



The End Is Not Yet – Endure and Be Saved

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 24:1-14

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Beloved, today we begin looking at Jesus' 2nd longest sermon that is recorded for us in the Gospel of Matthew, commonly called the Mt. Olivet Discourse. It is an amazing sermon – a sermon that gives an overview of the end of the age, insight into the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, that speaks of the triumphal return of Christ, the judgment that is to come upon every soul, and by way of parables, emphasizes the need to be ready to see Jesus face-to-face. It really is an incredible sermon and as we begin studying it this morning, I want to set down some foundational principles as we start preaching through it.

Foundational Principles

1) My approach to this text is going to be pastoral -- not theoretical, speculative or categorical. My intent is not to establish one eschatological system over another or to categorize differing thoughts regarding the endtimes. This is not a prophecy class. We are not going to debate the relative merits of pre-millennial or amillennial thought, or try to organize Jesus' words according to a human system of thought. Instead we will approach this as Jesus does --with pastoral intent. We do not see Jesus speaking to the disciples using endtime flip charts and trying to figure out the identity of the antichrist using numerology. No, Jesus' intent is prepare his disciples spiritually for the events that are coming, to tell them what is on the horizon and how to stand firm in the coming storm and be ready to meet Him when He returns. His approach is pastoral and so is mine.

2) Second, our intent is to going to be to understand the instruction of Jesus, first from the perspective of the disciples and then to apply the text to us right now. In other words, we need to remember that the teaching that Jesus does here is in response to a question from His disciples and so the first application is going to be to them, in the time and the situation in which they found themselves.

3) Third, though the teaching and prophecy of Christ will have first application to the disciples, there is no doubt that this prophecy has both immediate and future aspects to it. Not only does Jesus describe God's coming judgment upon Jerusalem for its rejection of Christ, but He also describes the days that will usher in the return of Christ in divine glory and majesty. In that sense, we see that the destruction of Jerusalem is intended by God to serve as a foreshadowing, a type, a template for the cataclysmic day of Christ's return – a picture of the Day of the Lord, **“when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.”** (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, ESV) As we look at this text, we can see that Jesus sees judgment coming in AD 70 upon Jerusalem, closing the era of Judaism, and especially the corrupted version of the Pharisees, with immense finality. But He also sees His own return at the end of the age as bringing to a close the universal history of mankind.

4) Fourth, we must remember that the Scriptures are in a very real sense, His story. He made this world. He came to dwell in this world and to redeem a people for His glory and for His worship. And He will return at the end of this planet's history to consummate His eternal kingdom. History is moving relentlessly toward that grand day. Jesus will reign in glory and His reign will settle the future destiny of all people. This text is meant to fix our eyes on the King, something no vision of the future, in any human religion or philosophy, can match.

5) Last, we need to park our presuppositions and preconceived notions at the door and take a fresh listen to Jesus' words in this sermon. Most of us have been exposed to all kinds of teaching regarding the endtimes, much of it speculative and chasing after tangents and many times we have had our understanding and our concept of what is truly important, shaped by popular books or movies, but we need to hear what Jesus has to say and to have our minds shaped according to His teaching and according to what He emphasizes, what is clearly understandable and what is of most importance. So let's get into this text today and let's begin by asking where this question comes from.

Where Does This Question Come From? (23:38 – 24:3) Look back with me at the end of chapter 23. There, Jesus has just finished his blistering indictment of the scribes and the Pharisees, exposing them as religious frauds and false teachers, while at the same time warning them to repent because of the judgment that was coming upon them. Then He says to them: **“See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”** (Matthew 23:38–39, ESV) That statement by Jesus, spoken with such finality and authority, would have hit the disciples with the force of sledgehammer. Your house, the temple, is left to you desolate – devoid of God’s presence, devoid of eternal significance, devoid of eternal worth. Jesus leaving the temple symbolizes the end of its relevance to the purposes of God. The fact that Jesus goes from there to the Mount of Olives is an echo of the departure of the glory of the Lord from Solomon’s Temple in Ezekiel 11:23.

Jesus was pronouncing judgment on the temple, and particularly on the false and corrupted Judaism of the day, the Judaism that had become so devoid of truth, so far from God’s original intention, that it did not terminate on Christ, to the coming of the Messiah, but rather on the scribes and Pharisees as the authorities. The reality that once existed in Israel and in Judaism – worship divinely revealed, divine prescribed, that pointed to Christ, validated and approved by God in heaven, was now obsolete and worthless because it did not end in Christ. From this point on, Judaism was just another religion, because the Christ whom it pointed to had come and they had not received her king. Their false view of Judaism was a failure and those who were true Jews would recognize Christ as their king. The days of the temple were over because One greater than the temple was here. There was no glory left to be associated with the temple because Christ had completely rejected it and its corrupted worship.

With their minds swimming, the disciples followed Jesus as He left the temple behind. We pick it up in verse 1: **“Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.”** (Matthew 24:1, ESV)

The disciples, still trying to make sense of what Jesus was saying, pointed out the buildings of the temple to Him. They are not acting as tour guides; they are looking at the magnificent marble and limestone structures, some of the stones overlaid with gold, truly, from an aesthetic and architectural perspective, a sight to behold and they are wanting Jesus to explain Himself, to explain His rejection of it and of this temple that had been so central to Israel’s worship – this temple which had become, not the house of God, but the house of the

ungodly and the center of false and superstitious worship. Sensing their confusion, He tells them in no uncertain terms, verse 2: **“But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.””** (Matthew 24:2, ESV) To their surprise and amazement, He tells them that the whole thing was about to be destroyed. They had trouble conceiving of this magnificent structure – its white marble stones, colonnades, columns and golden roof – being torn to the ground, cast down and destroyed. How can this be?

The disciples are troubled and so we read in verse 3: **“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?””** (Matthew 24:3, ESV) Now, beloved, here is the key to understanding this sermon. The key to understanding this sermon is understanding what question the disciples are asking and what question Jesus is answering in His sermon as He goes along.

You have to understand that when the disciples ask this question, they are asking them from their perspective, from their understanding. To their way of thinking, they are asking one interrelated question. Their mindset is something like this. To their way of thinking, the destruction of the Temple, if that was to happen, and the destruction of the false religion of the Pharisees – the end of their age, was going to coincide with the consummation of Christ’s kingdom, with Him ascending to the throne and with them reigning as kings with Him and the beginning of a new age of Jewish prosperity. They are picturing this in terms of military conquest. They have an entirely earthly perspective on all of this.

But by contrast, when Jesus hears this question – and the Greek construct of this sentence makes it very clear – He hears two distinct questions that while they are related are not interconnected. When Jesus hears the disciples ask this question, He hears it as: 1) when will the destruction of the temple take place and 2) what will be the sign of your return in glory and the end of this age, the end of all things?

Let me say it like this. The disciples, when they ask this question, are thinking in strictly earthly terms. They are conceiving of Christ leaving the city, overthrowing the current regime, and returning as a victor, sitting upon an earthly throne and them reigning with Jesus in a new monarchy. Jesus, however, answers this question from an eternal

perspective, speaking of eternal realities. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, of which Jesus speaks, is divine judgment and the end of Judaism as a viable faith, the destruction of the temple and the end of the sacrificial system that had been so corrupted, and the return of which He speaks is one of eternal and cosmic glory after His passion, His resurrection, His ascension into glory and His enthronement at the Father's right hand until His enemies become His footstool. The disciples are speaking from what they think they know and Jesus is speaking of what is, of eternal realities. In His answer, Jesus will give to the disciples more than they could have ever conceived when they asked the question. He will give to them an overview of redemptive history from this day forward and then He will deal separately with each question – the destruction of Jerusalem and His return to reign. He does this so they can be prepared, so they will be faithful, so they will not be caught unaware or despair as they see events unfold. This is so pastoral, the shepherding of their souls and also of ours. Again, what He tells them is filled with allusions to their present, the present that we find ourselves in right now between the two advents of Christ, and His glorious return. For the rest of our time this morning, we are going to look at the overview that Christ gives to them of redemptive history from that day forward and we will begin by looking at

Signs that Are Not Signs That the End is Here (v. 4-8) Let's read verses 4 to 14 and then look at each statement individually. Here is what Jesus says that His disciples can expect to take place. ***“And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”*** (Matthew 24:4–8, ESV)

Now notice what Jesus says here. He gives to the disciples a list of things that they can expect will take place before the destruction of Jerusalem and the close of the age, things which actually took place before the destruction of Jerusalem – the type of the great judgment to come, and a list of things that we can expect to occur as we move toward His return, but He closes that list by saying: ***All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*** These things that Jesus describes are not signs that the end is here right now. These things are part and parcel of this earth at all times and in all places and will be until Jesus comes back, but by themselves they are not evidence that the end is here – they are just the beginning of the birth pains. Certainly these things will intensify before the great and final

day of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the mere presence of these things is not to be taken as proofs individually that the end is here. These things characterize history. What does Jesus say will characterize the time between His first and second advent?

Spiritual Deception First, He says, there will be spiritual deception. He says: ***“See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.*** Be careful that you are not deceived, that you do not fall pray to false messiahs, for they are coming and many will be led astray by their lies. Jesus is not saying that men will show up and say “I’m Jesus.” What He is saying is that there will be many false saviors who will arise, men who claim to be the anointed one of God, whom people will follow to their own destruction. False messiahs are just that, someone who puts themselves in the place of Christ, a direct alternative to Jesus Christ as the Only Savior of God.

In the disciples’ day, there was no shortage of false Christs. The Jewish historian Josephus tells of men who arose before the destruction of the Temple, claiming to be the Anointed One. One guy, claiming to be the Messiah, raised an armed multitude at Mt. Gerazim that was quickly dispatched by the Romans. Another named Theudas gathered a group of followers and promised to divide the Jordan river and prove himself as Messiah, until the procurator of Judea at the time, Fadus, executed him. There was an Egyptian who raised a bunch of insurrectionists promising that the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command so they could enter Jerusalem by force. It got so bad that at the time of Felix as procurator, he was executing false messiahs every day!

More recently, in our days, we have seen Sun Yung Moon, Jim Jones, David Koresh and others present themselves as false messiahs and there will always be cult leaders like that. But false messiahs do not have to be famous. False religious systems are designed to make false messiahs of us all – proposing to give us the power to save ourselves, to make much of ourselves, to be our own deliverer. And it doesn’t have to be individuals, it can be totalitarian governments who take the place of God and who put themselves as saviors of the masses, from cradle to grave. This nation is running in that direction.

As we approach the end of the age, spiritual deception will grow because having rejected Christ as Messiah, the spiritual gullibility of the masses will increase. Having rejected Christ

and having turned away from the truth, people will follow anyone and anything that that speaks with authority and promises to solve their problems and give them meaning and significance. False messiahs will turn many away. Jesus speaks of

Wars and Strife He says: ***And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.*** Jesus is telling the disciples that the Pax Romana – the Roman peace was coming to an end. When Jesus gave this prophecy, the Roman Empire was experiencing a general peace within its borders. But Jesus explained to his disciples that they would be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. In the *Annals of Tacitus*, a Roman who wrote a history which covers the period prior to 70 A. D., we find such expressions as these “Disturbances in Germany”, “commotions in Africa”, “commotions in Thrace”, “insurrections in Gaul”, “intrigues among the Parthians”, “the war in Britain”, “war in Armenia.”

It is true in our own day. The history of man is a history of wars. As long as sin is in the world, there will be war, spawned by hatred, jealousy, greed and lust. We see it in our own day. War is a lasting virus in the heart of man. In recent years, experts have concluded that there have been at least a dozen conflicts simmering at all times in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe or the Americas. And yet Jesus says: ***See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*** Then Jesus speaks of

Famine and Earthquakes He says: ***There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.*** In the days of the disciples this was true. The Bible records that there was famine “throughout all the world. . . in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:28). Judea was especially hard hit by famine. Tacitus speaks of a “Failure in the crops, and a famine consequent thereupon.” Eusebius also mentions famines during this time in Greece. Tacitus mentions earthquakes at Rome. He wrote that “frequent earthquakes occurred, by which many houses were thrown down” and that “twelve populous cities of Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake.” Seneca, writing in the year AD 58 said: “How often have cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock! How many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! How many in Macedonia! How often has Cyprus been wasted by this calamity! How often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often been brought us of the demolition of whole cities at once.”

It is again true of our own day. In the course of any year, somewhere on the globe, what we euphemistically call a natural disaster of some kind will strike: a flood, famine, earthquake, or an epidemic. But all of this is only the beginning of the end. So he describes what the disciples could expect in the days that were ahead, what we could expect in our day, and His message to them in the midst of this is to

Be Faithful and Endure (v. 9-14) these days that Jesus speaks of would be perilous for His disciples and for us. He tells His disciples what must take place, what they and we must endure and through which we must persevere. He says: **““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. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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.” (Matthew 24:9–14, ESV)** Listening to these words, we see that there is much difficulty ahead for the disciples, difficulty and trial for us, but in the midst of it all, Jesus makes a great promise. **But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**

That word “endure” is such a beautiful one. The word literally means, "to abide under." You continue to abide under and in Christ when things are difficult and hard. Jesus Christ calls us to endurance, perseverance, and continuing on with Him. It is the evidence of true faith. Jesus calls us to be disciples, to be His followers and to persevere to the end – either the end of our lives or the end of the age – because He will preserve us as we stand fast in Him. Those who persevere will be saved. As David sang in Psalm 37: **“The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.” (Psalm 37:23–24, ESV)**

Hard times are coming, Jesus says, and we must not shrink back, we must not fall away, we must not be overcome with fear. We can either move toward Him or away from Him. We must endure, we must abide in Him and remain under His care.

Despite Persecution, We Must Endure Jesus says: **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. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.** Persecution is the reality for all who truly follow Christ. The disciples should expect it and so should we. The book of Acts and Christian history give testimony to how the disciples were persecuted in the very ways Jesus had predicted. Jesus said the disciples would be afflicted, beaten, imprisoned; they would be hated for his name’s sake and some would be killed; they would be brought before councils, rulers, and kings, for a testimony; they would be given a mouth of wisdom which their adversaries could not contradict – but they would suffer for

faithfulness to Christ. Brought to the test, there were many who fell away from professions of faith in Christ and betrayed others in order to save their own lives.

The hatred of Christ and of His gospel has not subsided in all the years since He walked this earth. Just as they hated Christ, His disciples will be despised. It may not always be obvious and fully blown, but more and more open displays of faith in Christ are being stamped out by more and more nations. There can be no question that there is a growing hatred and opposition to Christ by our society and by our government and if it continues unabated, believers in this country will one day face the same fate as the first disciples did. The days of easy going tolerance of Christianity is over. The 1950s are not coming back. Despite persecution, we must endure.

Despite False Prophets, We Must Endure Jesus says: ***And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*** Just as there were in the days of the disciples, there will be false prophets who will lead even professing believers astray. Paul writes in ***“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,”*** (1 Timothy 4:1, ESV) This is not picturing the false prophets of patently false religions, but of false prophets within the church. Men who in the name of ecumenism or of plurality or of some humanistic “greater good” deny the absolute and binding truth of the Scriptures, who deny the necessity for the substitutionary blood atonement of Christ, who deny the virgin birth of Christ, His uniqueness as the Son of God and only way to the Father, men who deny the depravity of men, who make a mockery of God’s holiness, who deny the reality of eternal hell, and deny that those who die without Jesus Christ are lost forever. They turn after fads and popular social causes and sell their souls to political correctness. They think the gospel to be something that can be twisted and molded and shaped to suit the depraved desires of men. They do not preach the gospel because they do not even believe the gospel. And Because of their “ministry”, Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 starting in verse 1: ***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”*** (2 Timothy 3:1–5, ESV)

There is only one answer to such men and women, we must withstand them in the power and the name of Christ and to heed the words of Paul: **“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”** (2 Timothy 4:1–2, ESV) Truly those days are upon us—both in America and around the world. The fruit of their demonic ministry is evident in the apostasy that is rampant today. But,

Despite Apostasy, We Must Endure Jesus says: **And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.** With all of the false prophets abounding, with them preaching another gospel that is not the gospel, the apostasy of which Christ speaks is inevitable and it is upon us even now. Falling away from the truth, sin increases, holiness decreases, love for God and for man evaporates. The visible church is on a severe downgrade, no different than the Israelites of Jesus’ day. What are we to do but to endure, to be faithful, to remain with Christ?

I love Spurgeon’s heart here. He said: “Inside the nominal Church, the many may grow cold, but there ought to be a remnant who abide in life and love. God grant that we may belong to it! We must at once grow warmer. We must live nearer to Christ. We must be more enthusiastic. Oh for a band of choice spirits—men fit to walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy—men who will be prepared to follow the Lamb wherever He goes! The Spirit said, “You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.” And so in every Church there are some that have not grown idle or heretical! Let them get together and help each other! I thank God for those whom the Lord keeps very near to Him—may their number be daily increased! May each one of us be filled with the Spirit! “ Beloved, Jesus means for us to see:

We Must Endure Because We Have a Mission to Accomplish Last, our Lord tells us: **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.** The true gospel must be preached, throughout the entire world and we must preach it. It falls to us, the body of Christ in this earth to complete the mission that our Savior began and empowers us to finish. The true gospel of grace, the gospel of salvation by the shed blood and perfect obedience of Christ, the rule of Jesus, the redemption that is in Christ alone which must be received by faith alone, must be preached. Just as Christ entrusted this responsibility to His disciples before us, so He has entrusted that

responsibility to us. Yes they faced many difficulties and so will we but they were to remain faithful and do what they had been called to do, they were not to withdraw and hid but were to be bold for Christ, and so must we. We are not to withdraw ourselves from society, not to retreat to some safe Christian cocoon, not to cloister ourselves or our families and isolate them, not to become inwardly and selfishly focused, only concerned for what is easiest or most beneficial for us. No, we have been called to something bigger than ourselves, something more lasting than life on this earth, something more important than our ease or our safety, something of greater significance and worth than even our own families. We have been called to proclaim the good news, to magnify Christ and His gospel. That is our calling as we wait for the end, when Christ in all of His glory will be revealed and we will be with Him forever. Comfort, ease, risk minimizing, self-security and self-preservation are not our rights as Christians. We have a gospel to proclaim and we must be found faithful to do it. Despite the dangers, despite the threats, we must fulfill the Great Commission. It is not for others to do who do not have families or have nothing to lose, it is for all of us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer story in Nazi Germany...

We must proclaim Christ faithfully and then, and only then, will the end come. Then we will see Jesus face to face. Until then we must endure as seeing Him who is invisible.

How Do We Endure?

- 1) Know Christ intimately so you will not be led astray.

- 2) Know the gospel perfectly and the full counsel of God increasingly so that false prophets cannot take advantage of you.

- 3) Do not be afraid but trust in the sovereign rule of God.

4) Set your face to be faithful to Christ despite the opposition, knowing that at His return He will make all things right.

5) Pursue continuing faithfulness to Christ and to His people so that your love may abound.

6) Intentionally engage the world with the gospel.

7) Pray! Pray! Pray!

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