

## Matthew 24:1-35; Mark 13:1-31; Luke 21:5-33

Good morning/good evening! I hope you all had a blessed Easter and are getting a taste of living in resurrection power. In a little over a month from now, Carol will be speaking to this important truth and great blessing of the Christian faith - living in the power of the victory over sin and death Jesus provided for those of us who believe in His sacrifice and resurrection. I'm very much looking forward to hear what she has to say about that!

Before I get into today's lesson, I want to cover something from our last lesson's reading. As you may recall, the lesson covered, among other things, Jesus pronouncing seven "woes" upon the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. These were serious pronouncements from the Lord, but I believe there's an important distinction in what He did. You can hear in His pronouncements a deep emotion and passion, and I think it's worth us remembering that God is a deeply feeling Being. Words like compassion, love, jealous, angry, and wrath are all used in describing God in the Scriptures. Jesus knew His time was almost at an end, so He was at the peak of His intensity at pointing out these very serious issues such as hypocrisy, ritualism, inward corruption, and other things. Here's the distinction – He hated what they were doing, but He did not hate them. Let me repeat that again – He hated what they were doing, but He did not hate them. These pronouncements were strong statements of deep, heartfelt grief from the Lord.

I'll provide two reasons why I believe this. First, after He pronounced these seven woes on them, what did He say? – "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*" (Matthew 23:37) There's great love in this statement – a yearning for everyone in Jerusalem – including the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees – to

come to Him as their Messiah. My second proof of the distinction of His pronouncements being about what they were doing as opposed to them as His chosen people is what were the first words Jesus said when He was on the cross? – “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Who is “them” in this statement? – It’s the same people He pronounced the seven woes.

Do these two proofs I offered sound like a God Who hates these people? Scripture tells us that God takes no joy in the death of the wicked and is long-suffering so all will come to repentance. The week leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection is often called the “Passion Week”. What was God so passionate about? – For people to repent and provide a way to save people from their sins because despite all the terrible and awful things mankind has done, is doing, and will do until Jesus returns, He still loves them and seeks to make a way to reconcile them back to Him. When you hear that kind of core truth about God, doesn’t it make you wonder why people would have a problem believing in, and coming to God? I believe there are two reasons they don’t: *1) It forces people to realize they are accountable for their behavior; and, 2) They’re not hearing this kind of deep teaching about God’s love for them – despite the eternal consequences of their sinful ways.* Ok – this is what I wanted to share about the previous lesson – let’s move into today’s lesson.

After I became a Christian and began to fall in love with, and study God’s Word, I began to run across some big words that I didn’t know. They come from Biblical scholars and academics that, I guess feel the need to come up with these big words to make them sound smart. One of them was *Eschatology*. I remember thinking, ‘*Oh great...another area of science I stink at!*’ Well, I decided to look it up, and one of the definitions said, “*A branch of theology dealing with a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind; specifically: any of various Christian doctrines concerning the*

*Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment.”*

Today's and next week's reading are some of the centerpiece Scriptures that Eschatologists work with. Today we're covering the first half of what is called...here we go again with the fancy words....the “*Olivet Discourse*”. It is called this because Jesus offers these words on the Mount of Olives, which is just south of the temple mount in Jerusalem. It is important to recognize that Jesus' teaching in this discourse is in reference to Israel and **not** the Church. Christ was speaking of God's future program for Israel.

Before I get to the reading, I think it will be helpful to provide you some context regarding where, or better said when, this period of end times is supposed to happen in the Bible's version of the time space continuum. Like any good story, there's no better place to start than in the beginning. So, we're going to take you on a quick tour through the Old Testament. In Genesis, chapter 1, God created the heavens and the earth. We don't know when this happened. When I was in school, the scientists believed the world was 1 billion years old. Today, they think it's 4.5 billion years old. I know it's been awhile since I've been in school, but sheesh! The fact is, we just don't know. Towards the end of chapter 1, God created Adam and Eve, and we also don't know how much time it was between God creating the heavens and earth and God creating Adam. However, with Adam's birth, we can calculate how long man has been alive; therefore, the age of human history is knowable – according to the Bible.

In Genesis 3, we learn of the beginning of the Age of Rebellion with Adam and Eve disobeying God's commandment to not eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. With their disobedience, sin entered the world, and this Age of Rebellion extends to this very day. Moving ahead to Genesis chapter 11, we're introduced to a man named Abram – who would later be renamed Abraham. He along with his son, Isaac and his grandson Jacob (who would be

renamed Israel) became the patriarchs of the Nation of Israel – God’s chosen people. The balance of the Old Testament is an accounting of God’s dealings with the Nation of Israel.

Jumping ahead to chapter 9 of the Book of Daniel, we read of an important prophecy regarding God and the Nation of Israel. In Daniel 9:24, Daniel was given the following prophecy, *“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.”* The “sevens” Daniel is speaking to are 7-year periods. Therefore, God has said there is going to be a 490 (70 x 7) year period for Him to wrap up His dealings with the Nation of Israel and step into a new age. The question to ask is, *‘How would we know when the 490 years starts?’* Well, I’m glad you asked because Daniel tells us in verse 25, *“From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.”* There are rare moments in Scripture that a specific time in history is provided. Interestingly, the command to rebuild Jerusalem is one of them – it is in Nehemiah 2:1. In verse 26 of Daniel 9, we learn that at the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> 7-year period, the Anointed One, the Messiah, will be put to death and have nothing.

What Daniel is saying is this 490-year period for God to wrap up his dealings with the Nation of Israel is going to go for 483 (69 x 7) years, but then He’s going to push the pause button with the Nation of Israel. What caused Him to push “pause”? - Their part in killing the Anointed One – their role in sending Jesus to the Cross. Now here’s the super cool thing – guess how many years it was from the time Nehemiah was given the order to rebuild Jerusalem to the day Jesus arrived in Jerusalem riding on a donkey acknowledging He was the Messiah? – Yep – 483 years - to the day! God is so awesome! So while God pushed pause on His dealings with the Jews, He pushed Play on the Age of Grace with Jesus’

sacrifice and resurrection. That Age of Grace, along with the Age of Rebellion, has been running along side-by-side until this very day. But what about that final 7 years for God's dealing with the Nation of Israel? I give to you the context for todays and next week's reading. These 7 years are known in Scripture as the Tribulation or Jacob's trouble. Hopefully, that gives you some context to what, or when, Jesus is speaking to, so let's get into the reading.

As I mentioned earlier Jesus had just finished putting on a heavy, heavy 7 woes on the religious leaders on the temple mount. There's that number 7 – what is it a symbol for? Completion – remember that when I get to my conclusion. Jesus and the fellas head south from the temple mount, cross the Kidron Valley, and begin climbing the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is very steep, so it would make sense to take a rest from the climb. One of the four disciples with Him at the time - Peter, James, John, or Andrew - commented on the magnificent stones of the temple. This version of the temple was King Herod's idea, and it is believed construction began around 20 B.C. It is also believed the temple was completed around 63-64 A.D. Therefore, at this time of the story; the temple has been under construction for approximately 50 years. Even though there was another 30 years left to complete the temple, there was more than enough done to warrant the comments about the stones' splendor. The engineering of the temple is one of the great mysteries because it is beyond comprehension how they pulled off the manufacturing of the stones and how they placed these massive stones so precisely. According to Josephus, the well-known Jewish historian, some of these stones were 20'x12'x9' and weighed as much as 100 tons. The stones were hewn so carefully that they fit together with no need of mortar to hold them together. It is believed you couldn't insert a knife blade between them. Inside the temple, there was a ceiling made of gold. Herod's temple was one of the marvels of the ancient world.

Jesus, though, was not impressed, and He makes this startling prophecy in Matthew 24:2, “*Do you see all these things?*” he asked. “*Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.*” In 70 A.D., Titus and the Romans entered Jerusalem and destroyed it. Many of the Jews went into the temple thinking it was the last and best fortress for them. Titus had given specific instructions to preserve the temple, but at least one of his soldiers had started a fire in the temple. The fire got so hot that it cremated all the Jews, melted the gold, and seeped into the crevices of the stones. The looters carved out the gold, and in doing so brought down every stone in the temple – leaving not one upon another – fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy.

The disciples were no doubt taken aback by Jesus’ prophetic words and, naturally, wanted to know when this is going to happen. They also must have linked His Words to His coming and the end of the age. I find it interesting that it would appear that they had come to believe He was going away for a while and was coming back. What they hadn’t figured out was the soon-to-happen tragic method of His going away. Jesus begins His response to their questions with warning them not to be deceived. I also find it interesting that the very first comment Jesus makes about the signs of the end times coming is to watch out for deception. Why? There will be a great awakening for the Nation of Israel – many will come to faith in Jesus. The enemy wants none of this, so he will do what he has always done, seek to deny the truth of Who God really is by telling lies about Him and introducing others who will perpetuate his lies. There will be a lot of false shepherds and prophets seeking to enrich themselves by taking advantage of their fears.

Jesus continued His warning by telling them many will come in His name, claiming, ‘*I am the Messiah*’, and will deceive many. This is the Good Shepherd speaking of Satan’s false shepherds, or hirelings, who will lure Jews away from

their newfound, but fledgling, faith. This is the first of 4 warnings in Matthew 24 regarding false shepherds. 1 John 2:18 labels these false shepherds antichrists, *“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”* Why would this be such a fertile time for false prophets? 1) The enemy knows his time is drawing to a close, so he is going to look to destroy as many people as he can with his lies; 2) The enemy knows this is going to be a time of demonstration of great power, and Satan lusts for power.

In Matthew 24 - 6 & 7, the Lord talks about wars, rumors of wars, nations rising against nations and kingdom against kingdoms. These are all references to a coming world war. Given the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the mass devastations these weapons can bring, the next world war will likely be the last world war for a very long time. Jesus goes on to talk about famines and earthquakes. Famine is the result of a population explosion. It took from Adam to 1857 for the population of this planet to get to 1 billion. Since then, we have added 1 billion more people every 25 years. We are at 7.44 billion people as of 2016. It's getting crowded, and it's hard to imagine how much more this planet can handle – our resources are being severely challenged.

In Matthew 8, Jesus called these the beginning of birth pains. Do you find it interesting that He is relating all this pain and suffering to *birth pains*? Isn't birth the beginning of life? If that were so, why would He be relating all this life *ending* warnings of death and devastation to a life-*beginning* concept as birth? This is a challenge of understanding God – He challenges us to consider the possibility that suffering is neither random nor arbitrary. We're forced to consider the possibility that suffering has a purpose.

The next step of the end times will be more personal – persecution and murder and martyrdom. Jesus tells them all of this was going to happen because of

Him. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, all the Apostles, with the exception of John, were martyred for their faith. They tried to martyr John by boiling him in oil, but the Lord preserved him as He still had plans for him to write at least the Book of Revelation. ***In this age of grace*** – the church age, according to [opendoorsusa.org](http://opendoorsusa.org), ***every month*** the following persecution is occurring:

- 255 Christians are killed
- 104 Christians are abducted
- 180 Christian women are raped, sexually harassed, or forced into marriage
- 66 churches are attacked
- 160 Christians are detained and imprisoned without a trial

***This is all happening when times are good.*** In the Tribulation period, the enemy is going to unleash everything he can on Christ believers – the Holy Spirit with the church will not be here to be a defender of these people. The enemy will no doubt point at all these troubles and then create a lie to make it look like all of this is happening because of God and the people who follow Him. They'll build on the lie that if they kill the Christ believers, that will put a stop to the wars and the violence.

Given the growing anti-God mentality of this country, it is getting more and more difficult to stand up and proclaim Whom we believe in, and stand on His Word. The enemy and his forces have been extremely effective at turning positions of righteousness into a doctrine of hate and exclusion. There are too many tragedies to list as a result of this effective campaign of deceit. One notable tragedy will be the newer and weaker people in the faith who do not have the foundational training and understanding to withstand these relentless and inaccurate attacks will walk away from their faith. There are a lot of people who claim they're spiritual, but when push comes to shove, what is their foundation? If we live long enough,

there are going to be foundation shaking moments – the loss of a loved one, a serious illness, a financial crisis – something that is going to test who we are and what we hold to be true. If we don't have that nail-pierced hand Who is true to hold onto, we are going to be vulnerable to believing enough lies to invalidate our faith.

Today's Nation of Israel is surprisingly not very religious. Most Jews either don't believe in God or, if they do, it is a shallow faith with nothing to hold onto in difficult times. In His remarks about persecution and dying for their faith, Jesus is speaking directly to the modern day Nation of Israel. During the Tribulation, there will be a great revival for the Jews – millions are going to come to believe in Jesus. They will need Him because this is going to be a very difficult period of time for the Jews. Jesus also warned that in addition to those claiming to be the Messiah, there would be many false prophets. All of them have will have a single purpose – to deceive as many people as possible. This is the mindset of Satan and his forces – to deceive people of the truth of God's character. Jesus said in Matthew 7:15, "*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*" Deception shadows the truth and leads us to becoming vulnerable to those who want to destroy us.

As people move away from God and become more engulfed in the deceptions of Satan's forces – attracting them to the things and cares of this world, sin and wickedness will get worse. It's hard to imagine things getting worse than they are now, but they absolutely will. Jesus said in Matthew 24:12, "*Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.*" Note the inverse relationship between wickedness and love. This is another pictorial of the flesh, which is ruled by Satan who is wicked, and the spirit, which is ruled by God Who is love and good. During these times, the pressure on the flesh – primarily through fear – will be greater than ever in history. People will need to choose whether they

will submit to their fears or they will submit to the One Who casts out all fear.

Jesus went on in verse 13 and said, “*But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*” There is always hope because with God all things are possible. If they will learn to fully trust God and rely on His strength to stand, they will be saved.

Verse 14 is a commonly referenced verse as a cornerstone for missionary ministries. It says, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” This verse is often misunderstood that until the church gets the gospel to every person on the planet, Jesus can’t come back. Take another look at this verse – do you see the church mentioned anywhere as the ***sole delivery method*** of the Gospel? Join with me in Revelation 14:6, “*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.*” During the tribulation period, an angel will be flying in the air proclaiming the Gospel to **EVERY** nation, tribe language, and people. Remember, at this point in the tribulation, Jesus has not yet returned. Some of these well-meaning missionary groups are seeking to reach every person in the world to hasten Jesus’ return. God already knows exactly when Jesus is going to return, and there is nothing we can do to change His mind. Yes, we should be doing all we can to preach the Gospel to as many people as we can, but Jesus’ return or the rapture of the church is not contingent on every person in the world hearing the Gospel. Whomever we don’t reach, the angel in Revelation 14 will.

In Matthew 24:15, He speaks to the key moment when the escalation of God’s judgment will ramp up. Jesus says, “*So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand.*” The seventieth seven, or the final 7 years of the 490 years I mentioned earlier will have a dual focus during this period: 1) *For God to deal with the Nation of Israel; and, 2) Bring judgment on a Christ-rejecting*

*world.* During the first 3½ years of the Tribulation period, the antichrist is going to rise up, do many amazing things, and attain worldwide popularity. Two of the amazing things he will accomplish will be to bring a temporary peace in the Middle East and construct the temple in Jerusalem. At the end of the first half of the Tribulation, the antichrist will fully reveal who he is and what his motivation always was and will be. He will enter the temple and demand to be worshipped as God. This is what Jesus is referring to as the abomination of desolation, and it is the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” for God. Now the tribulation will become the Great Tribulation, and God will begin to pour out His judgments as laid out in Revelation chapters 6-19.

The Good Shepherd never stopped being the Good Shepherd, and His instructions for the Judeans was to run as fast as they can when they witness the abomination of desolation. In verse 16 of Matthew, He tells all those in Judea to flee to the mountains. This and the next several verses speak of the immediacy of God’s response to the vile act of the antichrist. Quite simply – run and don’t look back. No belonging will be worth keeping because it is likely going to be destroyed. This is pure survival time. Why would Jesus tell them to run to the mountains and what mountains were Jesus speaking of? Verse 5 & 6 of Revelation 12 tells us the ‘*why*’, “*She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*” The “she” or “woman” is the Nation of Israel, and the 1,260 days happens to equate to 3 ½ years – the very amount of time left in the second half of the Great Tribulation. In Isaiah 16, there is a mention of Moab, which is modern day Jordan, as a place for “*My outcasts*” to “*Be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler.*” There is a place in this part of Jordan called the Rock City of Petra, and it is an area that is surrounded by great

rocks. Many Bible scholars believe this is the place where the Jews are to run after the abomination of desolation where God will protect them.

Jesus goes on in verse 21 in Matthew 24, “*For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.*” With no disrespect meant whatsoever to those who were impacted by the Holocaust, that horrific time would pale in comparison to what is coming during this seventieth seven to the Jews – as well as to the rest of humanity. The slaughter is going to be mind-boggling. We’re talking at least *half* of the population of the world. We’re talking *billions* of people are going to perish in the Great Tribulation. I believe some of this horrifying extinction is going to come at the hands of man with a massive unleashing of weapons of mass destruction. God will be exacting judgment Himself, but based on what Jesus said in verse 22 about the days being cut short by God for the sake of the elect – the Jews - man would totally destroy himself.

In the next several verses, Jesus warns about the false messiahs and prophets that will come on the scene with the ability to perform great signs and wonders with one sole purpose – to deceive, if possible, the elect. These false messiahs and prophets will be empowered to perform amazing things to lure these newfound Jewish believers in Jesus to follow them. Jesus continued and offered a preview of the conditions on earth during the very end of the Great Tribulation - the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then, our great and awesome Savior will return. Unlike His first arrival as a meek and mild baby quietly in a manger, there will be zero doubt of His second coming. “*For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*” (Matthew 24:27) There will be no excuses that they won’t see Jesus, and for those whom haven’t yet believed in Him, it will be too late. Jesus said there would be great

mourning as they see “*the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.*” Verse 31 of Matthew tells us, “*And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*” With His second coming, Jesus will gather those Jews from all over the world who came to faith in Him during the Great Tribulation.

What happens next? Well....you’re going to have to come back next week and let Carol tell the rest.

The final verses of Matthew 24 lead me into my conclusion. Jesus asked us to learn a lesson from the fig tree – *as soon as its twigs get tender and its leave come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.* The fig tree is a symbol for the nation of Israel in Scripture. The Nation of Israel was re-established in 1948 – no other country or nation that was scattered so far and wide has ever been reconvened to its land. This was a new birth for the Nation of Israel. I believe Jesus is relating this ripened fig tree as the reestablished Israel. If this is true, then we should be very excited about what He said in verse 34, “*Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*” It’s been 70 years since the Nation of Israel was reestablished. If I’m right that the fig tree Jesus mentioned is the reestablished Israel, then there isn’t much more time before that entire generation will be gone.

What am I saying? We are close brothers and sisters – I believe we are **VERY** close to the Lord calling us all home. I’ll conclude my argument with this final analysis. The period of time that covered the creation of Adam to the time of Jesus spanned approximately 4,000 years, and it has been about 2,000 years since Jesus’ crucifixion. When Jesus returns, He will reign during the Millennium, or 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, there will be one final great battle, and the coarse of human history will be set forever in a new heaven and a new earth

with Jesus reigning. If you do the math, 4,000 years + 2,000 years + 1,000 years adds up to 7,000 years. What's the number of perfection or completion? - The number 7. Could this be God's chosen period of human history and dealing with sin? I'm not sure, but it has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

What did I learn about God from Jesus in today's lesson? *God loves us enough to give us warnings of when it will be too late for people to be saved from their sins.* He's provided us the method of our salvation by sending His Son to die on a cross as full payment for the penalty of our sins. He's also told us there is only so much time in this age of rebellion and grace, and He's given us the signs to recognize when the time will be too late for us to choose Him to save us. What more could we want from God? Time's almost up my friends, and we need to love the people in our lives more and more to give them as good a glimpse of the love of God as possible for them to see what we know. Amen? Let's pray.