

End Time Religion

Matthew 24:9-14

ILLUSTRATION: *Imagine if you will that there is a School of Drama that has given itself entirely to the Study of the Playwright, William Shakespeare. Imagine they come across a lost play that has been hidden for hundreds of years. As they read through the script they realize that the play has 5 scenes, but scene 4 is missing. Given their immense study of the Shakespeare, given the fact that they have the first 3 scenes and scene 5, they can probably make a pretty good guess at how the missing 4th scene would read.*

Our lives are being lived out in the missing 4th scene.

Scripture records God's word and God's history of dealing with mankind from creation to the founding of the Early Church. Then we have this mysterious genre of scripture called, "apocalyptic Literature" which shows us how the final scene of human history will go. By becoming students of scripture looking backwards and forwards our lives in the hear and now become more logical, we can understand who we ought to live and the decisions we ought to make.

CONTEXT: So far in our study of Matthew 24 we have seen the bad news. Today we will see the last aspect of the bad news, and begin to see that in the midst of This immense dark cloud of tribulation there is certainly a silver lining.

- Last week we saw that the individual called, "**AntiChrist (political leader) and False Prophet (the religious leader)**" is to be revealed in the last days.
- Before that we saw the "**Wars and Rumors of Wars**" that would erupt in the last days.
- Today we see that as is often the case - the blame for the world's chaos will be placed on genuine followers of Christ....

We see first of all -

1. Agony

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."

In the parallel passage in Mark 13:9 (ESV) Mark writes...

⁹ "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them."

The **courts** probably represent Gentile authority, and the **synagogues** obviously represent Jewish authority, indicating that persecution will come from both groups.

In two millennia of Christian history, about 70 million faithful have given their lives for the faith, and of these, 45.5 million — fully 65% — were in the last century, according to “The New Persecuted” (“I Nuovi Perseguitati”).

We live in a post Christian American bubble. Our suffering is different. We will be talked about on social media, we will be ignored, uninvited, perhaps even legal prosecuted... but throughout most of the world the suffering is far more intense.

The rise of radical Islam that we referred to last week, coupled with the expansion of atheistic communism has made this a very dangerous time to be a Christian.

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 2:15–16 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

ILLUSTRATION: In Rome, after a victorious battle, the general would lead a parade through the streets with all of the prisoners of war in chains behind him. The priests would burn incense alongside the prisoners.... To some the incense smelled like victory and life... to the prisoners of war it was the very smell of death.

Agony leads to....

2. Apostasy

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.

Now this is NOT saved people falling away from the faith...but rather these are those John refers to in **1 John 2:18–19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

There is something cleansing about Persecution - it purifies the church. They false believer is driven away.

Genuine believers may disagree among themselves, we may fight like family at times, but when we see a brother or sister suffer because they love Jesus... we rally, we defend, we protect. We stand with one another.

MacArthur said it this way, *"Such people abandon Christ's visible church because they were never a part of His invisible church. They forsake God's earthly family because they were never born into His heavenly family".*

THIS IS what is meant when Jesus says **-Matthew 10:32–33 (ESV)**

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

This is not something that Jesus said during an altar call at Church, but in the midst of his teaching on persecution... when you could die for it... do you confess Christ?

Friend, if you can't verbally show allegiance to Jesus at School or Work... what are you going to do when antiChrist comes?

Well while some fall away during this time, another group is birthed into the Kingdom during a time of #3...

3. Awakening

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.

Now Jesus tells us that it will happen - the whole Earth will hear the Gospel.. but he doesn't tell us HOW it will happen for that we look to John in Revelation.

We read of two end time Prophets....that come on the scene...

A. The Two Prophets

Rev. 11:3 ³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

Now let's talk about these guys.

These are two prophets in the Old Testament sense of the word. They are literally speaking for God. And the text tells us that they will have the attention of the entire world. They will do their preaching during the last 3.5 years of the tribulation. Well who are they?

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

That is referring to Zechariah's prophecy in Zech. 4:1–14 (ESV)

Zechariah's vision had both a near and a far fulfillment. The historical fulfillment was the rebuilding of a temple by

- **Joshua** the high priest the **religious** leader, and

- **Zerubbabel**, the **political** leader.

So whoever these guys are, it seems they will be a Jewish Political Leader and a Jewish Religious leader.

⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.

Who in the Bible had the ability to call down fire from Heaven to destroy his enemies? Only one man - **Elijah**.

1 Kings 18 Elijah calls fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice on Mt. Carmel. **2 Kings 1:9–10 (ESV)** ⁹ Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “O man of God, the king says, ‘Come down.’ ” ¹⁰ But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

These guys have been granted the authority to do that.

⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

Who does that sound like? **Moses**, who could bring plagues and turn water to blood.

- **Old Testament and Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah to return in the future.**
 - Malachi 4:5 predicted the return of Elijah, and
 - Deut. 18:15,18 said God would raise up a prophet like Moses
- **Both Moses and Elijah left the earth in unusual ways.**
 - Elijah never died, but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11–12), and
 - God supernaturally buried Moses’ body in a secret location (Deut. 34:5–6) Jude 9 tells us that Michael and Satan contended over the body of Moses. So one assumes, Michael took it into Heaven.
- **Not only that but, both Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, the preview of the Second Coming (Matt. 17:3).**
- Finally, like Zerubbabel and Joshua - Moses comes as Political Leader, a Law Giver... Elijah comes as a Prophet, a Religious Leader.

So this could be literally be Moses and Elijah. Or it could be two men who have the anointing of Moses and Elijah. The text doesn’t tell us for sure.

7 And when they have finished their testimony,

Now what is their testimony? What are they preaching? They are showing clearly that this is God's Judgement on humanity. They are pointing to Jesus. they are calling men and women to repent and come to Christ!

7b. the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,

That is Anti-Christ.

8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

That is Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified. So they are prophesying in Jerusalem and Anti-Christ kills them in Jerusalem. Imagine that on National news around the world.

9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,

10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

So it's a celebration like Christmas! These two prophets were hated. You do understand that if you speak truth, if you preach Christ, you will be hated by some.

11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

The great end time awakening begins with these two witnesses...then it leads to...

B. The 144,000

REVELATION: 7:2

2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

Have you ever met a genuine Jewish convert. Once their eyes are opened and they see Jesus. They will never be the same again, that preach!!!!

Have you heard of a guy named Paul of Tarsus? Imagine 144,000 Pauls.

Can you imagine 144,000 Jewish Evangelists that make Billy Graham look like a Novice?

You see even here in the midst of the most hellish day's this world has ever seen - the Gospel is still the center piece.

The scriptures tell us a day is coming when a nation will be born in a day... this is speaking of the rebirth of Israel spiritually.

Biblically speaking there are only two people groups Jew and Gentile (everyone else).

- In the Old Testament God worked PRIMARILY in the Jewish people.
- In the Church age there is neither Jew nor Greek, Male nor female, but the dividing line was abolished in Christ.
- Here in the tribulation period, the Church is removed. So God is once again working in the nation of Ethnic Israel.

Paul writes in Romans 11:25–29 (ESV)

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” ²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

So we see the two witnesses preaching the Gospel.
We see the 144000 preaching the Gospel.

c. The Angel

Revelation 14:6–7 (ESV)

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

No one will miss it - no remote tribe, no undiscovered people group... everyone will hear at the end.

INVITATION:

NOW - If we look back into scripture and read the story of God's redemption unfolding through the OT... and it's climax as Jesus rises from the grave and commands us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to Every Creature....

THEN, we look into the future and we see Two Witness, 144,000, and this Angel preaching the Gospel to every creature...

What should we conclude that the true church will be doing in our generation here and now?

What should we be giving to, working for, growing in?