



Loving Jesus, Loving People, Plowing a Counter-Culture

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 24:1-35

KEY POINT: Even as the world turns upside down, Jesus reigns, and his followers carry his Gospel forward.

FOR LEADERS

- Welcome to 2020! Hello all, and welcome to a brand new year of discipleship in Communities with one another! Thank you for continuing to help love and lead our church toward Jesus! This Winter 2020 Season will run for 10 weeks, ending the week of Sunday, March 29th.
Podcast Update: As per popular request, the podcast that we record each week for our leaders is now available on popular podcasting channels. Search for "Emergence Discipleship Podcast" in iTunes, Spotify, Google, iHeartRadio, etc. to join us each week as we dive into the weekly sermons and specific themes that God's Word offers us throughout Matthew.
Leader, be mindful: This week, talking about eschatology, end times, the destruction of the temple, the fulfillment of prophecy, the abomination of desolation, and when Jesus is coming back, PROBABLY isn't one discussion you're going to want to just "phone in." This section of Scripture is some of the most hotly debated, misunderstood, and even confusing sections of Scripture in all of the Bible. Check out the podcast this week for more insight into how to lead through this week's particular challenges, as well as a deeper dive into eschatology with Matthew 24.

GETTING STARTED

- [1] Communities Video: Watch this week's community extras video!
[2] Icebreaker: What is your biggest personal goal for 2020?
[3] Opener: What stood out to you from the sermon this week? Did you find anything particularly helpful or eye opening?

SIGNS OF JESUS' COMING

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 24:1-3

For the Jewish people in Jesus' day, the temple was everything - it's where God was said to dwell among them, where they worshiped Him, and even a partial proof of God's promises to them through the prophets. When Jesus explains that the Temple is about to be completely destroyed, the disciples are shocked, and ask Jesus both when this will happen, and how they'll know.

- [1] Try to imagine how this would feel if you heard it. What institutions in your own life would devastate you if, for some reason, they came to an end? Do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing that we care so much about these things?
[2] Why do you think people are so fascinated with questions about the end times? When is it healthy to dwell on such things, and when does it become unhealthy?

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 24:4-14

As Ryan explained in the sermon this week, Jesus first answers the disciples by tempering their expectations and then tells them of what is about to take place.



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- [3]** Consider what Jesus says in vv. 4-8. In your opinion, what do you think should be a Christian’s response to these things?
- [4]** In verses 9-14, Jesus teaches us to not only expect persecution, but false teaching and the growing “cold” of many in the Church. Have you ever experienced these things in your own life? Give some examples.
- [5]** In the sermon, Ryan pointed out how Christians are called to reach the very people who will hate them (vv. 9, 14). If that’s the case, then how can Christians overcome the impulse to make enemies of those who hate them because of their faith?
- [6]** What do you think would be some effective ways of reaching people who don’t like Christians with the Gospel?

LET THE READER UNDERSTAND

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 24:15-28

In verses 15-28, Jesus foretells of the destruction of the temple, by referencing the “abomination of desolation” in several prophecies (Dan. 8:13, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). This event took place in 167 BC under a wicked invading ruler, but now, Jesus says, an even greater fulfillment is about to take place. (Indeed, we know that this fulfillment happens in 70 AD when the Romans destroy the Temple).

- [7]** Why do you think the destruction of this temple is so monumental in Jesus’ perspective? How do you think the fall of the temple would have impacted the early Christians’ understanding of what God was doing in and through Jesus?
- [8]** In verse 27, Jesus says that his eventual “coming” (his *second* coming) will be like lightning. What do you think this imagery is meant to teach us about the nature of Jesus’ second coming?

SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 24:29-35

In the sermon this week, Ryan explained how this passage is often confusing because we like to associate this imagery with a literal depiction of the world. To Jesus’ followers, however, these images would have sooner called to mind Old Testament references talking about God’s judgment on powerful nations.

- [9]** In what way should Jesus’ words here refocus Christians on the Great Commission and sharing the Gospel?
- [10]** In your own words, how would you express the hope a Christian should have, despite current events or calamity?

PRAYER

- [11]** Pray that Jesus would help you to “endure to the end” regardless of what is to happen in the world, and trust God’s love toward you in any situation. Pray also for unity and growth together with your group.

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LEADER'S COMMENTARY

Verses 1-3:

- There are 3 parts to this conversation Jesus has with his disciples: 1.) He sets their expectations, 2.) He foretells what is going to happen in the near future (and how they should respond) and 3.) Tells them about His second coming
- There are good institutions – like country, family, churches, jobs, etc – that are good and we should care about, but our commitment to Jesus should never be *dependent* upon these institutions. People fail us, and tragedies happen, but our faith needs to be of such character that it is founded on the promises of Jesus, and not human institution – especially in a world which is so uncertain.

Verses 4-8:

- A Christian's response to wars and rumors of wars is to trust Jesus, regardless. Again, our faith should not be focused and dependent upon the existence of a building (like the temple), or government, or a home, etc, but rather founded on the promises of Jesus.
- Jesus foretells of false Messiah's that we see all over in our culture today. Rest assured, Jesus' second coming will not be secret information revealed by only a select few with some kind of "special knowledge." Rather, Jesus' coming will be like lightning – a crashing, blinding entrance that is seen and heard everywhere.

Verses 9-14:

- As Christians, we should expect persecution. The very people we are called to reach will hate us for Jesus' sake! If anything, that should be something of an encouragement to the Christian who feels the tension of ministry in the 21st century. Just because someone isn't "interested" or doesn't care about the faith, or even argumentative or belittles you, doesn't mean we shouldn't continue to love them! Remember Jesus' prayer on the cross – "*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*" Jesus was praying forgiveness over the very people crucifying him. And it's this that Jesus calls us to. But take heart – if you spoke Jesus' name in that day people would raise up their fists to stone you to death, these days most people just raise an eyebrow. Surely, we can endure such persecution.
- Jesus' warning, however, should be sobering to us – we should be careful that we do not grow cold, but endure to the end of our faith. The human tendency is to avoid anyone we don't like or don't want to be around, but our faith calls us to the opposite. The purpose of the Christian life is not to live in a cushy safe bubble until we die or Jesus comes back – No, we're called to the front lines – to reach people who desperately long for the truth they don't yet even understand.

Verses 15-28:

- In these verses, Jesus is predicting the destruction of the temple. This is VERY often misinterpreted as language that is specifically foretelling the end of the earth, but we believe this to be an oversight.

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- The “abomination of desolation” is a specific reference, and a call back to the prophet Daniel who spoke of a coming ruler who would defile the temple in Dan. 8:13, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11. This event took place in 167 BC. Jesus here is calling back to this to foretell what shall happen again in the near future, when the Romans siege Jerusalem and sack the temple in 70 AD.

Verses 29-35:

- These verses are challenging because we are often taught to associate this imagery with the end of the world, but Jesus’ disciples would have been thinking to events in the past, not necessarily the future. The language Jesus uses here is imagery that has occurred before in Scripture. “Sun, moon and stars darkening” and “stars falling from heaven” are phrases used in passages speaking of God’s judgment on powerful nations – ref. Dan. Isaiah 13:10, 14:12, 34:4, Joel 2:10. “Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” comes from Daniel 7:13-14, which talks about how the Son of Man will reign over his Kingdom forever.
- Seen this way, Jesus is not yet speaking about his second coming, but about *how* he will receive his kingdom following his death and resurrection.
- This further makes sense of passages where Jesus speaks about *when* this will take place. In verse 34, Jesus says that “this generation” will see these events. In 26:64, he tells this also to the high priest. In 10:23 he says it will happen before the disciples finish going throughout “all the towns of Israel. In 16:28 he tells the disciples they will “not taste death” until this occurs. All of this points to suggest that the events Jesus describes here are not predictions of his second coming and the “end of the world,” but rather the wars which are to come, and the defilement and destruction of the temple.