

The Coming of the Son of Man

Matthew 24:29-44

Since I've been away the last two Sundays, let me remind you about the emphasis of Jesus' teaching which I have sought to explain. Jesus laments the coming destruction of Jerusalem, recognizing that that great Old Testament nation of God's people would be justly condemned for their wicked rebellion against him. So we read,

Mat. 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Then comes his warning of impending judgment,

Mat. 23:38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"

The desolation of that judgment is made plain, in words with unmistakable meaning to a first century Jewish believer, namely that the destruction of the nation of Israel is represented by the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem—the physical destruction.

Mat. 24:1 "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

You have to recognize just how dramatic and unsettling those words must have been to Jesus' disciples. The disciples have a very easy-to-understand question in response:

v.3 "Tell us, when will these things be?"

Explain yourself? What do you mean? How can that be? Those questions have that sense of incredulity, of disbelief, of such astonishment as to otherwise think that such a thing would be absolutely impossible. "When will these things be?"

They then ask a further question, asking for a sign, presumably so that they could be prepared.

v.3 "And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

If you remember, I noted with reference to the question of "when" that the answer seems clearly implied by the summary conclusion in,

v.34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

When will these things be? Within this generation. When will Israel as a nation be judged, and destroyed? Within this generation. And so it was, with the total destruction and annihilation of the city, the nation, and the temple. The age of the Old Covenant was ended.

In other words, I believe Jesus is answering his disciples questions with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem that did, in fact, take place within that generation, in AD 70. So the focus of this Olivet Discourse is upon that destruction. That perspective gives me significant understanding of the book of Revelation as well, where we read too a similar perspective, beginning with,

Rev. 1:1 "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place."

In the last chapter of Revelation we read this,

Rev. 22:6. "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the

things which must shortly take place. 7 “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

So my perspective on this is that much of the prophetic language of the book of Revelation, tied in with this Olivet discourse in Matthew 24, are prophesying with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem. If you have studied these things and want a label, it is the partial preterist view, but I’m not wanting to start with a label and then use that to explain the Scripture. I want to expound the Scripture faithfully. So this “coming” of Jesus, to which we have these signs here in Matthew 24, is the “coming” associated with the completion of his first coming to earth, a series of events beginning with his conception and birth and ending with his resurrection, ascension and judgment upon Jerusalem. Thus the “coming” which Jesus explains to us in our text is the completion of his first coming, since “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”

And the sign which Jesus identifies can well be labelled the great tribulation. So it is, prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the armies of Rome, we looked at the sign of the abomination of desolation.s

v.15-18

We looked at that prophecy from Daniel three weeks ago, with the awareness that the abomination of desolation came to the temple in those days, in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes, but something even worse would happen. The whole temple would be destroyed. Thus we looked at the horror of tribulation, the great tribulation.

v.21 “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh

would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

All of that, I believe, has its primary reference in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in AD 70, again, consistent with what we read in,

v.34 “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”

But, as we continue this afternoon, we reach a point that might cause some confusion, or some questioning of whether or not my understanding of this passage is correct, because Jesus does clearly seem to be looking beyond that destruction of Jerusalem to something far greater and far more comprehensive, even to the end of the world, the end of this age.

So here is my perspective. Jesus is looking forward, with a prophetic revelation of the future. The immediate focus of the future is the literal destruction of Jerusalem, which would occur within that generation. Yet, in looking toward the future, he sees and gives prophetic utterance to events that go beyond what would occur in AD 70. In looking forward to that great destruction of Jerusalem, he looks past that into the future to the events of the end of the age. Thus, the destruction of Jerusalem becomes a type, a prophetic foreshadowing of the end of the age, thus both of those great events come into focus. And so when we study the destruction of Jerusalem, we can also look past that event, into the future, in order to see and learn about the final judgment upon the world at the end of the age. And this great prophecy of the Olivet discourse pictures both of those events for us, one to come in the very generation to whom Jesus speaks, and the other, farther on down the path into the future at the end of that age.

So we read,

I. A VISION OF THE COMING JUDGMENT.

It is a glorious vision, a glorious prediction of what is to come. And it really does begin with that initial view of the destruction of Jerusalem, but seemingly moving your gaze into the future past that event unto the end of the age.

v.29-30

These verses are just filled with Old Testament references, and I can hardly make reference to them all in a single sermon, but Jesus is referring to Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, Daniel and others. All of those references, all together, show to us,

A. A revelation of the power and glory of God.

And I don't want to get lost in the forest among the trees. In other words, I want to focus on that broad picture, that broad perspective. Jesus is telling us about the infinite power of God, the eternal glory of God. Power and glory that exceeds anything known in this world.

v.29

And the sign, the appearance, the coming of Jesus himself.

v.30

The mourning will be in repentance, for surely the appearance of Jesus will bring about much repentance. And we certainly learn more about this coming elsewhere in the New Testament.

1 Thes. 4:15 "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the

air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

And there is a great emphasis to that day, not merely the emphasis of judgment and condemnation, but that of salvation. Surely that will be the day of salvation, and note how Jesus describes it, as,

B. A gathering of the elect.

v.31

Thus we read in,

1 Cor. 15:50 "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So there is the great trumpet call of God, it is the announcement of victory, of salvation. Let me read one of the many OT references,

Zech. 9:14 "Then the LORD will be seen over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, And go with whirlwinds from the south. 15 The LORD of hosts will defend them; They shall devour and subdue with slingstones. They shall drink and roar as if with wine; They shall

be filled with blood like basins, Like the corners of the altar. 16 The LORD their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, Lifted like a banner over His land—17 For how great is its goodness And how great its beauty! Grain shall make the young men thrive, And new wine the young women.”

So this great day of judgment is a day of salvation, salvation for those whom Jesus identifies as the elect, and when the trumpet of God’s judgment sounds, it will summon all those whom God has chosen, all those for whom Jesus died, and they will be gathered together from every nation, from every direction. Read again,

v.31 “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Clearly the idea there is of the coming of Jesus in the power of salvation. Again,

1 Thes. 4:16 “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

Jesus then gives us a parable to teach us about that great day,

II. A PARABLE OF THE COMING JUDGMENT.

And the main point of the parable is the idea of imminence. Which is to say, the nearness of that coming. The eager anticipation of that coming in the near future, the impending nature of that coming. And so, with this parable, we have,

A. A warning of imminence.

v.32-33

That’s the point of this whole discourse. Go back to, v.3 “Now 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?”

Jesus doesn’t answer those two questions directly, at least not explicitly. But he does answer clear. When will these things be? The answer is soon!

Just look at the fig tree! You when summer is near. Just as you know this time of year around here. The early flowers are out. The crocuses. The daffodils. Tulips are starting to bloom. And what does that tell you? Spring is imminent. Spring is near. The time is at hand, it is “at the doors”, in the language of verse 33.

There is another image we looked at a few weeks ago that communicates this same idea of imminence, another very easy to understand illustration, though in the context referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, still also a prophetic view of what is still future.

v.6 “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

That last phrase refers to birth pangs, labor pains. The point is obvious. When a woman begins labor, when she begins to

experience those labor pains, which come in increasing frequency, what is obvious is that a baby is about to be born! Note even there, also, the reference to the gathering of God's people from every place in every nation,

v.14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

So with reference to the timing of the end of the age, with reference to the expectation of the final judgment of God, this is the consistent biblical answer—soon! And we are even able to pray for that, aren't we? For this is how our Bibles end, the very last words,

Rev. 22:20 "He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

So the parable is a warning, a warning to be prepared and ready. And then comes,

B. The definition of imminence

As I have already mentioned,
v.34

To emphasize my point again, I believe the initial reference of those words is to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, thus the words of Jesus are true, literally. But that definition of the imminence of the national destruction of Israel serves us well to define what still lies future for us, the second coming of Jesus, he who says to us, "Surely I am coming quickly."

And thus we read,
v.35
There is,

C. The reality of imminence.

The reality, the certainty of it. Surely, this world will pass away, in the judgment of fire. God will bring universal judgement upon the world for sin in that day when he saves the elect from the four winds, from every corner and every nation in every direction. And it will happen. God has spoken!

Many will doubt! Many will question this, or outright deny it. Many will live as though God's words are not true, that judgment will not come. Peter certainly tells us about those people,

2 Peter 3:3 "...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

"The day of the Lord will come." But notice how Peter puts it, "as a thief in the night." In other words, though this judgment is coming soon, it will still be unexpected. It's arrival is uncertain. And in our text this afternoon, in this Olivet discourse, Jesus is

telling us about,

III. THE BENEFIT OF UNCERTAINTY.

There is a reason we won't know the exact time. And clearly Jesus emphasis that uncertainty.

A. The reality of uncertainty.

He uses words that have reference to his own humanity, which is to say, he doesn't claim knowledge of that day himself, again, with reference to the fullness of his humanity.

v.36

1 Thes. 5:1 "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."

And even before Pentecost, when the risen Lord appeared to this disciples, this question was raised.

Acts 1:6 "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Uncertainty is built into the equation, with good reason, namely to cause us ever to be watchful. So Jesus points out,

B. The danger of careless negligence.

We've seen that already in some of the cross references I

have read. We are to be on guard, we are to be alert, in expectation. To use that image of the thief at night, we are to be as the homeowner who sits up all night, weapons in hand, just in case the thief shows up!

In our text, the danger of careless negligence is made obvious.

v.37-39

Jesus continues, with words again much easier to understand in terms of the earthly destruction of Jerusalem that if they are applied exclusively to the end of the age,

v.40-41

Those sorts of things did happen in AD 70, such was the great tribulation of those days, such was the horror of the terrorism so evident in those days. And all of that warns us of what is yet to come! And with that warning is,

C. The call to vigilance.

The duty to be on guard. To be ready. The duty to watch.

v.42

Then the pastoral application,

v.43-44

Paul makes such a practical point about all of this writing to the Thessalonians.

1 Thes. 5:1 "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren,

are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

So, beloved, be ready! Live every day as if it were your last, not merely that you yourself might die, but that Jesus himself might return. And yet there are so many obstacles to such a perspective, so many temptations to careless negligence. Especially sin. So those words I just read have so many specific applications for every one of us, “We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

So don’t get entangled in the sinful attractions of this world. Don’t get drunk, to use just one example, because if you do, you aren’t ready! And this ties in so well with my message this morning, the call of God to persevere. Sure there are trials and troubles in this world. Sure there are temptations, everywhere. So never let down your guard. Never lose this great perspective regarding the imminence of Christ’s coming. The day of the Lord is coming, it is at hand. That is the next great event in human history, and on that day God will gather his elect from the four corners of the earth.

And you and I must be that homeowner who stays awake all night, on guard.

v.44 “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”