



Parkway Fellowship

6 TRUTHS YOU CAN COUNT ON • THE END IS NEARER • MATTHEW 24:3-35 • 9/13/2020

MAIN POINT

We should watch for the signs of Christ's return, return to God, and be devoted so we won't be deceived.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you heard this week's sermon was about the end times, what thoughts or questions come to your mind?

What books or movies have you seen that depict the events and signs of the last days? What stands out to you about the way books and movies depict the end of the world?

How often would you say you give thought to the end times? Why is it good to know the signs of the end times?

There is prophecy throughout the Bible that gives information about the end times. Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation are all helpful on this subject. The teaching of Jesus on the matter is of particular importance because He instructs us not only what signs to look for but how to live in response.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

In this week's message, we learned some signs that show the end is nearer (Revelation 6:2,7-8; 8:10-11; 13:16-18). As we discussed the signs—one world, one-world government, a global pandemic, a nuclear or bio missile attack, one world

economy—how did you feel (i.e. anxious, calm, hopeful, hopeless, encouraged, discouraged, etc.)?

Which of the signs of the end of the world sticks out to you the most and why?

What questions or thoughts do you have about those particular passages and signs?

| **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 24:3-14.**

What were some of the signs Jesus mentioned? How might the disciples have experienced any signs?

What must we do to “stand firm to the end” in the midst of these final days?

Jesus mentioned several signs: tribulation, wars, famines, earthquakes, and false prophets. Jesus warned the disciples about persecution and false prophets. Today we must watch out for people who will teach in the name of Christ but do so for his or her personal gain. We also must remain steadfast in the midst of persecution.

| **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 24:15-28.**

Why did Jesus use the prophecy of Daniel to talk about the last days?

Read Daniel 9:24-27. What was Daniel prophesying about? How could someone cause a desolation?

What did the abomination of desolation have to do with the sacrificial system?

Why would Jesus point to this event happening in the last days?

The tribulation would include the desolation from Daniel. This was part of Daniel’s prophecy of a time of tribulation. It was in regard to sacrifices at the temple, as regular sacrifices would cease and an abomination would occur. Many have pointed to abominations at the temple but Jesus and Daniel are speaking about a future event during the time of tribulation. Specifically, this abomination was some kind of defiling, destructive incident in the temple, which would end the practice of daily sacrifices. Jesus specified that the abomination would be standing in the holy place; that is, the second most sacred room in the temple.

What is the difference between the coming of the false christs and the second coming of the true Christ?

Why is the difference important to you?

The false christs come to bring fear and oppression, but the coming of the true Christ will be in a flash and will set God's people free from persecution and oppression.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 24:29-35.

Why is the gospel not complete without Jesus' second coming?

What other aspects of nature like a fig tree can communicate the truths in this passage?

How do you reconcile Jesus' statement in verse 34 with the fact that multiple generations have passed since His teaching?

Jesus' second coming is key to the gospel because He has promised to return and that is our great hope. In nature, we can see that something is missing and that disasters and violence point to the need for the world to be made right again. Jesus taught that the generation who saw these things would not pass until all the signs were completed.

How do you feel right now in light of what we have discussed? Why?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What did you think when you read Jesus' words, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37)?

What does it mean, practically, for you to watch for the signs of the end times?

What would happen in our world if every Christ-follower truly returned to God?

How can you know if you're devoted to Jesus to the point that you would not be deceived?

PRAYER

Pray that God would give you a certain hope in Christ. Thank God that in His wisdom He made a plan and has given us glimpses of it in Scripture. Pray that you would be prepared and expectant of the return of Christ.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 24:3-35

24:3. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from the temple hill of Jerusalem. Jesus sat down on the Mount of Olives, probably to initiate a teaching session because a teachable moment was about to come at the disciples' initiative. The disciples were still reeling from Jesus' shocking revelation about the temple's destruction. In their minds, such a tragedy could only be linked to the end of the age and Christ's return in final judgment.

24:4-8. Jesus first warned, in general terms (24:4-14), of several characteristics of the period of time before he would return. There would be counterfeit messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence, earthquakes martyrs, false prophets, increasing evil, and the preaching of the gospel worldwide. Jesus used the present tense with the imperative statement: "but see to it that you are not alarmed." This comfort was to be applied repetitively, every time a troubling rumor of war came along. Jesus' message was, "Keep on seeing that you are not troubled, every time a rumor of war comes your way, as they often will in this troubled world." While war is a continual reality on earth, war alone is not sufficient evidence of the Lord's return and the end of the age.

24:9-12. Jesus' description of the persecution of believers is a graphic picture of our present age, which can be described generally as one of opposition and persecution. Suffering, death, and ostracism were part of following Christ. It was natural that many would turn away from him, seeking to avoid the suffering of discipleship. Not only would they fall away from Jesus, but these same apostates would betray and hate believers. Jesus clearly stated that the apostate followers of Jesus would become party to the persecution of believers, along with the rest of the unbelieving world. Verse 11 sounds similar to verse 5 above, describing false prophets instead of false Christs. A prophet was a spokesman for God; therefore, a false prophet was one who falsely claimed to be God's spokesman. This was a more subtle form of deception, since there was only one Christ. However, there can be many prophets from God, and it was easier to pass oneself off as a prophet. Jesus said there would be many such deceivers and that they would deceive many people. The person who attempts to remain faithful to Christ may find great difficulty in discerning between so many claimants to God's true revelation.

All four of the signs Jesus had given in 24:9-12 were symptoms of a society heading toward self-destruction: (1) universal persecution of the righteous; (2) joined by those who once numbered themselves among the righteous; (3) widespread following of false teachers claiming to be God's spokesmen; and (4) the numbing of hearts and consciences due to the abandonment of God's righteous values. As with the signs of 24:4–8, these were not absolute guarantees that the end was imminent. But judging from Jesus' words and the warnings of other New Testament

writers (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:1–9), these symptoms would be predominant throughout the world when the end actually did approach.

24:13-14. Jesus cautioned against signs that did not indicate the imminent end (including the destruction of the temple) and then described signs that would become predominant closer to the end. He then came to the partial answer to the disciples' question (24:3). His answer was twofold; it concerned the end result for the righteous individual and for the world.

24:15-20. The abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel and great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now are two such unmistakable clues. One specific sign of the end would be the abomination (meaning "detestable thing") that causes desolation (meaning "devastation, destruction, depopulation," related to "desert"). Jesus took this phrase from Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11, where it was used to mark a particular turning point in the events of the end times. Specifically this abomination was some kind of defiling, destructive incident in the temple, which would end the practice of daily sacrifices. Jesus specified that the abomination would be standing in the holy place; that is, the second most sacred room in the temple.

This period of tribulation is a specific period of time beginning with the abomination and ending with the second coming of Christ (Rev. 11:2; 13:5.) It is during this time that the terrible judgments of Revelation 6–19 with its seals and trumpets will destroy great portions of the earth. This time of trouble will be without precedent in world history.

24:21-22. So the disciples might not underestimate the horror of this Great Tribulation, Jesus explained that it would be the worst suffering in all of history—unequalled from the beginning of the world until now (24:21). But even in judgment, the Lord will display mercy, particularly for the sake of the elect. These are those who have placed faith in him and followed him as his disciples. The use of the term elect also highlights the Lord's sovereign choice as to who these people will be. It is he who draws the faithful to himself; none of us come of our own will. This Tribulation will not reach its full destructive potential because of the Lord's intervention.

24:23-26. So that God's chosen followers ("the elect," 24:24) might not be fooled by false Christs and false prophets, Jesus forewarned us about them. False Christs would be those claiming to be the Messiah himself, while false prophets would be those claiming to have truth revealed by God—possibly in a hoax supporting one of the false Christs.

24:27-28. When he comes, the whole world will know! Unlike his first advent—through natural birth into a human body and thirty-four years of life as a man—the coming of the Son of Man (here Jesus used the title with its full messianic impact) will be like lightning, which comes from

the east and is visible even in the west. The picture is that of a bolt of lightning, flashing all the way across the sky, from horizon to horizon, in an instant. Jesus was about to tell us more about his coming (24:29-31), but this alone distinguished Him from all the imposters at the end of the age.

24:29. This verse jumped to the very end of the Tribulation and pointed out that it would be marked by signals of cosmic proportion. Immediately after the distress of those days, which will be interrupted by the Messiah's coming, still more signs will make Christ's coming unmistakable. The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. This sign had been prophesied often in the Old Testament in connection with God's final judgment (Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14-16; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zech 14:6; Zeph. 1:15; see also Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12-17; 8:12).

The second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom on earth will be a majestic event that will extend over many hours. The earth and its occupants will be forced to watch, amazed, as the armies of the hosts of heaven descend to the earth in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).

24:30. Whether the sign of the Son of Man that will appear in the sky is an additional sign or a repeated mention of the phenomena of 24:29, the point is that his coming will be unmistakable. This probably refers to Christ himself appearing in the heavens. Perhaps this should be read, "the sign that is the Son of Man," implying that he himself will be the final sign as he descends Aids visibly to earth. This interpretation is supported by the remainder of this verse. He will come in such an obvious way that all the nations of the earth, will see him.

Using a direct quote from Daniel 7:13, Jesus described the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky. These may be literal clouds or the cloud of God's glory, as often seen in the Old Testament. Only the divine Messiah could come in such a fashion. Thus, it is natural that he would be coming with power and great glory. His arrival will be terrifying to all the people on earth, particularly those who oppose him. They will mourn because his coming implies their judgment.

24:31. The only people not mourning at the Messiah's return will be his elect (24:22, 24). The loud trumpet call brings to mind the royal herald, who announced the coming of a king with fanfare with his trumpet. As he comes, the Messiah will send out his angels to gather his faithful disciples from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. These phrases imply "from every part of the earth" since the gospel will have gone out to all nations (24:14).

24:32-33. Jesus' brief use of the lesson from the fig tree foreshadowed the latter portion of the discourse, beginning to edge the listener toward application of the teaching Jesus had provided. An observer could watch a fig tree begin to produce leaves (and green fruit) in late spring as a sign that summer is near. In the same way, an observer of history who knows the preceding teachings of Jesus was now equipped to know when the Messiah's coming is near, right at the door. This implies immediacy, but still not a specific time.

24:34-35. Jesus alerted his disciples to the importance of his next statement with I tell you the truth. He promised that this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Jesus underscored the faithfulness and reliability of his teaching (24:35). His words will stand even after heaven and earth ... pass away. Jesus' words are firmer than earth's bedrock, more sound than the foundations of heaven (cf. Ps 119:89-90; Isa. 40:6-8). Christ's words are more certain than even the existence of the universe.

The disciples would put their lives repeatedly on the line. Jesus knew they needed strong assurance that his review of future history was accurate and that their hardship for his sake would be worth the cost.