

I want to begin this morning by reading to you the **shortest** complete story... ever written in the English language. The source where I first read it... says that it was written by Ernst Hemmingway. And here is what is so unique about **this** piece of literature... from all his other writings. This incredibly dramatic story wallops a powerful punch... and only uses **six words** to do so. The story first appeared in his local newspaper. In fact... it was nestled among the want ads of the paper. ... But let me warn you ahead of time... it's dramatic impact - is immense **grief**.

"For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

Just pause for a moment and sense the story here.

That simplest of narratives... provides every reader with the dramatic elements of: death... loss... brokenness... and eventual resolve for moving on.

Yet I wonder how many people had read it... and didn't even sense the story.

Some of you have experienced in your own lives a deep sense of grief through personal loss... with people all around... who do not... or cannot seem to read you. Even though the world seems to be caving-in on you... you suffer... in large part... alone.

It was a year and a half after I had started an adventure with my new wife... moving from Central California... to a completely new environment... with a completely different culture - Portland Oregon! Our simple belongings were packed in a tiny U-Haul... without having a final destination to unload them... and without a source of income. Patti drove our little Honda car... with our African Grey Parrot (Malachai) talking and squawking the whole

way. ... I was going to attend seminary. We were all-in! (Fully invested in following God's call.)

At that time... jobs were scarce in Portland. We had heard about another young couple... who had come just as we did... from Nebraska. They only stayed a few weeks... and then returned to the Corn Husker State... because they could not find a job.

God was very good to us. Patti found a great job – two days after we arrived. And we found a great place to live... close to the seminary... that we could afford. Patti's job provided enough income... so that I could concentrate on my studies... and just be a full-time grad student... by taking on challenging loads of course work. (Quick in... short stay... and then on to God's ministry!)

The first year we were there... everything seemed to go smooth. Patti's work was great... my classes were going great... we had ministry in a church... and lots of new friends from church and the seminary. So... for my second year of grad school... I took another aggressive load of courses.

It was during that second year... that we discovered... we were about to become first-time parents. The cost of having a child... and the fact that Patti would be needing to take time off from work... for our baby's birth... would be a stretch of our finances that we knew God had a provision for. We were barely scraping by... and we didn't have any medical insurance. Things would be very tight.

The pregnancy was very difficult. Patti had a condition called "hyperemesis gravidarum." ... She had constant and severe nausea and

headache pain... It was a threat to Patti and to our unborn child. She needed to be hospitalized for several days on more than one occasion. There was no way to avoid her need to take (unanticipated) time off from work... which deeply cut into our shallow income... and our medical and hospital bills mounted higher and higher.

With my wife in such pain and discomfort... financial disaster on our immediate horizon... worries for the health of Patti and our child in the womb... and my being at the most challenging portion everyone's seminary experience (the 2nd year)... it all made completing my seminary education... entirely out of the question. It was a foregone conclusion that we would be like the Nebraska couple... and several others that I had since learned about... (having to return home.)

My world crashed-in! Will my wife make it? Will our child make it? ... One night at about midnight... I sat up... screaming to God: "*Why...? Why did You bring us up here to Portland to experience all of this...? Couldn't we have stayed in California... near friends and family... if You were going to put us through all of this...? Why have things gone so smooth... and then (BAM!) - what we were pursuing all flies apart...? If you didn't call me... why did You lead me on... Why give me the impression through the first year that You did... only to be sent back home?*"

What do you do in times like these...? ...

This is what we do: After expressing your despair to God... cling to Him! Cling to His sovereignty. He is still sovereignly in control... even if the future looks IMPOSSIBLE... and you don't see how you're going to make it.

I am reminded of our past history... by our passage of study in Matthew this morning. ... You see the disciples of Jesus were every bit as devastated (if not more) than I was. (They were sure of God's call... and then BAM! It all fell apart. ... And what does Jesus do...? He shows them that He is still in complete control of the future.

The private discussions and public disputes were over. The King (Jesus) had passed final judgment on the nation of Israel... through it's leaders. All that remained was the cross. ... But first... in an astonishing prophetic discourse... the King gave His disciples a brief sketch of the general tenor of the new church age... that was about to be inserted into time... and then He went on to speak of the end-time events (as they relate to Israel)... and some signs that herald His coming again.

At the end of Matthew chapter 23... the verses we studied last week... Jesus made it very clear to His disciples that He would be ***leaving***. He also made it clear to them that the magnificent Temple... the very building they were standing in at the time... would be "left desolate." Jesus was leaving for a while... and the very symbol of their national identity... everything that the typical Jewish person based their security and significance upon... would be demolished.

Now Folks... this is earth shattering! I have no doubt that the disciples felt their whole world crumble before them. These men had left EVERYTHING to follow Christ... their businesses... their homes... their families... to follow Jesus Who had convinced them that He was bringing about the long-awaited Kingdom of God... that the prophets foretold. ... But this is what they heard...

Matthew 23:37-39

Now in Matthew chapter 23... we have seen how Jesus made it extra clear – what He began announcing in chapter 12 of Matthew’s Gospel. Israel’s leaders rejected the Messiah and His Kingdom... therefore the kingdom... which the disciples left everything to pursue - will be postponed... until Israel’s obstinate leaders repent.

As we open Matthew 24 this morning... the disciples appear to understand that Jesus is leaving for a while and the Kingdom will be delayed. But... for sure... there was a lot that they did not understand. In a few days Jesus will be crucified... and the disciples won’t see this as what He told them about here (His leaving them for a while.) When Jesus died... the disciples scattered in fear... and some went home... to try and resume the lives they had BEFORE Jesus called them. They didn’t know – at all – what His leaving them meant.

As we open chapter 24... my guess is that their understanding of Jesus’ leaving them for a while... was that He was merely going off somewhere private ... until the current hostilities between Him and the national leaders cooled down a bit. ... Then... maybe He would return and set up the Kingdom. *“OK... Jesus... We know that You must leave for a while... that is confusing enough... but is it really necessary that our magnificent Temple building has to be destroyed? When is **that** going to happen... and when can we tell that the time is better for you to end this age and start the new Kingdom age at Your return...?”*

Matthew 24:1-3

Jesus and His small band of devoted followers continued to walk out of the temple area and leave the city of Jerusalem behind. They crossed the Kidron Valley to the east and ascended the Mount of Olives. This ridge is slightly higher than the east wall of Jerusalem. Sitting there... they could see the holy city and the temple itself. Pondering the ramifications of Jesus' prophecy during the short walk to this location... and looking back at the glory of the temple... the men were uneasy and their hearts deeply troubled.

This city was the center of their religious devotion. What would happen to God's chosen people when this devastating event occurred? ... Were they to suffer a second defeat like the HORRIBLE one they suffered when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's temple? ... How much were the Hebrew children expected to bear?

(You see)... Solomon's temple... which was one of the most spectacular wonders of the ancient world... was constructed about **967 B.C.** when Solomon was king of Israel... following the reign of his father... David. ... That Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar... king of Babylon... destroyed the city of Jerusalem. ... It was a terrible time in their nation's history... when Nebuchadnezzar carried off the gold ornaments... and enslaved the people of God.

This temple (the one they were looking at) ... was constructed when Cyrus of Persia allowed the Hebrew people to return to their homeland. ... Because of a lack of funds... and lack of commitment on the part of God's people... this Temple was a poor representation of the glorious temple of Solomon. ... But even so... it was spectacular and a source of great pride!

In recent years... the temple complex was greatly improved architecturally by Herod the Great. ... While this temple lacked the richness of Solomon's temple... it became the most prominent structure in all of Jerusalem... because of its architectural beauty.

According to Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian... the stones of this structure were polished and gleaming in their whiteness.. ... The porches... the courtyards... and the colonnades were glorious reminders of the WORLD STATUS that Israel once possessed... and an inspiration to believe that God would one day restore their world-wide prominence... once God's Kingdom came. ... It was a sight that would stimulate awe and wonder.

He looked at the grandeur of the temple and then exclaimed to his disciples that these great buildings... even the stones, would be leveled. Everything that they saw would be demolished.

This prophecy of Jesus was completely fulfilled in 70A.D. when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem... and the Temple was set on fire.

Because there was so much gold in the Temple... a great amount was melted and liquid gold seeped through the crevices of the stones in the Temple. When the ruins cooled down... the Romans systematically removed everything... stone by stone... in order to reclaim all of the gold that had solidified inside the crevices.

Some of the Temple Mount can be seen today... if you visit Jerusalem. But the Temple building itself... was completely destroyed... stone by stone.

Now... please look at verse 3 again with me...

Matthew 24:3

In the midst of the disciples' consternation... they finally asked Jesus three questions: (1) when would Jerusalem and the temple be destroyed; (2) what would be the sign of His coming; and (3) when would the world come to an end.

The first and third questions would be synonymous in the Jewish mind. Within their frame of reference... these men would have great difficulty understanding that the destruction of the temple and the "end of the world" would not be parts of the same event. To them... the destruction of the temple meant the end of the Jewish world (the end of its social... political... and religious structure... which had guided God's chosen people throughout centuries of upheaval.) ... In the disciples' minds... the destruction of the temple would be such a cataclysmic event... that it could not the least bit occur... without the curtain on the world's story closing at the same time.

Personally... I don't believe the disciples were asking Jesus three different questions. I think that in their minds... they saw all three as happening together.

You and I are looking back in hindsight... and we have a different perspective. From our vantage point of history... we know that the prophecy about Jerusalem and the Temple... happened less than 40 years after Jesus told them about it... in 70 A.D. ... The temple's destruction and the Lord's return have been separated now for thousands of years.

But this closer event (the destruction of the Temple) is strongly related to the other. It was in the disciple's immediate future... but it symbolized the **still to come** event (that is - the end of the age... when Jesus returns and establishes a new age.)

In rabbinic theology of Jesus' day... the rabbis spoke of two ages: **THIS** age (the one in which we now live)... and **THE AGE TO COME** (the Messianic Kingdom age.) So the disciples had some understanding when they asked about the end of the age. To them... it meant Jesus bringing the new kingdom... (the new age... that replaces the current one.)

The answer that Jesus gives to His disciples is known today... as the Olivet Discourse... because Jesus spoke it as they sat there on the Mt. of Olives... looking back at the Temple.

The basic purpose of the Olivet Discourse is to answer the question: when and how the Messianic Kingdom will come into being. Israel had rejected their Kingdom offer by God's sent Messiah. It will now come in fullness at a later time... after Israel's leaders repent. But when will that happen... and how will that happen...? The Olivet Discourse answers this question. (In short)... the events of the Tribulation will bring Israel to repentance.

While the whole earth will be judged and go through the Tribulation... the Lord dealt with end-time events... in the Olivet Discourse... as they will affect the Jewish people. Since the great tribulation will be pre-eminently "*the time of Jacob's trouble*" (as Jeremiah refers to it in Jeremiah 30:7)... and since it will be the most dreadful period in all of Jewish history... and since it will drive the surviving remnant of the Jewish people to Christ... and

because His disciples had immediate Jewish concerns... the Lord emphasized the tribulation primarily in this prophetic sermon.

So... let's keep in mind that the "atmosphere" of this discourse is Jewish. Jesus will talk about Judea (in verse 16)... the Sabbath (in verse 20)... and the prophecies of Daniel - concerning the Jewish people (in verse 15). ...

Jesus will not discuss the rapture... because it does not concern how God will bring the Jewish leaders to repent. The concern of the disciples was when and how their national hope would be restored. ... The will be gone by the time the event that brings Israel's repentance happens.

We will see a very brief description this morning of our current church age (in which we live today)... It will be described as "the beginning of birth pangs"... but most of Jesus' Discourse is about the Tribulation... as the means by which Israel will finally repent.

Matthew 24:4-6

Jesus answered His disciples FIRST negatively... telling them of things that DO NOT mean that the end has begun. This is a description for most of the church age – but NOT where we are currently in it. (I will show you why in a moment.)

At first... the Church Age (following Christ's ascension back to Heaven)... will see the rise of many false Messiahs. And this has been true. After Christ... there have been many who claimed they were the Messiah. From the time of Jesus... until about the middle of the 1850's... a great number of Jewish men... from Simon Bar Cochba... to Sabbetal Tzvi... and Jacob Frank... have come onto the scene and made claim to the Messianic title.

In many ways... Carl Marx... the initiator of socialism... (who was Jewish) has been described as the savior of the world. So has Sigmund Freud.

Jesus said... there will be many false Messiahs. Don't follow them... and don't think that they indicate the end of the world.

Another thing that will NOT mark the end of the world is the existence of LOCAL wars. Wars will break out in local geographical areas... between one group trying to wipe out another group in various distinct regions. But these will not be signs. Stay calm... don't be alarmed.

You know... as a person who watches a lot of television news... I need to take this into consideration. Russia... China... Iran and North Korea may threaten a nuclear holocaust. Rumors abound that we are all going to die and our weapons of mass destruction will wipe all life off the face of the earth (except... maybe... for cockroaches.) – This is exactly what Jesus tells us to “chill-out” and not be alarmed over. ... God is sovereign. He is working His plan. It is not over – until He says it is over!

After telling us certain characteristics that will in no way indicate the end of the world... Jesus next proceeded to give signs... that the end actually has begun. It is right here in verse 7...

Matthew 24:7-8

“Nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom”... This is not the same as “wars and rumors of wars.” ... Remember... “Wars and rumors of wars” are normal throughout the entire church age... (from the time of Christ's ascension)... These are local wars in single geographic areas. ... But something new has been introduced – and when it is coupled with famines and earthquakes in various places... THEN we have

the sign of the beginning of birth pangs. In other words... the end of the age (the new Messianic age that the disciples were asking about)... is not long in coming.

If we are to understand what Jesus meant by "*Nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom*"... it would help to explore how His disciples probably understood that idiom. Was it a phrase used in Jesus' day? ... ANSWER: Yes, it was. This expression was a Hebrew idiom of rabbinical teaching. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum cites two different rabbinical writings from Jesus' day... (the Bereshit Rabbah... and the Zohar Chadash) where this idiom is used. It is a phrase that means – "world-wide conflict."

The beginning of birth pangs will be "a world-wide conflict" rather than a local war. This world-wide conflict... remember... is coupled with famines and earthquakes in various places.

The first such time that a world-wide conflict occurred was 1914-1918 with WW1. (By the way... most historians agree that WW2 was really a continuation of WW1.) And both of these wars had a direct effect of re-establishing Israel as a nation... in their own land.

Right after WW1... from 1918-1919... a pestilence killed 23 million people. In 1920... the Great Chinese Famine occurred... followed by the Great Russian Famine in 1921.

The increase of earthquakes since WW1 is even more staggering. We don't have time to go over all the details... but the number of earthquakes causing 10,000 or more deaths have greatly increased... and so have the minor earthquakes... which have killed much fewer.

There is little doubt in my mind that Jesus was speaking about our two world wars – as the beginning of the birth pangs. The end of the age is near! So here is Jesus' answer to their asking Him for a sign of the end of the age. But He offers yet another sign – the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:9-14

Jesus gives five descriptions here of the Tribulation. We know that this is the first 3 ½ years of it... by comparing this with other prophecy. Next week... when we get to verse 15... Jesus will describe the second 3 ½ year period of the Tribulation.

The first 3 ½ years will include **#1**. Tremendous persecution. Anti-Semitism will flourish on a world-wide scale. The holocaust of Nazi Germany was absolutely horrific. But this segment of WW2 was only part of - the birth pangs. This will be another holocaust that eclipses that one. It will be ruthless in character... deliberate in purpose... and heartless in operation.

It will be so horrible that many will turn from away their Jewish faith and heritage. They will not be able to tolerate the opposition... and they will be turning against one another in a deplorable display of betrayal.

#2. The first half of the Tribulation will be characterized by the rise of many false prophets.

#3. There will be a tremendous rise of sin and iniquity. Instead of the rule of law (in a civil society)... the world will be characterized by anarchy. Most will do what they please and will deliberately disobey.

#4. The Jews who survive until the end of the full 7 year Tribulation... will be saved. Why? Because the Jewish leaders will repent... at the end. The

nation will be led to accept Jesus' Messiahship... Jesus will return... and His Kingdom will be initiated.

(But now back to the first 3 ½ year characteristics...)

#5. By the end of the first 3 ½ years... the Kingdom will be made available world-wide. A great multitude of Gentiles will come to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus... the Messiah. Revelation 7 says that there will be 144,000 Billy Grahams around the world... and revival will be HUGE!

What have we seen in the first fourteen verses of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew? ... We have seen in verse 3 that the disciples... with their questions... desired to be in on some fairly confidential information. (They wanted to know when the world would come to an end.)

We have seen in verses 4-14 that Jesus... with His answers... gives them what they need. ... He gives them a glimpse of God's plan... so they will not be disheartened by the CRUSHING news of the Temple's destruction and Jesus' going away – before He brings His Messianic Kingdom. God is VERY MUCH still in charge!

Then... as we have applied what Jesus said to them... we have found that Jesus' words still have much to say to us about how to live the Christian life in our own troublesome days (when we are dismayed)... before His return. How are we to respond to our times of despair... (when our world seems to fall apart...?) God is still in charge! He is working His plan. His Kingdom is coming – in all of its glory and fullness!

Won't you cling to Him today...?