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Tillamook, Oregon

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The Gospel of Matthew

The Great Tribulation

March 29, 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:15-31

Scripture Reading: Daniel 9

We must always be watching and be ready for Christ's return. We will know Him when He comes. We are not to be fearful or alarmed by the calamities that characterize this present world, nor try to read any of them as signs of Christ's return. We will know when He comes.

This morning we come to a very difficult portion of the Olivet Discourse which contains subjects that all of you have surely heard of before:

- The Great Tribulation
- The Abomination of Desolation

And as we said when we arrived at the Olivet Discourse, we do not pretend to be able to sort out every detail with absolute certainty. In fact, sometimes I think that attempts to do so actually obscure the main point Jesus wants us to get hold of.

First, I wanted to make some comments about verse 14 before we move on because I suspect it has very often been used as one of those “certain signs” by which people attempt to pinpoint the time of Christ’s return:

Matthew 24:14 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.

You have most likely heard before in connection with Christian missions that the church must do all that it can to take the gospel to the entire world because then Christ will come again. We have to translate the Bible into every known

language, and then Christ will be able to come again. That sort of thing.

Well, translating the Bible and taking the gospel throughout the world is indeed a very good thing. It is how this Gospel of Matthew ends:

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

You see again that Jesus makes a kind of connection with making disciples of all nations, and His mention of the end of the age. But to make a direct cause/effect relationship between the gospel being universally preached and the return of Christ is to press Jesus’ words to far. In fact, all through the Olivet Discourse Jesus is careful to warn us about not being deceived, false christs, false predictions and so on.

So what is Jesus saying in verse 14? Simply this: that during the church age in which we live, from the time of Christ’s first coming into this world until His second coming, the gospel is going to be preached to all nations. All

nations will hear. And it should not surprise us then, knowing the kindness and mercy of the Lord, that this age is protracted.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

And really Jesus’ emphasis is, I conclude, this:

John 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

So be encouraged by this. *The gospel will be proclaimed to all the nations.* It is that leaven that Jesus told parables about, spreading and spreading.

Alright then, follow along as we come to this next section:

Matthew 24:15-31 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader

understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, (18) and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. (19) And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! (20) Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

(21) For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

(22) And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

(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.

(29) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Needless to say, these are very difficult verses and one reason for the difficulty is that it appears Jesus' words are woven together so that some apply more directly to the 70AD destruction of Jerusalem and others more clearly are describing events at His second coming. This is because the historical destruction of Jerusalem is a kind of type or picture of the judgment and destruction of this present world at the final judgment.

The first thing we need to deal with is this:

Matthew 24:15-31 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

The abomination of desolation. To people today that sounds like something out of *The Hobbit*, Smaug the dragon and so on. But the disciples knew right off what Jesus was referring to by this term, and of course Jesus left no room for them or us to miss it – *the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel*. [NOTE: Think about what this tells us regarding Jesus’ view of Scripture. He confirms Daniel to be a real prophet of the Lord, prophesying obviously events future even to Jesus’ own day! Many higher critics (ie, liberal unbelievers) have claimed Daniel didn’t write Daniel and that nothing in Daniel is anything but history written after the fact].

We heard this already in the Scripture reading, but here are the pertinent verses again:

Daniel 9:24-27 “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting

righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. (25) Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. (26) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

(27) And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

If you would like to go into more detail about this subject of the 70 weeks of Daniel, I would recommend that you go through the Revelation sermon series we did some years back. You can find it at sermonaudio.com/crc under the series menu. You all know that this subject of the 70 weeks of Daniel has had volumes written about it, much of which is incorrect. Let me just point out

that in verse 27, the One who comes and makes a covenant and puts an end to sacrifice and offering is NOT the antichrist, but is in fact Christ! This is what He did at His first coming. See it? He made a new covenant and ended the sacrifice and offerings of the Old Covenant. A great amount of “prophecy” experts claim that this is the antichrist and they get it all wrong.

But it is the last part of verse 27 that concerns us now:

“And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

I need to rely on good old William Hendriksen here to help us: [New Testament Commentary, the Gospel of Matthew]

As to the erroneous implication of that question, as if the fall of Jerusalem and its temple would be immediately followed by the end of the age, Jesus has set the disciples straight on that. He has shown that many disturbances will occur and that a lengthy period of gospel proclamation is going to intervene before the day of his coming arrives.

As to the first part of the question, considered all by itself, ‘When shall this –destruction of Jerusalem and its temple – be?’” Jesus answers it now, but in such a way that the answer suits more than one event in history.

To begin with, it was appropriate for the days immediately referred to by Daniel; see especially Daniel 11:31; 12:11. In accordance with that prophet’s prediction, Antiochus Epiphanes (174-164 BC)...erected a pagan altar over the altar of burnt-offering, thus polluting the house of God. This happened long ago. Nevertheless, Jesus says, ‘Now when you see the desolating sacrilege.’ Showing that he is telling the disciples that a divine oracle may apply to more than one historical situation: the sacrilege that results in the desolation of city and temple takes place more than once in history. Let the man who reads Daniel’s prophecy understand this!

Are you with me? Hendriksen continues explaining:

And it did indeed take place when the Roman armies, with the image of the emperor upon their standards, an image and an emperor worshipped by them

laid siege to the city of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20).¹

But just as the pagan altar and the swine offered upon it in the very temple of Jehovah in the 2nd century BC pointed forward to the idolatrous legions of Rome, so these in turn *foreshadowed the great and final violation by the antichrist of all that is sacred*. It is for this reason that in verses 29-31 Jesus is able to say, ‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light....And then the sign of the Son of man shall appear in the sky...and then they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.’

Let’s just make sure everyone see this. Look at Jesus’ words again:

Matthew 24:15-20 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, (18) and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take

his cloak. (19) And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! (20) Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

This description sounds like what? Like the 70AD destruction of Jerusalem. Those who are in Judea. Pray it not be on a Sabbath, and so on. But...

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (22) And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

And...

Matthew 24:27-30 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. (29) “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then will appear

¹ Luke 21:20 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.

in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

See the change? Suddenly we are into language that is descriptive of a much greater tribulation and event. The second coming of Christ.

Verses 15-20 then are words of warning and instruction to the Jews who would be there when the Romans came in 70AD. If I remember correctly, R.C. Sproul has a very good lecture on this subject and provides some historic detail as to what happened then. But here are a few more very good details provided by Hendriksen:

...we know that the Jews in general rushed *into* Jerusalem, resulting in a horrible blood bath. But what happened to the Christians? Did they heed Christ's exhortation to flee to the hills? According to many commentators, they did, and finally found refuge in Perea and Pella. Other historians disagree, but let us hope that many obeyed the Lord's kind and urgent warning.

Now, let me suggest that there is another picture here that we are not to miss and which Jesus would surely

have wanted the disciples and early Christians to understand too. Let me point you to it by asking you this question:

Can you think of another biblical event in which the Lord's people were told to flee a city immediately and not look back, not go back to get any belongings, etc.?

You know, right? Sodom:

Genesis 19:15-17 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." (16) But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. (17) And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away."

Why is this significant? What is the message? Here it is:

Matthew 11:20-24 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. (21) "Woe to you,

Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (22) But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. (23) And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. (24) But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

And again:

Isaiah 1:10-11 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! (11) “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

Jerusalem, the city of God, had become Sodom. And the Lord was going to rain down His judgment upon her and her inhabitants. Those who believed in Christ and belonged to Him must flee in that day and not look back. This is what Jesus was telling the disciples. That

Old Covenant nation and people was finished.

But what is there here for us? It is this:

There is coming one more Day when God’s judgment is going to be poured out upon this world. This world, typified by “Babylon,” is going to be destroyed. The world kingdom whose god was the devil and which hated and opposed Christ and His kingdom is going to be destroyed. Another final false Christ is coming, that son of destruction Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians. (more on him next time).

I am going to end by reading the 18th chapter of Revelation as you follow along, but as I do remember the main point we are to get from Jesus’ words here in Matthew:

Do not love the world. Do not look back. Don’t go back to get any of your possessions on that Day, don’t cling to them. Don’t love these things now. Because it is all opposed to Christ and it is all going up in flames. On that Day, look up and run to Him.

Revelation 18:1-24 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. (2) And he called out with a

mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. (3) For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

(4) Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “**Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;** (5) for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. (6) Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. (7) As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.’

(8) For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.” (9) And the kings of the earth,

who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. (10) They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, “Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

(11) And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, (12) cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, (13) cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. (14) “The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!”

(15) The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, (16) “Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! (17) For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.” And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors

and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off (18) and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?” (19) And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, “Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

(20) Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!” (21) Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; (22) and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, (23) and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. (24) And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”