

What Jesus Taught About The End Of Time – Part 1

Matthew 24:1-35

Pastor John Miller

Matthew 24 and 25 are what's called the Olivet Discourse (I'll explain that in just a moment) because Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives when He gave this teaching. There's also the Scriptures that have what's called the Sermon on the Mount, one of the great sermons that Jesus preached. There's also the parables that are given of the Kingdom in Matthew 13, but here's the Olivet Discourse where Jesus describes the world's condition before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Because I want to survey it I'm not going to be able to go into depth on any single verses, I'm going to touch the high points. If you're taking notes, I'm going to give eight divisions—yes, I said eight—from these 51 verses, breaking it up as we go through. The first is Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction, we see the setting for the Olivet Discourse, verses 1-2. Follow with me. It says, "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily,"—or truly—"I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Jesus was in the temple. Jesus came out of the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple.

The temple is what's known as Herod's Temple. The Jews at this time had the original temple, Solomon's Temple, that was destroyed by the Babylonians and they were taken into captivity. They came back and rebuilt the second temple, called the temple of Zerubbabel. That second temple, by the time of Christ, was actually refurbished and enlarged by Herod the Great, the Idumean who was the Roman king over the land of Israel during the time of Christ. This was the temple that was built beginning in 20 B.C. and it was finished in 64 A.D., and we're going to see in just a moment that six years later it was destroyed by the Roman general Titus, and the Jews were dispersed which started what is known as the diaspora or the dispersion of the Jewish people.

On May 14, 1948, we saw a miracle that a nation was born out of the past. God, as He promised in the book of Ezekiel, brought those dry bones back into the land, breathed on them and gave them flesh, and they became a mighty nation. There is still the need for their spiritual revival and restoration, but they're back in the land. One of the significant things we see of Bible prophecy is the rebirth of the modern state of the nation of Israel. Prior to 1948, you couldn't really think in terms of these prophecies being fulfilled because Israel was not yet in the land. It wasn't until 1964, when they had the Six-Day War that they actually recaptured Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, thus they will be able to rebuild their temple and we'll see what's called the abomination of desolation takes place as a sign of the Second Coming as Jesus gave in Matthew 24.

Israel is God's time clock. If you study the 70 weeks of Daniel, back in Daniel 9, you'll see that God basically uses Israel for all His prophecy to be fulfilled as it surrounds the nation of Israel,

so no mistake that Israel is in the land. We know because of God's Word that they will not be driven from the land, destroyed, or wiped out. No more than the sun would stop shining or the moon would be in the sky, God would never allow His people to be destroyed. I'm going to mention a couple of times tonight, you'll want to make a note to read Romans 9, 10, and 11. You say, "Well, why would I want to read the book of Romans when I'm looking at Bible prophecy?" Romans 9, God elected the nation of Israel; Romans 10, God set aside temporarily the nation of Israel; Romans 11, God restores the nation of Israel. Paul gives us God's whole purpose, plan, and design for the nation of Israel—His election, His rejection, His restoration.

Again, we must keep distinct the church from the nation of Israel. The church is not Israel. That's a false doctrine that's taught today that we are spiritual Israel, we're the new Israel, God's finished with Israel. No, He's not. God still has a purpose and a plan to restore His people as He's already brought them into the land, and the Messiah will come and sit upon the throne of David and reign forever and ever and ever, so they're back in the land. As I said, read Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Going back to Matthew 24, "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple." If you back up into Matthew 23, and look at verse 37, Jesus has wept over Jerusalem from Mount Olivet looking down over the city of Jerusalem. He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,"—but notice—"and ye would not! 38 Behold, your house,"—that's a reference to the nation of Israel—"is left unto you desolate. 39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." That's a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Check out Zechariah 12:10. It is prophesied there that, "...they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn," they will realize He was their Messiah that they rejected.

Why did I go back to Matthew 23 and read those verses? It sets the context of Jesus coming to Jerusalem, being rejected of His people, the Bible says, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," and He wept over them and He says, "...your house is left unto you desolate," so they would be destroyed and dispersed. But they will be restored, and God will protect them, and they would see Him come back, verse 39, in the Second Coming and say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

In Matthew 24:2, Jesus said, "See ye not all these things?" These "things" are the building of the temple of Herod. The disciples were all from Galilee primarily, so they were what was called 'country bumpkins,' kind of like us in Menifee going into New York City, "Wow! This is awesome!" I've never been to New York City. I've flown in and flown out, flown in and flown out, but I've made about five trips to Hong Kong. How many of you have ever been to Hong Kong? Amazing city. I've never seen anything like it. It's just amazing. When I'm in Hong Kong, I'm walking around with my mouth hanging open—I'm a country bumpkin from Menifee, California.

The disciples saw these beautiful stones about 40 feet in length and 15 feet high and about 15

feet wide. It was about the size of a boxcar on a train. They were all quarried out of Solomon's Quarries below the Temple Mount, and they were all put together to make this temple that Herod enlarged. It was a beautiful temple overlaid with gold. They were looking at it and told Jesus, "Look at the beauty of this temple." They were all enamored by it after Jesus had said, "...your house is left unto you desolate." Then Jesus makes a prophecy in verse 2. He said, "Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." That would take place in 70 A.D., so just a few years later Titus and the Roman armies would surround Jerusalem and lay siege to the city, millions of Jews would die, and they would be dispersed. The temple would be destroyed, every stone would be taken down, and, to get the gold, they took all the stones off the Temple Mount and then got the gold of Herod's Temple. Jesus the Prophet, predicting the destruction of the temple, which was what we know as the modern Diaspora of the Jews until they were restored recently back in 1948 and became a nation once again.

Now, I want to mention something. The Olivet Discourse is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and in Luke 21. In Luke 21, even more so than Mark 13, Jesus is going to be dealing with the subject of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., but in Matthew 24 (believe me, this is very important in interpreting it) He's going to be dealing more with the subject of the signs that will be in the world before His Second Coming. I want to show you what I mean in the next section, verse 3, the questions for Jesus. It says, "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives,"—so He comes out of the temple, His disciples are enamored by the beauty of Herod's Temple, and Jesus said, "Well, don't get too excited. There's coming a day when not one stone will be left upon another, it shall be thrown down." They're wondering, "Well, when will this happen and how is it going to happen and what's the deal?"

Verse 3, "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives,"—which is to the east of the city of Jerusalem—"the disciples came unto him privately," we know from Mark 13 that they were Peter, James, John, and Andrew. These four represented the whole group of disciples. They said, "Tell us,"—notice these three questions—"when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Some debate whether there are two questions or three. We do know for sure that there's at least two questions, but the second question has two parts so I believe it has three questions. "...when shall these things be?" Here's the answer. He's talking about the things of the destruction of the temple of Herod. When he says, "...when shall these things be?" the question is, when will the temple be destroyed? Jesus is not going to deal with that in Matthew 24.

This is where major interpretive problems take place where people assume that everything we read about in Matthew 24 happened in 70 A.D. This is what's called preterism where they believe that all this took place in 70 A.D. and that all the book of Revelation is past, that there's no future aspects to it, and they see it as an historical past.

Notice that Jesus also was going to deal with the question, "...and what shall be the sign of thy coming,"—and the second half of that—"and of the end of the world?" Jesus is asked three questions: 1) When is the temple going to be destroyed? 2) What are the signs of Your

coming? 3) What are the signs of the end of the world or age? The word “age” is the word *aión*, or age of the Jewish believers or Jewish people or the age of man. Jesus is mainly going to deal with the two last questions, the signs of His coming and of the end of the world.

Again, I’m trying to resist it, but I can’t. The amillennial view, which is also the postmillennial view, is that the words that we have here took place either in 70 A.D. or they are to be spiritually interpreted or allegorical or not to be taken literally. But then also the liberal, or what’s called progressive, view today is that they were not really the words of Jesus but just a summary of the first century apocalyptic idea. It’s only the premillennial view, Christ comes back before the thousand years, that I believe fits the right interpretation of this chapter and allows you to use a literal method of interpreting Scripture. That’s always the way we should prose Scripture—the literal method of interpreting—knowing there are figures of speech, allegories, similes, parables and so forth, but we still approach the Scripture with the literal method of interpretation understanding that God made promises to Abraham called the Abrahamic covenant of the land.

When I watch the news on Israel right now, and I hear the raging fighting and debates over the pro-Palestinian position...and we’re even having rallies in America—God have mercy on America—in support of Hamas. I don’t know how anyone could support a terrorist group like Hamas. I realize that in the Bible God promised to those people that land. God promised it to Abraham, God promised it to David, God promised it to Isaac and Jacob, and He promised them all that land—even the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula all the way to the Great river Euphrates, and the rivers in the middle of Egypt. All of that land God promised to give to the nation Israel, and that will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ comes back—you talk about debating whose land it is—Jesus comes back and makes an end to the debate, and in the Kingdom Age for one thousand years Jesus Christ will reign on earth—Amen?—and we will reign with Him as the church.

Jesus is going to answer these two questions in verse 3, “...and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Let me give you another information. You say, “You’re not going to get through 51 verses.” I’m just about to kick it into high gear. I didn’t only want to teach this chapter because of what is going on in Israel right now, I wanted to teach this chapter because I hear so many misinterpreting it. When they ask, “...and what shall be the sign of thy coming,” this is one of the biggest, okay? You don’t have to agree with me if you don’t want to, you can be wrong if you want, I’ll still love you.

The “coming” here in verse 3 that they’re asking about is the Second Coming. They knew nothing about the rapture of the church, and I believe the best way to interpret the Olivet Discourse is to not see the rapture in it at all. When you put the rapture in the Olivet Discourse, you run into big problems, and that’s why so many people are abandoning a pretribulational rapture and a premillennial return of Jesus Christ. When they said “coming,” all they knew about was the Second Coming. You say, “Well, what do you mean?” The rapture is a doctrine taught in the Bible where the church, the body of Christ, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That’s a New Testament revelation. It’s first disclosed by Jesus in John 14, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive

you unto myself,”—there’s the rapture—“that where I am, there ye may be also.”

The Bible also says, 1 Thessalonians 4, “...and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” If you look at the rapture verses, it’s distinctly different than the Second Coming. I believe that there’s at least a seven-year gap between the rapture and the Second Coming and that the rapture takes place before the tribulation period. At the end of the seven years is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ; that in the rapture the church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. In the Second Coming, we come back with the Lord, and we’re going to look at the Second Coming in the passage tonight. So, we’re caught up to meet the Lord in the air, we come back with the Lord in the Second Coming, two distinct events, one involves the church, the other involves the church coming with Christ, and the whole world, it’s a visible return of Jesus Christ. You need to understand in verse 3, “...and what shall be the sign of thy coming,” that is the Second Coming. They had no comprehension of the rapture. It was revealed by Jesus in John 14 and then by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, “Behold, I shew you a mystery.”

A mystery in the New Testament was something that was hidden in the Old Testament but now is revealed by the Lord to His apostles and His prophets. The second half of that question, “...and of the end of the world?” or the end of the age. Verses 1-2, the prediction of the temple destroyed; verse 3, the question of Jesus from the disciples; and verses 4-14 we see the course of the present age or the beginning of sorrows. Again, this is where people get this messed up. From verses 4-14, they try to make it like these are signs of the rapture or that these are signs that will happen during the tribulation. They get confused. Verses 4-14 are general signs which are called, verse 8, “...beginning of sorrows,” or birth pains. They’re not specific signs. He’s going to give the sign of the abomination of desolation, the sign of the tribulation, and the sign of His Second Coming. That’s later on in the chapter. If you’re outlining this chapter, verses 4-14 are general signs that will exist in the world, and we’re going to see how fitting they are through this present age. They are, “...the beginning of sorrows.”

Let’s read verses 4-14. “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you,”—that’s right on the top of the list, don’t be deceived—“For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass,”—but notice at the end of verse 6—“but the end is not yet.” These are general signs of the age that we live in right now, “...the end is not yet.” Wars and rumors of wars are only part of what the world is like leading up to Christ’s coming.

Verse 7, “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are,”—here’s the key—“the beginning of sorrows,”—I’ll come back to that, that’s birth pains. Verse 9, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end,

the same shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” This is the first section of Jesus teaching the answer to the question, “...and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” so He gives general signs. There are statements made here that you can see parallels in the book of Revelation, but I think it’s best to see this as just the course of the present age and the general characteristics of the times that will go up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Let me outline it for you. There are six characteristics. First, there’ll be deception, verses 4-5, “Take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” From the time of Jesus Christ until the time Christ comes again the second time, the day and age we live in, what do we have? False christs, false messiahs. This is one of the things that really concerns me and stirs my heart. In what’s called Progressive Christianity today, they’ve hijacked Jesus and actually take the Jesus of the Bible, throw Him away, and they create kind of a woke, postmodern, guru Jesus of their own making. It’s really a false christ or a false messiah, and all throughout the church’s history the danger has been that we have not had the real Jesus of the Scriptures, that’s why a couple of weeks ago I spent two weeks on Philippians 2 looking at the Person and the work of Jesus Christ, that He is God and Man in one Person—truly God, truly Man—that He came from heaven, He preexisted before Bethlehem, that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, buried, rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, and is seated, exalted, at the right hand of God the Father. That’s the Jesus of the Bible, and unless you repent and believe in Christ, you will surely perish. He is the only, “...way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” so don’t be deceived by false christs. First John 4:3, “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is...that spirit of antichrist,” is not of the Father but is of this world.

The second characteristic is divisions or wars, verses 6-7. “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars,” we’ve had two world wars. There will be a third world war at the end of the tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon, when Christ returns. But what’s going on right now? Wars in Israel, right?, wars in the middle east, wars in Croatia, war in Russia, war in Europe. There’s wars going on in the world right now, and there always has been wars. There’ll actually be wars until Christ comes back.

When I watch the news right now on what’s going on in Israel, I can’t help but weep and say, “Even so, come Lord Jesus,” because there will be no peace anywhere in the world until Jesus Christ comes back. Amen? He is the Prince of Peace. So, there’ll be, “...wars and rumours of wars...these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”

Thirdly, there will be disasters, verse 7, “...and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.” We know about famine; we know about pestilence. We had the AIDS, Ebola, the COVID-19, and that’s just a few of the time of history of some of the diseases and plagues that we’ve had.

Notice, “the beginning of sorrows.” That word “beginning of sorrows” literally means birth pains. What are birth pains? Well, we call them contractions. I don’t know from experience, but I’ve had four kids, and I’ve been there watching my wife go through all the labor four times. Thank God that she’s the one that had to go through the labor, thank God for her; I mean, bless her sweet heart. But one thing about labor pains, they generally start a little light, sometimes they just come full blown, and they get stronger and closer together, right? They start and get stronger, and they get closer together. The same thing is true of, “...famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.” There’s been a whole bunch of earthquakes lately. We just had that big earthquake in Turkey and other earthquakes recently. The earthquakes are increasing and they’re, “...in divers places.” These are all general signs leading up, birth pains getting stronger and stronger, until the Lord returns and there’ll be a new heaven and a new earth. It’ll be the dawning of the New Age as Christ comes to sit upon His throne.

So, there’s deception, divisions or wars, nation against nation, there’s disasters and then there’s defamation or persecution, verses 9-10, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another,” so there’s the persecution both to the church and of the Jewish people. One of the radical, clear signs of the end of time is the increase—no doubt about it—of antisemitism. Antisemitism is on the rise, and it will reach its apex during the time of the tribulation in the Antichrist and the false prophet. Jews will be massacred wholesale. It’s a horrible, horrible time as we see the antisemitism increasing and the persecution against God’s people.

In verses 11-13 there will be a departure. This is a sign for the church today because we see so many apostatizing and turning away from the faith. “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Lastly, verse 14, sixthly, there will be declaration. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.” I do know that during the tribulation period there will be 144,000 Jews (Revelation 7) that will be sealed to actually go out and preach the gospel during the time of the tribulation. Many Jews will come to faith in Jesus during the tribulation period, which is primarily for Israel to come to Messiah, that’s why it’s called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” or “the day of the Lord.”

As you come to verse 15, down to verse 25, we see the signs of the great tribulation. This is where He gets specific. From the birth pains in verse 8, to the very specific sign of verse 15, “... the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,” Daniel 9:27, to the very specific times—specific sign, specific time, verse 21—called the “great tribulation.” That’s the sign Jesus Christ is coming back soon in His Second Coming, not the rapture, that can happen tonight (and as I always jokingly say, but it’s true, it could happen before I finish my teaching tonight). That’s not why I’m covering 51 verses, hoping for the rapture, but it could happen. There’s nothing that has to take place before the rapture of the church could happen, and Christians will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Let's read verses 15-25. "When ye therefore shall see,"—remember, Jesus was asked what signs will there be before His coming, the Second Coming, and of the end of the age? Now He's going to answer them specifically in very great detail. Verse 15, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation,"—there it is—"spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: 17 Let them which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. 19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!"—nursing mothers in those days—"But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day."

I was thinking about the attack that took place Saturday in Israel, that it happened on the Sabbath day. You see the video of the people running from the terrorists. What a picture that is! You think, Man, it's like I'm living the tribulation right now. You see how the reality of it is so near. Those people ran in horror, they were fleeing for their lives, and it happened on the Sabbath day which caught them unexpected.

Verse 21, "For then shall be great tribulation." Now, the first sign's in verse 15, "abomination of desolation;" the second sign is in verse 21, "the great tribulation." That, in itself, is the sign that Jesus gives for His Second Coming. "For then shall be great tribulation,"—and I don't believe this is for the church, I believe it's for Israel and for unbelieving Gentiles or unbelievers who will be here during this time—"such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." You look at the horrors that have taken place in Israel the last few days and think about the horrors of the tribulation are greater than ever before in man's history or ever will be.

One of the things that's really struck me, too, as I've watched the news of late, is the wickedness of mankind, the viciousness of mankind. You think you're reading about the Assyrian Empire where they used to dash the babies against the rocks. Mankind has not changed. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Only God can change a person's heart.

Verse 22, "And except those days should be shortened,"—which, by the way, means stopped, it also means to stop quickly or immediately; it doesn't mean it'll be shorter than 7 years or 3-1/2 years—"there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake,"—which I believe refers to Israel—"those days shall be shortened,"—or stopped instantly. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets,"—this is during the tribulation period—"and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. 25 Behold, I have told you before." This is really the heart of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus is giving us the signs of His Second Coming, not the rapture but His Second Coming, and of the end of the age. There's two of them, primarily. The first is, "...the abomination of desolation,"—back in verse 15—"spoken of by Daniel the prophet."

There are several places in Daniel it's mentioned, but let me give you Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 11:31. This is the episode when Israel is dwelling in the land. The church has already been

raptured, caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the Antichrist then is revealed. I don't believe the Antichrist can be revealed until the church is taken out, read 2 Thessalonians 2. There's something holding him back, and I believe it's the Holy Spirit working through the church in the world today. When the church is taken out of the world...you think the world is wicked and dark and demonically energized right now? You haven't seen nothing yet, and you don't want to see it, you want to get raptured, because the church is the light of the world. When the light of the world is taken out, what happens? The world gets very dark. I mean, if you watch the news lately you say, "How dark has this world become!" Wait until the church is taken out. The church is, "...the salt of the earth." You say, "It is so corrupt, so wicked!" It's going to get worse.

The floodgates will be opened up, the lights will go out, the church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and then the Jews will sign a covenant with the Antichrist for seven years, that they will have peace in Jerusalem. Evidently, they will be able to rebuild their temple. The Jews (verse 15) would have to have possession of the Temple Mount. They would have to be in the land first of all, and secondly, they'd have to have possession of the Temple Mount. In 1948 they became a nation in Israel, born from the past, and in 1967 they captured Jerusalem, now they could build their own temple. The problem we know is the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque, which we're hearing about as of late, is there on the Temple Mount, so the Antichrist is going to come and is actually going to take over the whole world because he will solve, temporarily and demonically, the peace crisis, the war crisis, in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the center of the story. The Bible says Jerusalem becomes the, "...burdensome stone," around the neck of the nations. What to do with Jerusalem? Not just Gaza, not just West Bank, but, "What're we going to do with Jerusalem?" This man of sin that will arise after the rapture, in Daniel he said, "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week,"—which is one seven-year period, it's the Hebrew word heptad which means seven, and he will make this covenant with them. In the midst of that week, he will break his covenant by going into the temple in Jerusalem and erecting an image of himself and commanding everyone to worship him. It's called, "the abomination of desolation." You'll read about it in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 13. You can read about it in detail, this man of sin called "the beast" whose false prophet is called the second beast coming out of the sea, and he will come to get worship as he sets up his image in the rebuilt temple.

Jesus instructs those that see this sign in Jerusalem during the tribulation, which is in the middle of it, three-and-a-half years later Christ will return, to flee, verse 16, "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains." This is not for the church—this is not about the church, this is not about the believers today. This is about Jewish people living in Israel during the time of the tribulation. Read Revelation 12 about, "...the woman who fled into the wilderness," and (Matthew 24:17) "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house...Neither...return back to take his clothes,"—just run for your lives—"And woe unto them that are with child,"—or nursing—"...in those days! 20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter,"—it's going to be hard—"neither on the sabbath day: 21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

So, two signs, “the abomination of desolation” and the tribulation itself. Now, the “great tribulation” is specifically the last half of the seven years, three-and-a-half years. The last half of the tribulation period is called the “great tribulation.” Here it is very simple, you read about it from Revelation 6-19. Just a little footnote again, and I know there’s so many pieces of the puzzle that you have to put together that are quite difficult, is that from Revelation 6 to Revelation 19, where you have the Second Coming at the end of the tribulation, the church is never mentioned or seen on earth. The church is mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. The church is in heaven in Revelation 4 and 5, but in Revelation 6, the Antichrist comes on a white horse. He has a bow but no arrows. He comes in a peace mission, makes a covenant with Israel for seven years, but during that time he will deceive them—they’ll think he’s their messiah, they’ll think he is their savior. The whole world will worship the beast, and then he will give them the right to build their temple, but then he’ll erect his image in the temple and command everyone to worship him. As I said, 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul describes this in graphic, specific detail as well.

Verse 21, “For then shall be great tribulation,” so read Revelation 6-19, the bowl judgments, the seal judgments, the wrath judgments where God pours out His wrath. Now, tribulation is coming from God. It’s really directly the wrath of God poured out upon a Christ-rejecting world for the last three-and-a-half years to be sure, but it’s a seven-year period. Verse 22, “And except those days should be shortened,”—or brought to a conclusion—“there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened,”—again, the context is a reference to God’s people, Israel, and for their sake, “...those days shall be shortened,”—and brought to an end. Verse 24, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets,”—this is a reference to the Antichrist and the false prophet, his sidekick, Revelation 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2.

From verses 26-31, we have the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I want you to note the sequential order: We have the “abomination of desolation,” we have the “great tribulation,” and then what follows is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, right? We’re not talking the rapture, we’re talking the Second Coming. Follow with me as I read, “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. 27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 28 For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

Notice verse 29, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” He’s describing the last half of the tribulation just prior to the Second Coming. Remember, the church is caught up to be with the Lord before all this happens on earth. So many times Christians are freaking out when they look at the moon and it looks kind of red. They think they’re in the tribulation and write a book called, *The Blood Moon*, or when some earthquake takes place, they think they’re in the tribulation and missed the rapture. Don’t be shaken, don’t be distraught, “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of

the night, nor of darkness.”

So, “...the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man,”—that is one of the signs. The Second Coming is the sign again itself. “...in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man,”—which is a Messianic title for Jesus taken from Daniel—“coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect,”—this is not the church, this is actually Israel. It could be the Old Testament saints which will be resurrected at the end of the tribulation. “...from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

I want you to note, I’m just going to rapidly mention them, that these are facts and truths about the Second Coming. First, it will not be a secret coming. Verse 26, “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.” If somebody says, “Hey, Jesus has come back, and He’s in Barstow.” Really. I remember years and years ago there was an ad in the LA Times, it was in the London papers, that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, had come back and was living in London, England in an apartment. Wow! Can you imagine? The Second Coming of Jesus, He’s living in London in an apartment? I don’t think so. When Jesus comes again, the verse is basically saying, it won’t be a secret coming. The Jehovah’s Witnesses actually said that Jesus has come already, but He’s come secretly—no one saw Him.

Secondly, it will be personal and visible, verse 27, “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” That’s the Second Coming, that’s not the rapture. Now, what a contrast. The rapture is only seen by believers—we’re caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The world doesn’t see it, the world doesn’t know about it, all of the sudden we just disappear. But in the Second Coming, “...and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him,” it’ll be visible, and it’ll be glorious!

Thirdly, it shall come at the end of the tribulation. Look at verse 28. He says, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. 29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days,”—this is when the Second Coming takes place, at the end of the tribulation. Fourthly, it will be preceded by signs, “...and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” Isaiah 13:9-10, Revelation 6:12-14, all describe this during the time of the tribulation. Fifthly, verse 30, it will cause the nations to mourn, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.” Sixthly, it will be a glorious appearing, “...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Read Revelation 19.

Lastly, seventhly, verse 31, it will be Israel’s restoration. “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds,”—or from the four corners of heaven—“from one end of heaven to the other.” And you can add an eighth, which is not in this text, it will fulfill God’s promise to David that the Messiah would sit upon his

throne.

Now, verses 32-35, the “parable of the fig tree.” “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: 33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see,”—notice this phrase—“all these things, know that it is near,”—that is, My Second Coming—“even at the doors. 34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. 35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” Again, this is where a lot of people get the “parable of the fig tree” all confused. I realize, although I could really keep jammin here, that I’m not going to get to 51 verses. I can’t promise you I’ll finish it next week, but I probably will because I can’t resist.

The misinterpretation of the “parable of the fig tree” is to say that the fig tree represents Israel, the fig tree budded in 1948, and a generation is 40 years or 70 years or 80 years (since they’ve had to change their dates, they’ve had to change the generation). Any interpretation of a verse of Scripture or prophecy that allows you to set a date is a wrong interpretation.

Now, if you miss the rapture—which I hope you won’t—and you’re here on earth during the tribulation and you see the abomination of desolation, you can set your watch. It’s going to be about three-and-a-half years. You might not know the exact day or hour, which the Bible says, but you’ll know it’s getting close. The rapture could happen at any moment, so you better be ready. But if you miss the rapture, you can get saved in the tribulation, it’s going to be very difficult—most likely will be put to death for your faith. If you are here, based on the abomination of desolation, based on the tribulation being the last half, three-and-a-half years, you can know that it’s coming very soon and you can be ready. That’s what the whole context of the Olivet Discourse is all about.

I believe that the “parable of the fig tree” is actually a parable of the fig tree. Wow! How profound is that? An actual fig tree, that when a fig tree buds, it buds in late spring and so it starts in early summer. It tells you that summer is nigh. When you’re in Israel and you see the fig tree starting to bud, you know something’s close. What is it? Summer is almost here.

Verse 33, “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things,”—what things? The things in the context of Matthew 24, the things of the tribulation—verse 15, the abomination of desolation; verse 21, the great tribulation; the moon turning to blood, the sun stops giving her light, the earth is shaken, all of the signs of the tribulation, “these things.” The generation living at the time of these signs will not be eliminated or gone until they see Christ return. That’s what he’s talking about. That’s the “generation” that will see the coming again of Jesus Christ in the Second Coming. He’s not telling us that the birth of Israel in 1948 is something we can actually strategize of 40 years, Jesus is going to come in 1988, and we can predict the date of Jesus’ coming. It’s just a picture of an actual fig tree, when it buds it tells you summer’s here. These signs of the tribulation tell you that Christ’s coming is nigh, even at the door.

From this point on in the sermon on the Mount, and we’ll wrap it up next week, Jesus exhorts to readiness, watchfulness, and faithfulness. In light of what’s going on in the world right now—

globalism, demonically-energized world, the weakening of America, the war in the middle east, prediction that Russia with Iran will invade Israel, keep your eye on that, which could happen just before or just after the rapture, giving rise to the Antichrist out of Europe, coveted sign—all this is ready to go and the stage is quite set. Jesus exhorts us, “Be ready. Be watching, and be faithful.” Amen?

As you look around the world today, Jesus Christ is coming soon. You say, “Well, Christians have been saying that for years.” I know, He’s coming soon! The Bible says they’re ignorant of the fact that there was a world that...we stopped just short of Noah, the signs of the times of Noah, that just before the flood came and destroyed all that generation, they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage. They knew that something was going to happen—Noah was building a big old boat, call it a big ol honkin’ boat (you can actually go see it in Kentucky if you want to)—that something’s going to happen. But when it started to rain, it was too late. They weren’t ready. The Lord shut the door.

My conclusion tonight is: Are you ready? You may not be able to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and figure it all out. If you’re not born again, if you haven’t trusted Jesus as your Savior, if the rapture happens tonight, you’ll be left behind, and it could happen tonight. Be ready. Be ready. Be watchful. Be faithful. Let’s pray.