

THE RETURN OF THE KING, PART 1

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 24:1-14

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INTRO.

-- David Platt, pastor, author and former president of the International Mission Board, tells about when he was a first-year student at New Orleans Baptist Seminary, that he and some of his friends went to the French Quarter and set up a booth next to a woman called the Voodoo Queen. They offered to tell people's futures for free. When someone came to their booth, they told them that their futures looked grim and very dark, but that could change depending on their relationship with Christ. They quickly found out that wasn't the kind of future-telling that people in the French Quarter were looking for.

-- In our study through the Gospel of Matthew, we are coming to a section in which Jesus is going to tell us about the future, and He also is not going to tell us what we want to hear but what we need to hear. So, turn in your Bible to Matthew 24. The Gospel of Matthew contains 5 major discourses given by Jesus. The first was the Sermon on the Mount, and the last is the discourse we start today, the discourse found in chapters 24-25, which is sometimes called the Olivet Discourse, because Jesus gave it to His disciples on the Mount of Olives.

-- Jesus' purpose in this discourse is to prepare us for how to face and persevere through everything that lies ahead.

I. The Setting (vv. 1-2)

A. Jesus Leaves the Temple (v. 1a)

-- For the past 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ chapters Jesus has been on the Temple Mount having a series of confrontations with the religious leaders. All of that ended with Jesus making a lament over the rejection that He had experienced. In that lament Jesus declared:

23:38, "Your house [the Temple] is left to you desolate."

-- In other words, God was withdrawing His presence from the Temple. Now, as a sign of that divine withdrawal, Jesus leaves the Temple. To emphasize the completeness of that departure, Matthew uses two different verbs: "left the temple and was going away."

It was probably Tuesday afternoon of the Passion Week that began on Palm Sunday with Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus and His disciples left the Temple, they probably headed back to Bethany, where they were staying at night with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha.

As Jesus and the Disciples left Jerusalem, they descended the Temple Mount and went through the Kidron Valley and then ascended the Mount of Olives, where they had a stunning view of the Temple and the city.

B. The Disciples' Admiring Remark (v. 1b)

-- The NT Temple was built originally by Ezra after the return from the Babylonian exile in 516 B.C. But for the last 50 years it had undergone an extensive rebuilding, renovation and expansion that was started by Herod the Great and then continued by his successors. That Temple work would continue for another 20 years until A.D. 66. The Jerusalem Temple was one of the most impressive buildings in the Roman Empire. The Temple's marble exterior was a dazzling sight under the intense Judean sun. The stones in the Temple and its surrounding walls were massive. Many of them measured 40' in length by 12' in height and 12' in width. They weighed hundreds of tons each.

C. Jesus' Startling Statement (v. 2)

-- Jesus replied to the Disciple's admiration of the Temple by declaring that there would be a time when not one stone would be left on top of another - the great Temple would be completely leveled. It was something that was almost impossible to imagine. How could such a thing happen?

But what Jesus predicted happened exactly as Jesus said it would. In A.D. 66 the Jews rebelled against Rome and took control of the city of Jerusalem. In retaliation, the Romans started a 4-year siege of the city that ended in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the city and the utter annihilation of the Temple. The Romans very literally did not leave one of the Temple's stones on top of another.

The West Wall, also called the Wailing Wall, is the only remaining part of the Temple structure, but it was not part of the Temple itself - it was part of the foundation for a wall that surrounded the Temple area. The Temple, the center of the Jewish faith, ceased to exist in A.D. 70.

II. The Disciples' Question (v. 3)

-- The idea that the Temple would be so thoroughly destroyed must have been a shocking prospect to the Disciples. It would have been almost impossible for them to imagine Jewish life without the Temple.

So, as Jesus sat down to rest on the Mount of Olives, the Disciples came to Him with a question, actually a 2-fold question.

v. 3

A. "When will these things be?"

-- The first part of the question has to do "when" these things, that is, the destruction of the Temple take place.

-- The Disciples most likely expected that the destruction of the Temple would lead immediately to the events in the next part of their question.

B. "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

-- It's easy to misunderstand what the Disciples are asking here.

1. What They Are Not Asking

-- The Disciples are not asking about Jesus' Second Coming - they didn't have any concept that there would be a Second Coming. They weren't thinking that Jesus would be crucified and buried and then be resurrected and ascend back to heaven and wait more than 2,000 before returning to earth.

2. What They Were Asking

a. "Your coming"

-- When the Disciples asked about Jesus' coming, they were thinking about what they thought would happen at that time, during Jesus' first coming. They are wanting to know about what will happen when Jesus assumes His full position and role as Messiah and reign on the throne of David.

b. "End of the Age"

-- When the Disciples ask about "the end of the age," they are thinking about when Jesus sets up His Kingdom, and they were expecting all of that to happen soon. Indeed, they believed that was why Jesus was in Jerusalem - to depose Herod, to kick out the Romans and to reign as Messiah from Jerusalem. Their question was what sign would happen to indicate that the time for all of that had arrived.

III. Jesus' Answer (vv. 4-12)

-- In His answer Jesus is going to start correcting the Disciples' ideas about the end of the age and the establishment of His Kingdom rule. Jesus is going to start that correction by describing what it will be like during the period that will last until Jesus comes to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

-- What Jesus indicates here is that the period between that time of His first coming and the time when He sets up His Kingdom reign will have 2 features.

A. It Will Be a Time of Delay.

-- Contrary to what the Disciples were expecting, Jesus Kingdom reign was not going to happen immediately.

v. 6d, "the end is not yet."

v. 8, "All these are but the beginning of birth pains."

B. It Will Be a Time of Tribulation.

-- The time of delay until Jesus sets up His Kingdom reign will be a time of tribulation - a time of opposition and trouble for those who follow Jesus.

1. Problems Throughout the World (vv. 4-8)

-- It will be a time for trouble throughout the world. It's important to notice that none of these world problems are indicators that the end is near.

a. False Messiahs (vv. 4-5)

-- There will be those who claim to be Christ - to be a re-appearance of Christ. From the first century on there has been a constant chain of such false deliverers. I've seen several in my own lifetime - men like Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Sun Myung Moon.

b. Wars (v. 6)

-- When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, there were people who claimed that he was the Antichrist and that the return of Christ was about to happen. Obviously, those people disregarded what Jesus says here: there will be wars, and when they happen don't be alarmed - the end is not yet.

c. Calamities (v. 7)

-- Neither are calamities like earthquakes and famines a sign of the end of the world.

d. "Beginning of Birth Pains" (v. 8)

-- In fact, Jesus says that these things that so many people interpret as signs that the end is near are only "the beginning of birth pains." They are things that recur throughout the time before Jesus returns, things that move us toward the end but don't indicate anything about when it will happen.

2. Problems in the Church (vv. 9-12)

-- Not only will there be problems throughout the world, there will also be problems experienced specifically by the Church.

a. Persecution (v. 9)

-- There are those who say that the Church will not go through tribulation, but that's not what Jesus says. Ask Pastor Brunson, who was just released this week from a Turkish prison if believers have to face tribulation. Ask the thousands of Christian families in Nigeria whose loved ones have been murdered by Boko Haram if believers face tribulation.

b. Apostasy & Betrayal (v. 10)

-- Tribulation will cause many who profess Christ to turn away from Him and to abandon the Church.

c. Deception (v. 11)

-- False prophets plagued the early church and continue to do so through our generation.

d. Lawlessness and Lovelessness (v. 12)

-- The early church was troubled by a lack of holiness and a loss of love for God and one another - and it still is yet today.

IV. Two Keys to Living in This Time Before Christ Returns (vv. 13-14)

-- Jesus indicates here that there are 2 keys to living in this Church age, this time between Jesus First and Second Comings.

A. Perseverance (v. 13)

-- The first key is perseverance.

v. 13

1. The Greek word "endure" literally means to remain under - the idea is to remain steadfast and faithful under opposition and persecution. Saints endure to the end - they persevere. Perseverance is not a requirement for salvation but an evidence of it.

2. Perseverance is both an assurance and an expectation.

a. The Bible assures us that we will persevere.

John 10:27-28 <sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ^{28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.}

b. The Bible also expects us to have a perseverance mindset - to be determined to endure.

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

B. Proclamation (v. 14)

-- The second key to living in this age before Christ's return is proclamation.

v. 14

-- Christ's delay in returning is largely to provide the Church the time to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations. The question that naturally arises is how do we know when we've reached every nation? Perhaps, the best answer to that was the one given by theologian and author George Ladd:

"I cannot precisely define who all the nations are, but I do not need to know. I know only one thing: Christ has not yet returned; therefore, the task is not yet done. When it is done, Christ will come. Our responsibility is not to insist on defining the terms; our responsibility is to complete the task. So long as Christ does not return, our work is undone. Let us get busy and complete our mission." (Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 137, as cited by David Platt in *Christ-Centered Exposition: Matthew*).