

It's the End of the World (Matthew 24:1-44)

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks, Pastor William. So I'll be reading from Matthew 24, verses 1 to 44. Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.

Do you see all these things? He asked, truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another. Everyone will be thrown down. As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately.

Tell us, they said, when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Jesus answered, watch out that no one deceives you, for many will come in my name claiming I am the Messiah and will deceive many.

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but to see that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of the birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

[1 : 1 9] At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

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. So when you see, standing in the holy place, the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel, let the reader understand.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.

How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equaled again.

If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. At that time, if anyone says to you, look, here is the Messiah, or there he is, do not believe it.

[2 : 4 6] For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, there he is out in the wilderness, do not go out, or here he is in the inner rooms, do not believe it.

For as lightning that comes from the east, visible in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, the vultures will gather.

Immediately after the distress of those days, 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 will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn, when they see the Son of Man coming, on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

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. Now learn this from the fig tree.

[3 : 54] As soon as its twigs get tender, and its leaves come out, you know that the summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass until the end all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Then go to the day and the hour unknown. But about that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, not only the Father.

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark.

And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field, one will be taken, and the other left.

[4 : 53] Two women will be grinding with a hand mill, one will be taken, the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

So, you must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Thank you.

Hello everybody. My name's Nathan. If we haven't met, I'm pastor down at Papacarabaptist. It's lovely to be here with you and open God's Word, and it's lovely to open this passage, even though it seems tricky.

I really think it's got a lot to say to us and practically help us navigate life today. So please keep it open in front of you, because I'm going to be referring to it, and you might think, what?

Jesus said what now? You want to look down and see that, yes, he actually did say that. Before I get into it, a couple of things. For those who have been coming on and off for a few years now, a quick life update from me.

[6 : 07] In my home, we had our second daughter a couple of months ago, so I haven't slept. So who knows what I'm going to say. If you'd like to see photos of her, her name's Amelia.

If you'd like to see photos of her and hear my claims that she's smiling, I'm here after the service. But we're very happy she's healthy. We've got an older daughter who's two now and tearing down the house and saying all kinds of words.

So we're happy, and life is full, and things are good. Last thing I'll say before I pray and we get into it. Do you guys still have groups after the service where you get together and talk?

Sometimes you talk about the sermon and other things. I really recommend, after this sermon, you get into a group and talk about it for two reasons. One, this is a big topic.

We're talking about the end of the world, so a lot to talk about. Two, I'm going to talk as fast as I can. I still won't have enough time to get through every detail, so there'll be a lot to talk about. So this week is a good week.

[7 : 09] If you haven't joined one, you can join one and talk about the passage because there's a lot to digest. Really helpful for us, but a lot to think about.

All right, that's enough. I'm going to pray, and then we'll get into it. Gracious Father, we thank you that in the midst of this world, in the midst of our troubles and our joys, we know that you are sitting on the throne, that you are in control.

Whatever we might feel, the anxieties we might feel, we know we can come to you in faith and trust because you are powerful and you direct our history so that your gospel can be proclaimed.

Father, I pray that you'd impress that upon us today as we think about what the Lord Jesus said. We'd realize that now is the time where we may preach the gospel and tell others about you, and we'd be encouraged to do that.

I pray this in Jesus' powerful name. Amen. So apparently, the University of Chicago, they have this thing called a doomsday clock.

[8 : 19] It's, you know, on the side of the road, you see like a fire danger warning. It's like one of those, but it tells us how close we are to the end of the world.

So scientists get together every now and again and they set this clock and the closer to midnight is, the more perilous our world seems to be.

How close would you put it? You're a scientist, pretend you're a scientist. How perilous a position is our world in? Well, this year, 2025, the experts have got together.

They've set the clock at 89 seconds to midnight, which means, to translate that, they think things are pretty bad. They think we're just, you know, a few seconds away from the end of the world.

It all could end. And for several years now, they've been predicting that things are bad. Things are looking bleak. This all could go up in smoke. So, if you've come to church looking to relax and de-stress and, you know, whatever before the week begins, I'm sorry, we're talking about the end of the world and it's intense, but we're talking about that because that's what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24.

[9 : 36] What I've found really striking is that today it seems a lot more acceptable to talk about the world potentially ending, an impending catastrophe.

When I was young, if you were talking about the apocalypse, you were considered a nutcase. You probably were a nutcase. Today, everybody's talking about it.

Whether it's triggered by, you know, the war in Ukraine or artificial intelligence and how it's going to change the world in the next two years or something Elon Musk tweeted about, you know, whatever he's saying now.

Many, many people have a deep sense of alarm and anxiety that maybe it's all going to end. Civilization is going to collapse.

Something's going to happen. And in that context, it's really good to hear what Jesus says about the end of the world. What does Jesus say about the end?

[10 : 35] Maybe the alarm that we might feel is the same thing that the disciples are feeling at the end of chapter 23. Jesus has been teaching in the temple.

It's crescendoed to this big, you know, he's got stuck in to the Pharisees condemning them and lamenting over Jerusalem. They've rejected the prophets. They've rejected the word of God and so they're doomed.

Chapter 24 begins with Jesus leaving the temple for the last time. And as they step out, the disciples are awestruck by the magnificence magnificence of the temple complex.

And Jesus says, you see all these, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

Now if you're an Israelite, that's an alarming thing to hear. The temple of Jerusalem, it's the political, cultural, spiritual center. It's the center of the world, the most important place for everything.

[11 : 45] And Jesus is saying it's going to be demolished. It's like if you were walking through London and you were with the best preacher you knew and he was explaining Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey and the Big Ben were all going to be burnt to the ground.

You would be thinking, that sounds like a catastrophe. That sounds like the end of the world. That's alarming. That sounds like an apocalypse. And that's why the disciples ask, in verse 3, tell us, when will these things be?

I think they're referring to when will the temple be destroyed? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? You see, they ask about three things and in their minds they're all related.

For them, the temple being destroyed, Jesus returning and the end of the world probably will happen at once. And, if they're feeling the sense of panic, alarm, maybe the word, as Jesus is talking about the end of the world, I think they might be feeling a very similar thing to our world, to maybe some of us here today.

I don't know about you but I've heard so many predictions that the world's going to end somehow in the last year. So let's look at how Jesus answers this question.

[13 : 10] What does Jesus say about the end? Well, I think there are three instructions that Jesus gives us. Don't be alarmed, don't be deceived, don't be unaware. Don't be alarmed, don't be deceived, don't be unaware.

First, don't be alarmed. Look at verses six to eight. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed for this must take place but the end is not yet.

The nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these things are the beginning of the birth pains.

So what's going to happen? Earthquakes in various places, wars, rumors of wars, general earth-wide strife is going to happen.

According to ChatGPT, there has not been a time in recorded history when there hasn't been at least one war happening somewhere in the world.

[14 : 13] There's always wars happening and if there's not a war that you can think of, there's probably the rumor of one. The world is filled with trouble and it will be filled with trouble whether it's caused by war or natural disaster.

Jesus is very clear these things are not the end. It's the beginning of the birth pains. Jesus goes further.

So if we categorize wars and natural disasters as sort of general strife, general tribulation, there's also specific strife for God's people.

I think the word in verse 9, I'm using the ESV, starts with then. I think it means at the same time rather than after that is how I take that. Meaning Jesus is focusing on what will happen to his disciples during this time of general strife.

What's going to happen to God's people? The specific strife for God's people? Well, persecution. Verse 9. Infighting in the churches and church splits. Verse 10. False teaching.

[15 : 20] Verse 11. Worldliness and falling away. Verse 12. Sounds unpleasant, doesn't it? See, those things are not things we'd like to have as a part of our church and I hope none of these things touch you guys here or us back at PBC.

but at the same time when we look around the church, look around churches nationally, globally, these kinds of things are things we sadly see all too often.

Church splits, people falling away, false teaching. We've thought about persecution just today. See, what's Jesus saying?

Well, to understand what Jesus is saying we need to think about what causes alarm amongst people today. What kind of things make people anxious, anxious to the point where they think the world is going to end?

Well, it's wars, isn't it? It's natural disasters, things like that, the general strife that rumbles on. What makes people within the church anxious?

[16 : 40] It's persecution, infighting, perhaps worldliness. I think Jesus is listing these things which he knows will alarm his people in future generations.

He knows that these kinds of, this kind of strife, these kinds of tribulation will cause anxiety and his people will cause alarm, will cause people to think, maybe it's the end.

And to those things Jesus says, see that you're not alarmed because this is not the end. War, earthquakes, natural disaster, famines, church splits, the very things that cause existential dread generation after generation which make our world and our neighbours afraid that the end is coming.

Jesus is saying these are not the end. If you know anything about labour pains, you'll know it's impossible to predict how long it's going to take.

The pain tells you that the baby is coming but you really don't know when that first contraction hits whether it's going to be a few hours or a few days. In the same way Jesus says when war breaks out and you're afraid when disease spread when cities flood when false teachers rise up when churches split these are a birth pain they don't indicate how long this will take.

[18 : 22] Follower of Jesus do not be alarmed these things are not the end of the world. The reason we see in verses 13 and 14 which we've already heard but the one who endures to the end will be saved and this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

See in the midst of war and earthquake and famine don't be alarmed because the gospel of the kingdom is going to be proclaimed throughout the whole world. The things that alarm our world the things that alarm those around us are not alarming to us because we're focused on the good news of the kingdom the kingdom that is coming.

Follower of Jesus do not be alarmed trust in Jesus that he's going to return that his kingdom will come and that before that his message will go out to nation after nation spreading throughout the whole world.

We don't need to fear. We don't need to be alarmed. We don't need to join the hysteria which we see so often because we know the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom that matters, is advancing all the time.

The world is in turmoil. The church may be in disaster but Jesus is still reigning and he's still saving people who trust in his message. All nations will hear before the end comes.

[19 : 54] So don't be alarmed. The kingdom of heaven will triumph over any war. The message of Christ is more powerful than any earthquake. The gospel can sustain any Christian until the end.

Don't be alarmed. Believe the words of Christ that they'll save until the end. That's his first instruction.

In light of the end of the world, don't be alarmed. Second instruction, don't be deceived. Now, here's the thing. If you go online and google Matthew 24, 15 to 28, you will find dozens and dozens and dozens of wild and wonderful interpretation of these verses.

If William has seemed a bit stressed in the past week, it's because I've been messaging him with all these crazy things I'm going to say because of these verses. But sadly, I think a faithful explanation of them is not as wonderful as what you might be able to find on the internet.

If you look at verses 17 to 20, you'll notice, so there's the part about this abomination that causes desolation, we get excited, but verses 17 to 20, you'll notice it's all about escaping.

[21 : 11] If you're in the field, don't go back home and get your sweatshirt, just run. Now, think about it. If this is talking about the end of the world, you know, Jesus returning or, you know, worldwide sort of tribulation or something like that, where are you going to run to?

If this is global, then running doesn't do anything. Running only helps you if this is localized. You can only flee from localized events.

You can't flee from the end of the world. And so for that reason, I think Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That is, after all, the question that the disciples have asked, is it not?

They're saying, what are you talking about this temple being destroyed? And that event would have felt like the end of the world to them. It would have felt like, you know, if someone invaded New Zealand, it would kind of feel like the end of the world.

And I think Jesus is talking about this huge historic event, which will happen 30 or 40 years down the track from where they are, as an example of what he's been saying, that during this catastrophic, cataclysmic event in their minds, they shouldn't be alarmed, but they also shouldn't be deceived.

[22 : 29] There will be catastrophic events taking place, sometimes, in some places, for some people, it will feel like the end of the world.

world. But it isn't. There's an ancient Jewish historian called Josephus who was actually present at the fall of Jerusalem in 78 AD.

He said this, neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did in any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was from the beginning of the world.

So he's saying both the suffering, suffered more than any other cities, but also they were more wicked than any other city. What's worse, or perhaps more interesting, is that Josephus himself went, he was fighting, so the Romans, the ones that destroyed Jerusalem, he was Jewish, but he was with the Romans, and he went to the wall to try to persuade people, if you flee now, you can escape, we're not going to murder you, just come on out because we're coming in.

But they refused. And so he details the false prophets who were proclaiming that God would send his Messiah to deliver them. And one of the leaders in this revolt against the Roman Empire was captured wearing the garments of a Judean king.

[23 : 53] And the imagery, I think, it couldn't be clearer. Here is a man who thought he was going to save the city. He was the new ruler of the Jews, he was the new Christ, leading this people to freedom, and he was so devastatingly wrong.

And against that backdrop, I think Jesus' message to his followers makes a lot of sense. Verse 23 and 24, then if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it.

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. You see, as much as Jesus is saying, don't be alarmed, he's saying, don't be deceived.

The two go hand in hand so often. Don't get caught up in all the panic. Even though Jerusalem, the center of your world, is falling, don't get caught up in that.

Don't be deceived. Don't listen to the claims of would-be messiahs, that this is how you're going to be saved. Don't go along with people who promise another kind of salvation.

[25 : 08] Wherever there's alarm, wherever there's panic and war and earthquake, there will always be people ready to claim they can save the day. Don't believe them. Don't be deceived.

Follower of Jesus, look to Jesus alone. Don't be deceived by these other claims. Look to Jesus Christ, the only one who can save.

Don't be alarmed. Don't be deceived. Lastly, don't be unaware. Now, just to be clear for the person who's really reading closely, I want to tell you how I think this passage is fitting together because it is complicated and if you want to talk about it afterwards, I'd love to.

But Jesus is saying there will be, so the first point we saw, Jesus, general tribulation, wars, earthquakes, problems in the church, all generations everywhere will face these sort of general tribulations.

And while these tribulations are happening, the gospel is going out. And then he's talked about Jerusalem, the fall of Jerusalem, which fits into this is another one of the tribulations that's going to happen.

[26 : 19] And Jesus says, finally, don't be unaware. In verses 27 to 31, he's clear that after the tribulations, after all these problems, he will return and the age will end.

The end of the world is coming and it's when Jesus comes and the good news is you can't miss it. Verse 30, then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other.

You see, he's saying when Jesus returns, Jesus is saying when I come back, you'll all see it. No one's going to miss it. No one's going to not know what's happened. Everybody's going to see it and know that it's happening.

And then Jesus says, look at the fig tree. There's an illustration of how you ought to live. We can see it in trees today. When new shoots start to grow, new leaves start to appear, it means summer is coming.

But then he uses a, you know, he says something in verse 33 and 34 which we find confusing or is easy to misunderstand. He says, so also, so you can look at a tree and sort of know what time of year it is.

[27 : 46] He says, so also you see all these things. You know that he is near at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Now it's confusing for two reasons. It seems like Jesus is saying, look at the signs and you'll be able to predict when I come. It seems like he's saying that but then he says, this generation will see the signs.

And if I've seen the signs, they lived a long time ago, what's going on here? But what we need to see is that he's not saying what we so often do. Look at the signs and you'll be able to predict when Jesus is going to come.

That's not what he's saying. Because he's about to say in verse 36, concerning the day and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

And in verse 44, therefore you must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. So it's not about predicting the end. We won't be able to do that. And between these two statements, Jesus uses a bunch of illustrations.

[28 : 55] It will be like the days leading up to the flood, he says. No one expected that. No one imagined that. They'd never even seen rain. How were they going to predict a flood of that magnitude?

And Jesus says when he comes, two people will be grinding at the mill. It's like two people will be driving in traffic to work. It will be such a normal day and then one is taken.

No one, and notice too, it's believer and unbeliever. Neither of them expected it. No one will know. So Jesus is coming, but no one knows when it's going to happen.

We'll all just be going about our lives and then it will happen. And so his instruction is to not try and figure it out, try to predict it, but be aware and stay awake.

So what's the sign? What are we learning? What's the lesson of the fig tree? What are the signs we're looking for? Well, Jesus is telling us, I think, when we feel strife, when we see tribulations, when disaster and death touch us, as they will every generation and every life, that's a sign.

[30 : 12] When we see this suffering, that our world faces, we are to remember that our world is growing ripe for redemption.

This time of tribulation and suffering, this time which is in a lot of ways very awful, is a time when the gospel can be proclaimed and people can believe.

We should remember that this is the time when people must repent, because an end is coming, when that will no longer be possible. Now is the time when people are ripe.

It won't be so when Jesus returns. Tribulation now is a sign that the gospel must be proclaimed, and that we must trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man coming in glory.

So Jesus is saying, don't be alarmed, don't be deceived, but also don't be unaware. These things point to what time it is. It's the time before Jesus returns.

[31 : 16] It's the time of gospel proclamation. It's the time to be awake and alert and busy doing what our Lord commanded. You see, in some respects, this doomsday clock in Chicago is a wonderful motivation for us believers.

the signs that we live in this time of gospel proclamation are so clear that even non-believers see them. Even non-believers feel that urgency.

These tribulations are telling us that Jesus hasn't come yet, but he will. And until he does, his kingdom's got to go forward and forward and forward.

We must tell others about him. So when you hear the rumbling of global strife, when trouble touches your life, my life, and the lives of those around us, or even when Elon Musk sends another tweet and we all get outraged, remember what time it is.

Don't be alarmed, don't be deceived, don't be unaware. This is the time of gospel proclamation. Jesus will return, his gospel will prevail. Now's the time to tell people.

[32 : 38] Let's pray. Father, I thank you that as we face a world of trouble, that we know you reign.

We don't have to worry, we don't have to be alarmed, we don't have to be caught up in whatever others are caught up in. We can trust you and tell others of you. We thank you we have such confidence that when you come we will know that those who believe in you won't miss it, won't miss out on anything.

But as we seek to trust you and honour you, we have clarity for how we are to live in a difficult, strife filled world.

So Father, help us not to be alarmed, help us not to be deceived and go off chasing other things, but help us to be aware of the time that it is. This tremendous opportunity that we have to tell others about you.

Help us make the most of this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.