

W D J S
The Last Days
Matthew 24

How often do YOU think about Christ's return? DO you ever think about it?

-What often prompts you to think about it? TROUBLE!

-When do you often fail to think about (or even desire!) his return?

*We think this way when life is going GREAT or we are expecting delight!

[I even asked Jesus to DELAY his return the day before my wedding!]

Why is it so HARD to think about the end times? [IRONY: I wrote this sermon on a cruise ship –the Dream - between meals on the Lido Deck!]

*Recount my time on the Cruise Ship. [It was like a 7-Day Sabbath!]

-Mindset of pleasure and escape for many. [7-Day Weekend Party]

-Few prayed or thought about their FAITH. [Girl I talked to during manicure]

-Life seemed carefree, easy, and ENDLESS. I did not WANT it to end!

*No one likes to THINK about the END, especially when times are GOOD.

-We AVOID thoughts of our own DEMISE!

-People MOCK "Doomsday Prophets." [The end IS near!]

-YET, the END really is NEAR! [Most of us have 30 or 40 years left . . . maybe.]

The VALUE of FOCUSING on CHRIST'S RETURN:

It is a reminder that life is so much MORE than your circumstances.

-Your present circumstances are NOT the SUM TOTAL OF REALITY.

ILLUSTRATION: We can no more imagine the joys and wonders of heaven than a baby can imagine the joys and wonders of life outside of the womb!"

*The fact is, people are fascinated by the Bible's words about the End Times.

*LEFT BEHIND: God sets eternity in our hearts! **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

People were very interested in the End Times in Jesus' day as well:

-There were high expectations concerning ISRAEL'S POLITICAL DESTINY.

-The TEMPLE seemed indestructible! "Look at these amazing stones!"

Christ was a PROPHET. Luke 21:5-7, 20-24 NLT

5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." 7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" 20 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.

Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the **times of the Gentiles** are fulfilled.

-Christ's words remind us that many things that seem permanent are NOT!

-He prophesied the destruction of the Temple 40 years before it happened.

*He GRIEVED over it. ["Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"]

Christ's answers HELPED to PROTECT the early church when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. [They saw the Roman siege begin & GOT OUT OF DODGE!]

*JESUS foretold the "TIMES of the GENTILES." [Resurrection to Rapture]

-During this time, Gentiles will constantly threaten Israel's existence.

*The disciples didn't really even LIKE Gentiles! They had no idea that for the next 2,000+ years, God's work would be focused on THEM! How do you think they would have felt to know this? Jesus had to spell it out to them in something of a mystery, because it was NOT UP TO THEM to set the seasons. That is God's business! Jesus saw future history the way an AUTHOR sees a BOOK. He can flip to whatever page he wants to read! (C.S. Lewis)

Jesus actually answered TWO QUESTIONS: **(Matthew 24:3-5)**

***When will the Temple be destroyed?**

***What will be the SIGN of Christ's RETURN and the END OF TIME.**

-This is principally a JEWISH QUESTION concerning Israel's part in the Kingdom!

*Jesus actually addressed Jewish destiny along with the Church's future.

***Telescoping prophecy:** Dual fulfillment. [Can be CONFUSING!]

GIVE A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAST DAYS.

Could I be wrong about some details? *YES! But here is what JESUS SAID.*

Trouble is coming. Expect it!

*This was not a THREAT, just TRUTH. Threats are pointless. God wills and works.

-This was not given to create PESSIMISM or FEAR, but to inspire FAITH.

*This prophecy MOTIVATES some to RUN to him for salvation.

*This INSPIRED followers *since his day* to LIVE FOR HIM no matter how things look!

-This was a REMINDER: GOD is in control of human history. **Matthew 24:4-9 NIV**

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains. 9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

The earth will experience the constant INCREASE of TROUBLE.

*Persecution will increase for believers in all generations.

*Natural disasters will grow more frequent. [Global Warming or Divine Warning]

[QUOTE: David Jeremiah – [Living with Confidence](#), P. XVIII]

- *Wars will be constant and more far ranging and frightful.
 - Nation Vs. Nation AND Kingdom Vs. Kingdom **(As in WW II)**
- *MANY political/religious deceiver/saviors will rise up!
- *These are like End Times BIRTH PAINS. Will increase exponentially at birth!

TRUTHS TO CONSIDER:

***Turmoil always creates VULNERABILITY.** [Tsunamis/Attack on 9/11]

- Every TREMOR might open a heart's door to the Gospel – SHARE IT!
- Yet, many others will TURN AWAY from the FAITH during this time.

Matthew 24:10-14 NIV

10 At that time **many will turn away from the faith** and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the **increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold**, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the **kingdom will be preached in the whole world** as a testimony to all nations, **and then the end will come.**

- This will cause a great sense of fear, weariness, and discouragement.
 - *GUARD YOUR HEART! [This is our current cultural dilemma.]
- Realize that God will ENSURE that the GOSPEL will be preached to all!**
 - *This is evidence of God's great mercy.
 - Millions of Jews will be saved during this time. [144,000 Evangelists]
 - *This also reveals his perfect JUSTICE.

*God's people do not have to worry that they will MISS Christ's return! He will not miss a SINGLE ONE that belongs to him! Here is what you need to know:

Jesus WILL return. Watch for HIM!

*His coming will be in 2 PARTS: RAPTURE and the 2nd COMING.

*The RAPTURE will come as a total SURPRISE! **Matthew 24:36-39, 40-42 NIV**

36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be **taken** and the other **left**. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be **taken** and the other **left**. 42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

*People will STILL be living their lives OBLIVIOUS to God and to impending doom.

- This is a picture of life BEFORE the Great Tribulation! **(Matt. 24:21-22)**
- Their focus will be FLESHLY.
- Their HOPE will only be for the extension of earthly life.

*Jesus says that the 2nd COMING will be EXPECTED and VISIBLE!

Matthew 24:26-33 NIV

26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 29 "Immediately after the distress of those days " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' 30 "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, **you know that it is near, right at the door.**

*Here, Jesus is saying that his 2nd Coming will NOT be a secret event. **Severe Tribulation will create constant EXPECTATION.** And when he comes, every eye will see him and all people will KNOW that Jesus Christ has returned!

-Jesus indicates here that these signs will help you KNOW he is at the door!

-Those who stay faithful to God in the Tribulation will LONG for this day.

*Refer to **Matthew 23:38-39 NIV**

The Rapture and 2nd Coming will bring us into the protection of Christ in HEAVEN!

*Heaven is a place that is PREPARED for us! **John 14:2-3 NIV**

2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

His return will SEPARATE the PRETENDERS from the POSSESSORS!

-The Surprise Return of Christ will leave some standing alone and abandoned!

-The Parables of the 10 Virgins and the Talents reveal this lifestyle separation.

-The account of the Sheep and the Goats reveal a separation in judgment.

*Here, Jesus says that people will be thrown into the place prepared for the DEVIL and his angels. Hell was not God's desire for mankind!

Eternity is certain. Prepare for it.

*Grace is AVAILABLE to you RIGHT NOW! Will you receive it?

*What will YOU be found doing when he returns?

-This has been an ONGOING POSSIBILITY since the day Christ left earth!

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH THIS MESSAGE?

*Learn to PRACTICE the DIVINE OFFICE.

- Set your smart phone alarm to sound 3 times each day.
- If you are not a Christian, take time to really CONSIDER ETERNITY.
 - *Where are you HEADED? *How is God involved in your life? Pray.
- *CHRISTIANS:
 - Take a few minutes to worship, read scripture, or pray for a lost friend.
 - Thank Christ for his promised return and ask him for strength to be faithful!

Let's pray.