

AW Tozer wrote...

The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather, he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, more important than angels. ... He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring.

Do you have the humility that Christ would like in your life...?

I ask this... just before we continue our study of Jesus' Olivet Discourse... because many people... who I have known through the years... have become very proud... about (of all things)... their privileged understanding of end-times prophecy. (There is just something about this topic... that arouses a smug pride... in those who study it.)

One believer takes a certain position that others don't hold... and they develop a sense of superiority over others who don't see it the same way. And End-time prophecy has so many understandings. Passages like the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 are not cut and dry.

I have to admit to you that (this week) as I prepared for this message... there were many times that I read something and wanted to scream, "*Did you tear (such-and-such) verse out of your Bible? Did you erase it... or blot it out with a black marker...? Because only if it is not in Scripture can your understanding be correct...!*" So often... I would say in my mind... "*Have you not read...*" ... But I also know that these men... most of whom (I have no doubt) are smarter than I am... would say the same about my conclusions.

So... because there are many understandings... how are we to handle such passages... like the one we are currently in... as we study the Book of Matthew...?

FIRST... lets pray for humility!

SECOND... let's do our best to understand it... but with open-handedness... knowing that there are many wonderful believers... who come up with a different understanding... as they too humbly seek God's truth.

But here is my intent in studying it with you. I pray that each of us would make this our goal... today:

To trust more fully in Christ's authority... to persevere in His power... and to long for His return.

You see I am less interested in whether or not you agree with me... or would rather cling to a previous understanding that differs from mine... (as long as you see Biblical warrant for those beliefs.) If the result of our time in His Word this morning causes us all to *trust more fully in Christ's authority... to persevere in His power... and to long for His return...* then our time today will be time well-spent.

- **Pray** -

Last week... as we opened Matthew 24... and the Olivet Discourse... we saw that Jesus is answering His disciple's concerns... which were very Jewish... in nature. (As I pointed out last week: The atmosphere of the Olivet Discourse is PRIMARILY Jewish.) These are future events as they relate to the Jewish people. You see... the disciples wanted some relief about the highly distressing news Jesus had given them... that Israel's

national hope... (the stabilizing factor of their people's politics... social life... business life... and religious life...) would be utterly destroyed. When will this happen...? And because such devastation is equated with the end of the world to a Jew... they asked Jesus... (not only) when the Temple would be destroyed... but also when the end of the world would be. There was also a third thing they asked about – “*When will You return, Jesus?*” ... I believe that they associated all three events as different parts of the same thing.

Matthew 24:1-3

In the portion of Jesus' answer that we covered last week... we saw that He started by telling them what are NOT signs to look for... then He gave them some signs that do mark the beginning. He called them “birth pangs.” I also gave you my understanding of it... (and many others... not everyone's... but several)... and why we believe the birth pangs of the beginning... started happening in the last 100 years.

Then Jesus told them about the 7 year period known as the Tribulation. Why...? Because the Tribulation... is the sign that Jesus is about to return to establish His kingdom on earth. The return of Jesus happens in two stages. First is the rapture... when He return in the clouds for those who have already placed their faith in Him. (And this can happen at any moment. No man knows the time or the hour when the first stage of Christ's return will begin. But I believe that will be the rapture... and soon thereafter the events that Jesus tells His disciples about – the Tribulation – will begin. Jesus doesn't discuss the rapture in the Olivet Discourse... because His disciples were concerned about their own Jewish nation. So Jesus deals primarily with what **they** were concerned about. ... The tribulation will be

used by God to bring the Jewish nation to repent for rejecting Christ's Messiahship. It will be a sign that the delayed Messianic Kingdom is about to happen.)

We studied Christ's description of the first half (3 ½ years) of the Tribulation... in Matthew 24:9-14.

Matthew 24:9-14

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 horrible enough... but this will be another holocaust that eclipses that one. It will be ruthless in character... deliberate in purpose... and heartless in operation.

#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 (remember... Jesus is answering His disciples questions about the Jewish nation)... so the Jews who survive until the end of the 7 year Tribulation...will be saved. Why? Because the Jewish leaders will repent... and lead the nation to repent... at the end. That is one of the main reasons for the tribulation. The nation will be led to accept Jesus' Messiahship... Jesus will return... and then His Kingdom will be initiated.

#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!

Beginning with verse 15... here in Matthew 24... Jesus describes the second half of the Tribulation (the final 3 ½ years.) This is what finally makes the disciple's Jewish brethren ready to repent. Persecution becomes VERY intense.

Matthew 24:15-30

Jesus gives six characteristics of the second half of the Tribulation.

FIRST – the second half begins (the middle of the Tribulation starts)... when the event known as the “Abomination of Desolation” occurs. This involves two stages.

Stage One will be when the Antichrist will take over the Jewish Temple... sit down in the Holy of Holies... and declare himself to be God.

II Thessalonians 2:3-10

The Antichrist cannot be revealed until the *restrainer* is taken out of the midst. That restrainer is the Holy Spirit – Who indwells every believer. I believe that this is talking about the church. Once the church is out of the midst (the world...because of the rapture)... then Satan can produce his masterpiece... the Antichrist.

He will make the agreement for seven years... but after three-and-one-half years... he will break that agreement. He will then move into the Jewish temple himself and proclaim that he is God.

Stage Two will be when the character (referred to in Scripture as “the False Prophet”)... has a statue of the Antichrist made... and stands it up in the Holy of Holies.

Revelation 13:11-15

The False Prophet will cause the whole earth to worship the statue. Satan has always wanted the world’s worship... and in the middle of the Tribulation... he will begin to receive it.

An interesting parenthesis occurs at the end of Matthew 24:15—“*let the reader understand.*” This statement indicates that what Jesus was teaching would have greater significance for people reading Matthew’s Gospel in the latter days. By reading the Prophet Daniel... Revelation 13... and these words of Jesus... future readers will understand the events and know what to do: **Get out of Judea!** The two stages of the Abomination of Desolation is their signal.

Jesus then gave some very strong advice to the future generation who would see this occur. It will be necessary to flee **immediately**. This will not be some orderly retreat where people would pack up their belongings before moving casually to some safer location. The judgment of God would be swift — so run! ... Jesus advised that there would be no time to collect any possessions.

Jesus also recognized that flight from the oncoming catastrophe would be impossible for some. He expressed His concern and compassion for those women who may be pregnant or nursing infants. Jesus still encouraged them to flee Judea... but he did not minimize the hardship that would befall

new and expectant mothers. ... And if their only opportunity to escape is during the winter... or on a Sabbath... the hardship will be greater.

But there will be many who read this and follow Jesus' instruction here. During the 1st half of the Tribulation many Jews are going to respond to the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists.

SECOND – a characteristic of the second half of the Tribulation... that Jesus describes in giving His disciples a sign of His return... is this flight into the wilderness. This event is also described in Revelation 12. (We looked briefly at it three weeks ago.)

Revelation 12:13-17

THIRD – another characteristic of the second half of the Tribulation is an even greater Anti-semitism persecution... than the world has ever... or will ever know.

Matthew 24:21

Most of the books I read this week in preparation for this message... declared that everything in the Olivet Discourse **has already occurred**. They point to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70ad... as the fulfillment to Matthew 24. But I believe that just like MANY of the Old Testament prophecies... parts are fulfilled in the immediate generation when the prophecy was first spoken... and other parts were fulfilled centuries later. That is the way the prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus works in Isaiah 7:14. I believe Jesus was talking about the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70AD – and to an even more horrific future event – the 7 year Tribulation.

Because of the verse we just read (Matthew 24:21)... I cannot believe that the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 has been completely fulfilled in 70AD. When Rome destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple... it certainly was horrible! But that horrible event does not fit Jesus' words here – (Look at verse 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.***

The German Holocaust of WWII prevents the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70AD from being considered as the **worst** tribulation from the beginning of the world until now... as well as any time in the future. Millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust as there were in 70AD. Also... Revelation describes the Tribulation as so horrible... that what happened in 70AD (we can safely say)... cannot possibly be worse. So Verse 21 convinces me... that Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse were **not** fulfilled in 70AD.

A **FOURTH** characteristic of the 2nd half of the Tribulation... is that Israel will survive this terrible period. They will be greatly reduced in numbers... however.

Matthew 24:22

The 144,000 Jewish evangelists will bring many Jews who are part of the “elect” to salvation in Christ. And they will be part of the flight into the wilderness. But not everyone who flees to this place of safety will be a believer yet.

Matthew 24:23-26

FIFTH – there will be many attempts to draw those who have fled to this place of safety (under God's protection) away. False prophets and false

messiahs will come on the scene to draw (even those who are believers) out.

So **SIXTH** – the latter half of the tribulation will be characterized by many false signs and wonders.

Matthew 24:27-28

Don't be drawn out from God's protection. You will know when Christ returns. The **whole world** will know... wherever they happen to be at the time. His return will not be known to only those who must go out somewhere to see Him.

Just as people from far away can see vultures circling high in the air... and know there is a dead body... Christ's return in judgment will be visible and predictable. It will be impossible for people not to see and recognize the return of Christ.

Matthew 24:29-30

Please look at the very first word in verse 29. ... It's the word...

"Immediately." I looked at it in the Greek. It is the word **εὐθεὺς** – and it means just that... "immediately"! (Not 2,000 years later!) Jesus went out of His way to say... "Immediately after the tribulation of those days... signs will appear in the heavens and Jesus will return."

Well... what's the big deal...? Why am I making such a big deal of this...?

I do so... because most of the commentaries that I read this week were all say that Matthew 24 is all about the tribulation that occurred when Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed. (Matthew 24... the Olivet Discourse... was fulfilled during the first century... by their understanding.)

But do you know what they must also understand in order to hold to this belief...? That Jesus returned in the 1st Century and established His Kingdom... and fulfilled all of the promises of the Old Testament (which – to me – are still waiting to be fulfilled.)

Jesus said “*immediately after the tribulation* of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give forth its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken...” But there is no record of those events happening at all during the first century. And neither is there any evidence that Jesus returned. I’m still waiting for that to occur.

I believe that the tribulation spoken of by Jesus and recorded by Matthew in chapter 24 of his gospel is the future tribulation that much of Revelation is about. That tribulation... I also believe is what will be used by God to bring about the repentance of the Jews as a whole. Jesus will return at that hour when Israel is about to be defeated by the Gentile armies (according to Zech. 12). ... He will rescue His people... and they will see Him and recognize that He is their Messiah. ... There will be a national repentance, national cleansing, and national restoration under the gracious leadership of their Messiah.

Zechariah 12:9-14

Now... let me remind you how this conversation between Jesus and His disciples began...

Matthew 23:27

Once Israel and it's leaders are ready to mourn over the loss of their rejecting Jesus... and to mourn like a parent begging God for another chance – over a lost child... and once they are ready to affirm His Messiahship... with the Messianic greeting (like the crowds did when He entered Jerusalem before His death)... THEN He will return. All of the things Jesus has described here in Matthew 24 are going to affect Israel's HUGE repentance... and bring about His return.

Isn't this a FANTASTIC display of God's rich mercy and almost unfathomable forgiveness...? ... And isn't the way He is treating His People (Israel)...?

Actually... it is the history of mankind. ... God has given humanity His best — His law... His guidance... His warnings... and His promises. ... He even gave His only Son as the sacrifice needed to pay for the penalty of sin.

Still... we run away from Him... avoiding everything that He has done for us. ... Ultimately... God's judgment falls on those who refuse to listen and obey Him... just as it did in Jerusalem so many years ago. ... One day in the future... at a time known only to the Father... everyone will again have to face the consequences of His or her decisions and actions. ...On that day... some will rejoice to see their Savior... and the rest will view with terror the One they have spurned.

... ..

This text leaves no doubt that the day of Christ's return will be evident to all. ... His coming will be no secret: the angels of heaven will let out a

trumpet blast... and every eye will behold the Son of Man in the sky. (We will see that next week in verses 29-31).

How different this will be from His first coming! The first time He came to a remote... obscure town just outside Jerusalem... where He went largely unnoticed... except for a few shepherds and some farm animals. He came the first time **lying in a manger**. ... However, He will come the second time **riding on the clouds**. This is what Daniel prophesied centuries before:

*And I saw One like a son of man
coming with the clouds of heaven.
He approached the Ancient of Days
and was escorted before Him.*

*He was given authority to rule,
and glory, and a kingdom;
so that those of every people,
nation, and language
should serve Him.*

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that will not pass away,
and His kingdom is one
that will not be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)*

Matthew's reference to "the clouds of heaven" in verse 30 is not just an allusion to Daniel 7. Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals His glory in the image of a cloud. It was a pillar of cloud that led God's people in the exodus from Egypt (Exod 13:21). Then, at the end of the book of Exodus, God's glory was revealed in a cloud that covered the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38). Psalm 104:3 says that God makes the clouds "His chariot," and Isaiah 19:1 depicts the Lord riding on a "swift cloud." The picture we get in

Matthew 24 is of the glory of God revealed in the glorious Son of God, who will come on the clouds in power to execute judgment.

In verse 30 Jesus says that the tribes of the earth will "mourn" when they see Him coming. That day will be a day of judgment, and all who are not ready for that day — that is... those who have refused to turn from their sin and to trust in Christ as Savior and King — will come face to face with the Holy One whom they have rejected.

This text should cause us to ask ourselves, "Am I ready?" ... Am I prepared?" Because it will happen just as He said. If not, then repent and believe in Christ today.

If you are a genuine follower of Christ... are there things in your life that you still need to repent of... sins that you're holding on to and toying with? What are you doing today that would cause you to be ashamed before Jesus if He were to come this moment?

In light of all these truths... I invite you:

To trust more fully in Christ's authority... to persevere in His power... and to long for His return.