**Calvary Fellowship 1.29.2023 Matthew 24:15-51 “Minutes to Midnight”**

* **Some of U have heard this story before - but it’s important that U hear the story b/c the 2nd part of the story involves U knowing the 1 part**
* It was December 5th, 1992 - it’s the day my wife & I met
* But it was a chance meeting - we were both at a mutual friend’s house
* I was in a band & my friend had just bought a new guitar & he asked me to try it out - so I picked it up & started playing & a crowd begins to form
* Then this really pretty girl walked away & sat down on other side of the room
* So I put down the guitar & sat next to her & introduced myself
* We started talking & she told me how much she loved school
* Carey was on a scholarship at FAU & I had just finished my 5th year of school
* So she’s telling me how great college is & how much she loves school & she asks me, “Do U like school?”
* I say, “Do I like school? I love school! I go to school more than anyone else I know.” I went on & on about my love for school
* What’s funny is, a few years later I would end up graduating college w/ just under a 4.0 GPA & ended up running a college
* And right now I’m 3 classes away from a Masters degree in Theology where I have a perfect 4.0 GPA - which that’s important for U to know
* But Carey tells the story & says, “Yeah, Bob started our entire relationship w a bunch of lies.” - I tell her, “Honey, it wasn’t a lie. It was a prophecy.”
* **Well, I tell U this b/c when my daughter Mia has always loved hearing the story of how Carey & I met - but at age 9, it dawned on her that I lied**
* So I got home & Mia was mad at me in a way that only a woman can - bringing up something that happened 20 years ago & holding it against me
* But I couldn’t do anything right - we were siting down to eat dinner & Mia is getting everyone something to drink & she asks me what I want
* I say, “I’ll have water please.” - She said, “Are U sure U like water or are U lying to me like U lied to my mom when U met her?
* So I laugh & move on - we’re eating dinner & Carey asks me about my day & I say, “It was really good. Got a lot done.”
* Mia says, “Mom, do U really believe he had a good day or is this another 1 of his lies like the day he met U when he lied about school?”
* Then we’re getting the kids ready for bed & I say, “I love U Mia, good night.”
* Mia says, “Do U love me or this another of your lies like when U met my mom?”
* I say, “Mia, I wasn’t a Christian. I became a Christian 6 months after I met your mom. So yes I lied, but I didn’t know any better.”
* She says, “It’s OK Dad. I understand.” - Or maybe this is just another 1 of your lies like the day U met my mom.”
* Prophecies are funny things - b/c they sometimes don’t make sense when U hear them, but only after the fact do they come into focus
* **So we’re in message #37 in the Gospel of Matthew & we’re in what’s called The Olivet Discourse & we’re talking about Bible prophecy**
* And today we’re talking about a period of time that Jesus talked about that’s called the Great Tribulation
* **Now, as we get into this, let me give us some clarity as we go into this - there’s a different between tribulation & the Great Tribulation**
* Every believer experiences tribulation - that is, trials & difficulties
* There are directed at believers & originate from the Devil throughout history
* The Great Tribulation is the wrath of God & it is directed at non-believers & is for a period of 7 years in the last days
* “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NKJV)
* This is the tribulation or trials that everyone experiences
* “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.” (Matthew 24:21 NKJV)
* This is a particular 7-year period that is described in revelation 6-19
* The final 7 year period is split by 1 event that we’ll look at in a moment, but what U need to know is that for the 1st 3 1/2 years of the tribulation, everyone is having a tough time, but it’s going well for the people of Israel
* The reason is b/c a world leader will rise up who has all the answers, but in the middle of that week (3 1/2 years into it), he’s going to break a peace treaty w/ Israel & stops the offerings from happening in the temple (Revelation 11)
* If U were w/ us when we covered Matthew 21, we talked about a prophecy in the book of Daniel where God tells Daniel that redemptive history will be done in 70 weeks or literally weeks or years - so it was 490 years
* We talked about how 483 of those years were fulfilled from the March 14th, 445 BC until April 6th, 32 AD- that was the day Jesus presented Himself as Messiah
* But a 7 year period still remains - this is what much of Bible prophecy talks about - this is much of the b book of Revelation is about
* “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.” (Daniel 9:24 NKJV)
* The 1st 3 things on this list, Jesus handled in His 1st coming - the last 3 will be dealt w/ in His 2nd coming
* And we see the world heading into the conditions that Jesus described when He spoke about His return…

**———(v. 15-22)———**

**#1 - The Great Tribulation brings a New Jewish Temple**

* **Remember last week when I told U to put a tack on the 1st question that Jesus asks about the temple being destroyed - let’s answer it**
* The Jews rebelled against Rome in 66 A.D & Nero, the Roman Emperor, ordered the General Vespasian to put down this insurrection
* However, in the middle of it, Nero died - Vespasian is called back to Rome to become Emperor & he ordered his son Titus to end this conflict
* So 4 years after it started, on August 30th, 70 AD, Roman soldiers set fire to the temple - now, the inside of the temple was encased in gold
* Guess what happens when that gold gets hot? It melts into the cracks of the stones - so what do Roman soldiers do who get paid in the plunder?
* They push every stone to get the gold so not 1 stone is left upon another just as Jesus said - but here’s the other thing that’s important:
* The Romans destroy the temple on the 9th of Av in the Jewish calendar, which happens to be the same day the 1st temple was destroyed by the Babylonians
* And for close to 2,000 years the Jews have not had a Temple to worship in, but Jesus says there will be a temple in the future
* There’s a group called in Israel called the Temple Institute who are right now building all of the instruments for temple worship when it’s rebuilt
* So Jesus mentions the temple & a prophecy of Daniel about the Abomination of Desolation - what is that? History gives us a glimpse of this future event
* “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.” (Daniel 11:31-32)
* **In 167 B.C. a man named Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem - He made practicing Judaism illegal in Israel**
* He confiscated all Jewish money - He forbid the teaching of Torah
* And in his worst act, on December 25th, 167 BC, he defiled the temple by setting up an idol on the altar & sacrificed a pig in the temple
* Antiochus even exalted himself against God - he had coins minted that said, “Antiochus Theos Epiphanes” or “Antiochus, the God made manifest”
* Here’s how this whole thing got resolved - Mattathias Ben Johanan was an older priest in the temple & was ordered to offer an unclear sacrifice to a pagan god - he refused, but there was a compromised Jew who did
* So Mattathias killed that guy & the Greek Soldier who gavotte order
* He retreated into the wilderness & later died - his son Judah took up the fight & people called Maccabee, which means “the hammer”
* In 164 BC, 3 years to the day of the defilement of the temple, Judah & his group, which were now known at the Maccabeans cleansed the temple
* The beat back Antiochus’ troops & rid the temple of all the pagan symbols
* He rode into Jerusalem & people waved palm branches & shouted “Hosanna” in the streets when he rode by
* When they rededicated the temple, they only found 1 day’s worth of oil to light the Menorah - now, by Jewish law, the flame of the Menorah could only be lit with specially prepared pure olive oil
* So they lit the Menorah w/ the 1 day’s worth of oil & it lasted for 8 days until new oil could be made - this is what’s celebrated at Chanukah
* “Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch.” (John 10:22-23 NKJV)
* But this defiling of the temple is a pic of what will happen when the Antichrist arrives & Jesus is reminding us of what happened to show us the future
* According to Jesus, this future leader will make peace w/ Israel - maybe even negotiating peace w/ Israel & her enemies
* Then 3 1/2 years into this peace treaty he will walk into the Temple & offer some type of sacrifice that defiles the temple & he reveals himself for who he is
* That’s when things get really back for Israel & Jesus says “Run!”
* **Listen - why does God do things like this? B/c God is using the canvas of history & past experiences in your life to prove that U can trust Him**
* When my daughter Livi was younger - around 3 or 4, she would get hungry & forget all of the words she had learned & couldn’t name what she wanted to eat
* 1 day she she started asking for “circle meat” - I don’t know what circle meat is & we tried to guess it - she was very upset that we weren’t fluent in circle meat
* It was like a life or death version or Charades - turns out circle meat is a burger
* **1 Sunday after church we were headed to lunch & the kids are all making suggestions as to where we should go**
* So we decide to go to Pincho Factory - which if U haven’t gone, do yourself a favor & go - it’s totally legit
* Well, my daughter Livi starts going crazy that she doesn’t want to go - “I don’t want Pincho. I want to go to the other place w/ the light up sign on the door. “
* And she is having a super bad attitude about it - and Carey tells her, “Are U planning on paying for lunch w/ your money?” No. Then we pick.”
* Anyway, we got to Pincho & she says, "oh. This is the place I wanted to go to."
* This is why parents get old - there’s only so much crazy a person can take b/c they start aging in dog years
* Listen, we miss out on so much when we don’t trust God w/ our future b/c we think that somehow He’s not totally aware of your situation
* No - He gets it to a greater degree than we’ve ever going to get it & it’s only to the level that we trust Him is to the level that we triumph in life
* “I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” (Isaiah 46:9-10)
* This is why prophecy is so powerful - it’s 1 of the ways God proves His power & reveals His ability to transform a situation - by calling it before it even happens
* And it’s ultimately the place U want to go, we just couldn’t put words to it

**———(v. 23-35)———**

**#2 - The Great Tribulation brings Israel to the Center**

* **Some have criticized Christians who believe Jesus is coming back - they say, “B/c didn’t every generation think they were living in the last days?**
* Here’s the reality: not every generation could say, “Jesus could come back today” - why? B/c certain Bible prophecies had to be fulfilled
* If U were a believer in the 1,500’s, Jesus could not have come back yet - why?
* B/c Israel did not yet exist as a nation & Israel is the key to Bible prophecy
* **All of Bible prophecy speaks of Israel as a nation & that didn’t happen until May 14th of 1948, when the Israel was given its’ independence**
* After the horrors of WWII & Nazi Germany, the world community understood that this would never have happened if Israel had their own home land
* So when the people of Israel were given their homeland it fulfilled an important Bible Prophecy about Israel returning to the land
* “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.” (Ezekiel 34:11-13)
* 70 A.D. marks what is called “The Diaspora” - the time when the Jews were scattered throughout all the earth
* It’s amazing that up until 2010 there were more Jews living in the US than in Israel - today there’s more Jews in Israel than anywhere else in the world
* **1 of the most amazing things we’ve seen in the last 100 years is the Jewish people returning to the land of Israel**
* In 1918, there were 85,000 Jewish people living in what today is called Israel
* Today, there are 7.9 million Jews living in Israel (more than anywhere else)
* In 1948, only 6% of the Jews in the world lived in Israel - today, 43% do
* This is amazing b/c no people group in the history of the world has gone more than 3 centuries w/o a homeland & been able to maintain their national identity
* Have U met any Assyrians lately? Any Hittites? Any Canaanites? Any uptights?
* But I bet you’ve probably met an Egyptian - why them & not the others?
* B/c 1 group had a homeland & the others didn’t, so their identity faded away
* Israel went 1,900 years w/o a homeland & they kept their national identity
* **So what happens now? Israel is in the land - Jews are returning to Israel**
* Israel is flourishing & prospering in the land given to them by God
* Israel is 1 of the leading exporters of fruit & veggies in the world
* They are the Silicon Valley of the Middle East w/ their technology innovations
* Through the Bible, the symbol for Israel is a fig tree - Jesus is saying, “When U see Israel in their land, bearing fruit, prospering & growing, I’m coming back.”
* **And next time we’ll talk about social factor that are showing us that we’re getting close to the end - b/c most people (even non-christians) see it**
* We have the ability to wipe out humanity several times over w/ our weapons/ biochemical warfare/ AI/ & many countries w/ nuclear capabilities or ambitions
* And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” (Romans 13:11)
* **Most of us have been to Disney World - here’s what I find interesting about the 3-hour drive to Disney - there aren’t many signs in Broward**
* In fact, there aren’t really any signs for the 1st hour of the trip
* But then U see a sign - then U see signs for something called “YeeHaw Junction” which I have no idea what that is
* But as U get closer to Orlando, the # of signs increase & the size of the signs increase - the closer U get, the stronger the frequency & intensity of the signs
* The same is true w/ the return of Jesus - the closer we get, the more the signs of His coming increase in frequency & intensity & Israel is just 1 sign
* Now verses 36-44 are very important, but they relate to a parallel passage in chapter 25, so I’m going to punt that until our message in 2 weeks

**———(v. 45-51)———**

**#3 - The Great Tribulation Brings Godly Preparation**

* **Before we close, I want to talk about something here - Christians sometimes get nervous & they think about how they’re going to survive the Great Tribulation & if they should be stockpiling stuff**
* Or if you’re Cuban, that means buying 1,000’s of cans of Vienna sausages
* Here’s the good news - Christians aren’t going to be in the tribulation
* “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15-18 NKJV)
* **It wouldn’t comfort me much if I knew that I had to endure 7 years of hell on earth until Jesus came back**
* The comfort comes in knowing that we won’t are around for it & that better things are coming for us to are trusting & walking w/ Jesus
* Why? B/c the Goat Tribulation is God’s wrath being poured out on non-believers - why not on believers, b/c Jesus took God’s wrath in our place
* We’ll talk about this more next week, but teaching on the end times should give us comfort to know that God is 100% in control of the future
* And b/c of that, it should challenge is to live godly lives
* **That’s why Jesus closes w/ an exhortation - we can be like 1 servant who was faithful & wise & was found doing well when the master returned**
* Or we can be like the evil servant - the Greek word for Evil is (gr.) kakos
* It refers to something that was one good, but turned evil (spoiled)
* But here’s the thing - these servants had no idea the master returning
* Our master told us times & seasons, the conditions of the world at His return
* **In 1947, a group of scientists created what is called the Doomsday Clock**
* They take all of the conflict, threats, & capacity for human annihilation into account & set the clock as close to midnight (humanity’s total destruction)
* **When it started in 1947, they set the clock at 7 minutes to midnight**
* This was right after WWII & the beginning of the Cold War w/ the US & USSR
* **The furthest back it has ever gotten was 1991** - this was right after the fall fo the Berlin Wall & the fall father Soviet Union
* **The closest it ever got was in 1953** - it was the height of the Cold War & the nuclear arms race was at full speed - & the Us tested its 1st hydrogen bomb
* The Doomsday clock was set to 2 min. to midnight (70 years ago)
* **In 2018, they released a new report - based on uncertainty w/ N. Korea**
* Discord between Russia & the US - build up nuclear weapons w/ India & Pakistan - and uncertainty w/ Iran & their nuclear ambitions
* They set the clock to 2 minutes to midnight - all of this was pre-pandemic
* On Tuesday of this week, the Doomsday clock for 2023 was revealed & it was set at 90 seconds to midnight - It is the closest to midnight that it has even been
* And if people who don’t know God can discern the signs of the times, then certainly God’s people should be able to know & understand & live accordingly…