that no one leads you astray. We either become, like I said last week, distraught or distracted. You will either live in an absolute panic-ridden state, which I actually am the most worried about, but I see that less, or you'll live distracted, and it's like we're entertained by the theology sitcom that we watch. It's like we like church, but we don't like the kingdom. It's like we're entertained by the stuff. And some of y'all, you know, I wonder some days, if you just became apostate and walked away from the faith today, would the music you listen to change?

Would you still put on whoever it is that you listen to and listen to worship music? Because "I still like the music. I still like the — oh, I still go to church. I don't believe in Jesus, but I like the community. I like being around it. I like —" what good is that? And I mean, if I might just encourage you a little bit, if you're going to go to hell, right? Get you a good 10

years out of that. Don't go to hell singing "How Great Thou Art." You know what I mean? Sleep in on Sunday morning. If you're going to be apostate, go to the lake. But I don't just like the culture.

I don't just like church. This stuff is real and it matters. And if we willingly are deceived by it, if we're willingly taken captive and led astray, when we have the answer — the answer is there. The answer is there. The answer is there. And most of our end time theology that we get pushed on us comes from the very top end of that chapter 24. That's the stuff we talk about all the time. Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes. Yeah. Earthquakes happen. You know, and then every 20 years when the hurricanes ramp up, people go, "Oh, the hurricanes are happening."

Yeah. It happens like every 30 years. It's part of the cycle. It's the natural course. Wildfires — guess what? They're going to happen. I'll never forget when Katrina hit. Over here in Pascagoula, and I was there, we went to see our sectional presbyter, and his house was gone. I'm not talking about — I'm talking, it wasn't there. And his car — if you ever see a picture of a BMW flipped over into a pool, if you're looking at Katrina stuff, that was his. The lease had just ran up and the people hadn't come and got it. And so it wasn't his problem, it was the car company's problem.

Amen. That's how the Lord will do you good right there. Amen. And the thing is flipped over in the pool, and his wife is walking around and picking up whatever she can find. She had literally a couple of like forks and spoons and a saucer and a few pictures. And, I mean, nothing left. And this guy just goes, "It's the price if you want to live in paradise." We forget this stuff just happens. It happens. It comes, it goes on. This is the natural course of life. And we're going to be alarmed every time something happens? No. That's when you get steady and you get steadfast, and you look everybody in the face who says, "Hey, I don't mess with the devil.

I'm on the Lord's side. I'm going to be victorious. I'm going to be fine." God will get you through it. He'll bring you through. No matter what comes your way, you will make it. Why? Because Jesus is good — and he's not good and nice and feeble. He's good, and he's all powerful, and he sits high above all things. Amen. Hallelujah. That's a good place to give him praise. Now you'll notice that when all of this changes, Jesus does have this refrain. He says, you need to be ready. So this is the second answer, to the second question, is be ready. Be ready.

Be ready. Matthew 24:46 says this: "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes."

> **MATTHEW 24:46** ESV
>
> 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

You need to be found so doing. Some of y'all need to get so doing. This is why the distraction piece matters, because the distraction piece of eschatology is entertaining the drama of all of this stuff. It keeps you from so doing. It keeps you from so doing. It's easy to ignore a lot of stuff when you only worry about this fantastical theology that nobody can do anything with. It is very easy to ignore "love your neighbor" when you're reading about dragons. It's very easy to ignore getting into the prayer place

when you're trying to predict the future. It takes you away from the so doing. So you gotta be so doing. You gotta be so serving the Lord. I don't have this, but in Nehemiah chapter four — Nehemiah chapter four, Nehemiah is up on the wall, rebuilding the temple with some people.

> **NEHEMIAH 4:17** ESV
>
> 17 who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

And he instructs all of his folks. He says, I want you to keep a spade in one hand and a sword in the other, because we've got to get to work, but the enemy could come at any time and try to stop us and destroy us. I'm telling you, there is something about having the sword of the secret place in your hand, where you are looking to heaven.

You are in tune with what's going on with the Lord. You do have an eye turned northward to the heavens, but at the same time, you have a hand on the plow. You don't put your spade down. You keep working in the kingdom. You keep working in your life. You keep making things happen. You keep doing what you need to do. I hope the Lord returns and finds a handful of people who were changing their babies' and their grandbabies' diapers, and they aren't out here worrying about some nonsense that doesn't matter. I hope the Lord finds us so doing. I hope the Lord will find you serving instead of sulking.

That he'll find you being faithful instead of being fearful, because you can be given to that with this theology. And not here, because we're hopeful about tomorrow. So we keep an eye toward heaven and we keep our hands on the plow. Our job is to be ready. Our job is to be ready. Our job is not to figure out when it's going to happen, why it's going to happen, how it's going to happen, what it's going to follow, what's going to precede it, what the order of things is. The amount of people who are arguing on the internet today about what the order of these things will be.

I said it last week: the second coming of Christ will be the great clarifier. This is a great place to write your beliefs down in pencil and move on with your life. So, preacher, why are you preaching on it if we really shouldn't worry about it? Because I will say probably the only end time message anybody's ever got up is this: y'all get over it, move on. Right? We'll get a lot of that. So why are you preaching on it, preacher? Because I've watched people captivated and taken hostage by this stuff. I'm tired. There is a prophetic voice that has to rise in the church, and I believe that we are in a season of seeing this happen.

There's a prophetic voice that has to rise that stops playing around and stops messing around about this stuff. We have played church. I've watched preachers get up and preach the most God-awful nonsense that goes nowhere. And sometimes you got to do that. I was just talking to a friend. I got a message in my Bible that I could preach that does nothing. But if a preacher needs his preaching arm relieved, and I got to go in and preach a message somewhere and we don't want to cause too much trouble or mess too much, yeah, I'll go in and give you a Sunday and then let you get back to work.

But too many pastors, their whole Bible's full of it. Every time they walk out of sermon prep, it's talking about nonsense that goes nowhere. This would be my challenge to you. The next time you see somebody on TV talking about this stuff, shut it off. The next time you get ready — and I don't normally say stuff like this, so I'm well out of my wheelhouse. This is fun. I get wound up a little bit. Amen. Y'all are here for the first time. I get loose when I get up here. Amen. I have a good time. Stop sending money to these people. Stop. I'm not saying send all your money to this church.

That's not what I'm saying. I think y'all should sow seed. I do think this is good ground. But find somewhere that's faithful and honest and true and making a difference in the world. And like, the gospel is, I don't know, going forth, and it's reaching people, and people are getting saved, not scared to death. Stop doing that. Stop buying these books that look like New York got set on fire, that say the end is near. We look at the guy on the edge of the corner with the sign

who says, “The end is near, turn or burn.” And we laugh, but then we send the sophisticated version of that $1,000 a month and buy every book that he has coming.

Captivating. Taking hostage. And we’re off mission. This world desperately needs Jesus. Not because he’s returning soon, though he is. But so far, every person who has come into contact with their eternity in the history of the world has not been because of the second coming of Christ. It’s been because of the first death. People only have so much time. People only have so much time. Everybody’s time is limited. Everybody, at some point, everybody will come face to face with this moment. And we’re out here messing around and playing church, and it looks sophisticated and it looks deep, and we pretend.

I’m done playing. And this ain’t about y’all. This is the kingdom mandate of my life. I am done messing around. And if some of y’all weren’t so saved, I’d use stronger language. I’m serious. I’m so over it. I’ve sat in rooms — and I’m not against preachers getting paid. I’m pro that agenda. I like that. I like it. But I’ve watched preachers who I knew were getting $20,000, $30,000, $40,000 honorariums to do one-night services, that flew in on a jet. And again, I’m not against any of this stuff. But give me $40,000 worth of stuff. And I’ve watched them get in there and preach stuff on the temple or the tabernacle and say nothing.

And everybody get worked into a frenzy. There’s no revelation. There’s no... And everything doesn’t have to be practical and applicable. Sometimes you just ring the bell and let people peek into the glory of the Lord. And I get that. But to preach silly for no reason, to go nowhere. And then we go to Waffle House when it’s done. To watch the six people fall on the ground. We all knew we’re going to fall on the ground before we got here. Right? We’ve done too much of that. Not here. Everywhere. Everywhere. Everywhere. And at some point, if we just say no more — there’s a great line.

Prophetic stuff right here. It’s a great line in Star Trek: First Contact. Nobody? Okay. All right. The Borg is about to invade the earth. And Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the Enterprise, NCC-1701-E in this movie, he steps up in his ready room and he says, “This far, no further.” We need some prophets to rise up in this day. Maybe I’m talking to you today, preacher. We need some prophets to rise up today and say, this far, no further. God wants to do a great work in this area and in this city, in this church. I saw something this morning. Today was the day that Martin Luther stood in front of a council as he was challenging the Catholic church.

And he just got up, and he got in front of this council of preachers that were pulling him up on charges, basically. And he said, I’m not going to renounce anything that I said, because for me to walk away from conscience is dangerous. It’s a powerful line right there. I’m just going to keep pressing on. Every Sunday ain’t like this. Every Sunday we don’t talk about the world blowing up into 38 pieces either. So I’m not going to entertain it. I’m not going to have people in the pulpit doing it. And y’all need to be prepared for me to have that look on my face when you come up to me and you talk to me about some stupid book or something that you heard.

I’m going to look at you and go, “What are you doing?” And I’m going to pastor you through it. But we can’t live in this place where we’re so excited about nothing. I ain’t got no time for that. I was sitting in Florida working on recipes, y’all. And I came back into full-time ministry in the local church. I got to shoot videos. They went around the world. They made an impact. And then I went into my kitchen and figured out a good recipe to play with. I make a mean meringue now. Amen. I did not come out of that easy ministry. I got a job in my history where I made over $80,000 a year to work about four hours a week in the church.

I’m lucky if I see my family four hours some weeks. I haven’t come into all this so we can play. I told y’all one day, these aren’t curtains. It’s not a screen. They’re not lights. It’s not paint. These are souls. We’re doing the work because these

are souls. We're doing the work because people need Jesus. We're doing the work because it's a real deal. We're doing the work because God has set something in your life through a powerful work and actually meet you and actually show up. Don't you mess around and get taken advantage of because you like playing church.

And listen, I'm not saying I'm the best pastor in the city. I'm not against any church, but I need y'all to hear me. I don't know anybody else. I don't know how much these people pray. I don't know how much these people study. I have heard some pastors in our area say things that were egregious, in my opinion, from the pulpit. I mean, I heard one guy in town basically get up and admit he don't read the Bible, and nobody realized that's what he said. He can do what they want to do. We're not going to be taken advantage of in this church. We're going to serve the Lord, and God is going to move in a powerful way.

I feel like this is a strong word. I don't want this to come off as a rebuke. It's not, but I feel the presence of the Lord here. I'm kind of just repeating, and I'm in a refrain right now, because I feel like the Lord is dealing prophetically with something in the church, in the atmosphere. I don't know what it is. I'm kind of filling y'all in on what I'm doing. It's only been 10 months. We still get to know each other. I feel like the Lord's doing something in the room right now. So I'm just hanging out here for a second. Somebody in here is making a decision that this far, no further.

Hallelujah. Lift your hands to heaven all across the room. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Father, we ask you right now that by the Spirit of power and authority, you would meet people in their seats. Thank you, Lord. We call today a day of not looking back. We glance in the rearview mirror, but that's not where we're going. Father, we thank you that what you're about to do in this church will supersede what we have ever seen before. Father, I thank you for a palate cleanser of a Sunday, a moment where we cleanse our senses so that we can look forward and expect you to move in a powerful, powerful way.

In Jesus' name, and everybody said amen. Hallelujah. Give the Lord a hand clap of praise.

02

Preaching Notes

Before You Preach

This is the second message in a two-week series. Last week was a flyover of eschatology: the four pillars, the four views of the millennium, and seeing in a mirror dimly. This week slows down and walks through Matthew 24, the chapter most often used to stir up end times alarm.

Say up front that you are about to challenge how most people read this chapter. The reading here treats the first part of the chapter (the wars, famines, tribulation and abomination of desolation) as Jesus' answer about the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and verse 36 onward as His answer about His second coming. Many in the Assemblies of God read more of the chapter as still future, so hold the details humbly, in pencil, and keep the four pillars in ink.

The last movement turns from teaching to a strong pastoral word against the end times prediction industry. Let it be a word, not a rant: the aim is to get people back on mission.

Introduction

Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, a continual rise in natural disasters. Should we be on high alert? What does the Bible say? Today I want to show you why I'm not worried.

We're hopeful about tomorrow. Not hooked to the TV, not wigging out. No matter what comes my way, I'm going to be hopeful about tomorrow.

REVIEW: THE FOUR PILLARS OF END TIME ORTHODOXY

1. **The second coming of Christ, bodily and imminent.** No one knows the day or the hour. He could come back "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). 2. **The resurrection of the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous.** "The dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). 3. **The final judgment.** Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will spend eternity with Jesus Christ; those whose names are not will be thrown into the lake of fire, the second death (Revelation 20:14-15). This includes the annihilation of all evil. 4. **The new heavens and the new earth** (Revelation 21:1). The restoration of all things, where we will spend eternity if we are born again.

WHY MATTHEW 24 MATTERS

Matthew 24 is a major eschatological text. One author described a newspaper article listing eight reasons the second coming was near, and five of the eight came from Matthew 24. If we misunderstand this chapter, we will

be badly off base. We still wear sunglasses at night on these issues (1 Corinthians 13:12), but this chapter, more than any other, will decide whether you go into these days nervous or assured.

And we are in the last days. "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). Breathe in. That's last days air.

1. One Question Asked, Two Questions Answered

> MATTHEW 24:1-3 ESV
>
> 1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the
> temple. 2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here
> one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." 3 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?"

The disciples think they are asking one question. Jesus knows they are asking two:

- **When will these things be?**
- **What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**

In the Jewish view of the day, the fate of the temple, the coming of the Messiah and the final judgment were all wrapped up in one event. Even after the resurrection the disciples ask, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). In their minds, if the Messiah is here, it's about to go down. But Jesus separates His answer into two different events, far removed from each other.

This can be hard to see for two reasons. First, we read the Bible faster than we ought. Second, Matthew's account is compressed: we are getting a lot of information in a little text, not a word-for-word record of the whole conversation. It takes some work, but you can see where the answer shifts from one question to the other.

FOUR WAYS TO READ PROPHECY

- **Preterist:** everything Jesus prophesied has already happened. In my view, and the view of many others, that falls outside orthodox Christianity, because some things Scripture promises are still to come.
- **Partial preterist:** some of what needed to be fulfilled has been fulfilled, and some is still to come.
- **Historicist:** prophecy has been fulfilling itself across history.
- **Futurist:** nearly everything Jesus said is still down the road, waiting on something crazy to happen in the world. Most of us have been exposed mainly to strongly futurist teaching.

Some things Jesus prophesied have been fulfilled, and some have not been fulfilled yet.

2. “When Will These Things Be?” Read It in Context

What things? Matthew 24 sits in a story that begins in Matthew 21, and all of it happens in and around the temple.

- **Matthew 21:** Palm Sunday. Jesus enters Jerusalem and the temple (Matthew 21:12), drives out the money changers, and the leaders challenge His authority.
- **Matthew 22:** Still in the temple. The question about taxes (really about Caesar’s image on the coin), the Sadducees’ challenge on the resurrection, and the Pharisees’ test of His knowledge of Scripture.
- **Matthew 23:** The seven woes over the scribes and Pharisees.
- **Matthew 24:1:** “Jesus left the temple.” In chapter 21 He entered the temple; now He departs it. This may be the most prophetic moment in the chapter. It is Tuesday of the last week, and the covenant is about to shift. Jesus is departing a system that kept everyone in this room outside, and through His finished work we are now included.

Then they cross to the Mount of Olives, which sits well above the temple across the valley, and they sit looking down at it. (Show an image or sketch of Jerusalem, the temple, the valley and the Mount of Olives.)

Illustration: the cancer prophecy. Imagine you are diagnosed with stage three cancer on Thursday. On Sunday a guest speaker looks you in the eye and says, “You were just diagnosed with cancer, but the Lord says you’ll be healed this week.” On Tuesday the doctor comes out and says, “We don’t know what happened, but the cancer is gone.” Would you assume the prophecy was about some future, worse cancer you will get one day? Or would you say, “That was the cancer the prophecy was about”?

Jesus has spent days in the temple, debating in the temple, walking around the temple. The disciples point out the temple’s buildings. He says not one stone will be left on another. They sit staring at the temple and ask when. Doesn’t it stand to reason that His answer has something to do with the temple?

> MATTHEW 24:34 ESV
>
> 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

FORTY YEARS LATER

About forty years later, that temple was reduced to rubble. From AD 66 to 70 the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, trapped people inside the city and starved them. The dead numbered in the hundreds of thousands at the least. When Titus took the city in AD 70, the temple was burned, and Roman soldiers offered sacrifices to their standards in the temple courts. It was one of the worst assaults on the Jewish people in history.

Jesus foretold something that was not off in a distant apocalyptic future. It happened in that generation.

3. Don’t Be Deceived or Alarmed

The first thing Jesus says when He answers the first question may be the most important thing to take home today: “See that no one leads you astray” (Matthew 24:4).

> MATTHEW 24:4-8 ESV
>
> 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 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. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

It is amazing that we use this chapter to create more panic and alarm than any other chapter in the Bible, when Jesus expressly says, "See that you are not alarmed" (Matthew 24:6). He says these things are disconnected from the end: "the end is not yet."

Drop a pin anywhere in history and you will find wars and rumors of wars: the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, decades in the Middle East. Jesus is describing the natural course of the world. Don't treat it as a sign. People will always grab the latest headline and say, "Look, here is the Christ." Jesus said not to use these things to predict even the event coming soon, much less the end.

Why it feels like the world is getting worse. As we get older, two things happen. We feel less connected to a world that keeps changing (the TV remote keeps getting more complicated), and our lives settle down, so we have more time to watch the news. When every story is a "news alert," you live on high alert all day long. But as I said last week, things are getting better and better and worse and worse at the same time. It is the best of times and the worst of times.

THREE SECTIONS

Matthew 24 moves in three sections in answer to the first question:

- **Verse 4: routine events.** This is normal, not an indicator.
- **Verse 9: tribulation.** The ramp up: persecution, believers put to death, pressure building.
- **Verse 15: great tribulation.** The big indicators: the temple is about to come down.

Everything in this section can be tied back to what happened around AD 70.

4. The Abomination of Desolation

> MATTHEW 24:15 ESV
>
> 15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

The phrase sounds strange and distant, but it simply means "the abomination that makes desolate." Jesus is using language His hearers already knew.

> DANIEL 11:31 ESV
>
> 31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

The Jews of Jesus' day believed this prophecy had already been fulfilled in 167 BC, when Antiochus IV desecrated the temple, set up a pagan altar and sacrificed a pig there, and killed tens of thousands of Jews. The rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt is what Hanukkah celebrates.

So when Jesus says, "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)," He is saying: you are going to see something like Antiochus again. It is a signal to something they had already seen. If I stood up and said, "Look out for 2008," everyone would know what I meant: sell your house. It points to the past to warn about the present.

In AD 70 that is what they saw: those with no right to be in the holy place came in, desecrated it and destroyed it.

The first part of Jesus' answer is not about the distant future. It is about when this temple would be torn down. I'm not saying we won't face persecution in this country someday. But let's be reasonable with our end time theology.

5. "What Will Be the Sign of Your Coming?" There Isn't One

Now the second question, the apocalyptic one: the second coming, the resurrection, the final judgment, the culmination of all things. And Jesus' answer is that there is no sign.

> MATTHEW 24:36 ESV
>
> 36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Not the angels. Not the Son. Only the Father. You can read every article and look at a thousand things, and if you use the first half of Matthew 24 you will come up with plenty of answers about when. But that half is about something that has already happened. That should encourage you: Jesus' prophecy came true, because Jesus is right every time. Because He kept His word then, we can look to the future with hope.

Notice that from verse 36 on, the scary language goes away. There is no more talk of being chased down in the street. Instead there is a steady refrain: be ready. "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

We cannot believe on one hand that the return of Christ is imminent, and on the other hand try to figure out when it's going to happen every fifteen minutes.

The prediction industry. A book called *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* sold millions of copies. If you believed it, what would you do with the money? How many times do we let people predict the end and then let them do it three or four more times? It has become an industry, with books re-released with new dates.

Jesus starts with this: “See that no one leads you astray.” Like we said last week, we become either distraught or distracted. Some live in panic. More of us live entertained, watching end times theology like a sitcom. We like church, but not the kingdom.

Earthquakes, hurricanes and wildfires come and go. They are the natural course of life.

Illustration: after Katrina. After Hurricane Katrina, we visited our sectional presbyter in Pascagoula. His house was simply gone. His wife walked the slab picking up a few forks and spoons, a saucer and some pictures. And he said, “It’s the price if you want to live in paradise.” These things happen. That is when you get steady and steadfast: “I’m on the Lord’s side. God will get me through it.” Jesus is not good and feeble. He is good, all-powerful, and seated high above all things.

6. Be Ready: Be Found So Doing

> MATTHEW 24:46 ESV
>
> 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

You need to be found so doing. This is why the distraction matters: entertaining the drama of the end times keeps you from so doing. It is easy to ignore “love your neighbor” when you are reading about dragons, and easy to skip the prayer place when you are trying to predict the future.

Nehemiah’s builders. When Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, the enemy threatened to attack, so “each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other” (Nehemiah 4:17). A spade in one hand, a sword in the other. Keep the sword of the secret place in your hand, one eye turned toward heaven, and keep your other hand on the plow. Don’t put the spade down.

I hope the Lord returns and finds people changing their babies’ and grandbabies’ diapers instead of worrying about nonsense. **I hope the Lord finds you serving instead of sulking, faithful instead of fearful.**

We keep an eye on heaven and our hands to the plow. Our job is not to figure out when, why, how or in what order. **Our job is to be ready.** The second coming will be the great clarifier. This is a great place to write your beliefs down in pencil and move on with your life.

Conclusion: This Far, No Further

Why preach on it at all? Because I have watched people captivated and taken hostage by this. A prophetic voice has to rise in the church that stops playing around.

- **The next time you see someone on TV selling the end, shut it off.**
- **Stop sending money to people who scare you.** Sow into places that are faithful, honest and making a difference, where the gospel is going forth and people are getting saved, not scared to death. We laugh at the man on the street corner with a sign that says, “The end is near, turn or burn,” and then we send the sophisticated version of him $1,000 a month and buy every book he writes.

This world desperately needs Jesus. Not because He is returning soon, though He is, but because so far every person who has come face to face with eternity has met it not through the second coming but through their own death. Everybody's time is limited. These are not curtains, lights and paint. These are souls.

Illustration: "This far, no further." In *Star Trek: First Contact*, with the Borg about to overrun everything, Captain Picard draws the line: "This far, no further." And this very week in 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and refused to recant, because to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

We need people to rise up and say, this far, no further. God wants to do a great work in this city and in this church. Somebody here is deciding today: this far, no further.

Prayer. Lift your hands. Father, by the Spirit of power and authority, meet people in their seats. We call today a day of not looking back. We glance in the rearview mirror, but that's not where we're going. Let what You are about to do in this church supersede anything we have seen before. In Jesus' name.

OPTIONAL: FALSE CHRISTS AND THE LIGHTNING

This section is in the original notes but was not preached on April 19, 2026. Use it if time allows.

> MATTHEW 24:23-28 ESV
>
> 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false christs
> and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the
> elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out.
> If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 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. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures
> will gather.

This is directly about the temple's destruction, but people are still doing it. Preachers make claims and predictions, and Jesus said, "Do not believe it." When Jesus returns, it won't be in some hidden place: "as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:27). The second coming will be obvious. Vultures sense death, dogs sense fear, and false prophets sense people they can take advantage of. Then close with Jesus' own words: no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36).

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

MATTHEW 24:1-2	1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."
MATTHEW 24:3	3 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?"
MATTHEW 24:34	34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.
MATTHEW 24:4-8	4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 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. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.
MATTHEW 24:15	15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),
DANIEL 11:31	31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.
MATTHEW 24:36	36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

MATTHEW 24:46	46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

HEBREWS 1:2	2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
ACTS 1:6-8	6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
MATTHEW 21:1-11	1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."
MATTHEW 21:12-13	12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

MATTHEW 21:23-27	23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.
MATTHEW 22:15-22	15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.
MATTHEW 22:23-33	23 The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, 24 saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' 25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. 26 So too the second and third, down to the seventh. 27 After them all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." 29 But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." 33 And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

MATTHEW 23:13-36

13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of
heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would
enter to go in. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across
sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make
him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. 16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say,
‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the
temple, he is bound by his oath.’ 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the
temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar,
it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his
oath.’ 19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift
sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And
whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. 22 And
whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.
23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and
cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and
faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You
blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! 25 “Woe to you, scribes and
Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside
they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside
of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. 27 “Woe to you, scribes
and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly
appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 So
you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy
and lawlessness. 29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the
tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 saying, ‘If
we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in
shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you
are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your
fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced
to hell? 34 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, 35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth,
from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah,
whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly, I say to you, all
these things will come upon this generation.

MATTHEW 24:9-14	9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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.
NEHEMIAH 4:17	17 who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:52	52 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 THESSALONIANS 4:16	16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.
REVELATION 20:14-15	14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
REVELATION 21:1	1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
1 CORINTHIANS 13:12	12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

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