

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 11/04/2021

Mini Series – “Making Disciples” Part 18

Matthew 24 v 1-31 “Discipleship in the light of Jesus’ return.” Pt 1

All scripture references are taken from the ESV

Pt 1 The signs of the times – Matthew 24:1-31 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And 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. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.⁹ “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away^[a] and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the

corpse is, there the vultures will gather.²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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. ³¹ 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.

There is increasing concern among scientists over how long this earth can sustain humanity. God has given humanity the responsibility to care for this earth, though that is not the main reason for our existence, which is to know God and to honour him by delighting in him. However, it is widely accepted that the earth, in its current form, is not going to be able to sustain humanity indefinitely. All the studies that show this miss one vital fact.

Jesus is going to return to this earth to make all things new.

This earth does have a ‘use by’ date. That date is known only to God, who has determined it. It is a date called ‘The day of the Lord’, the day when Jesus will return to this earth. Peter talks of it in **2 Peter 3:10** (see p4), but he learned about it from the Lord Jesus Christ, as we see from **Matt 24** (above), where Jesus teaches about the end of time. As we saw from the Great Commission (**Matt 28: 19-20** see p4) Jesus expects the church to teach obedience to everything he commanded, which includes his teaching on his second coming. Disciples of Jesus need to know:

- that Jesus is coming back and what the signs are that point to his return
- how we are to prepare ourselves and what will happen on judgement day

We are to be a people who live with the expectation that Jesus is coming back

Most of us rarely think about the fact that Jesus is coming back to bring this current age to an end. We have become so caught up with life as it is now, and are so conditioned by secular media which denies the existence of God that

we have lost our vision of how God says he is going to bring this current world to a conclusion.

Because of this we are not leading the godly lives that Jesus calls us to, nor are we passionate about telling people the gospel. We are not prepared for, and looking

forward to, the day when Jesus returns, though we are preparing and looking forward to many short term events, like the lifting of lockdown which is not certain to happen.

We have become apathetic over the most certain event that will ever happen in the future.

What does Jesus say about how the world will end?

Jesus spoke of a time when the temple would be destroyed (v2 above), and the disciples wanted to know when this would happen, as well as the signs of his coming and the end of the age (v3). Jesus responds by telling them of three stages in future world history as we head towards the return of Jesus.

1. The beginning of birth pains (vv4-13 above).

We are to expect a time of suffering for both the world and the church. For the world there will be:

- Deception at the hands of false messiahs, claiming to be from Jesus (or to be Jesus) and will lead many astray
- Wars and rumours of wars, and earthquakes in various places

For God's people, there will be suffering through persecution and martyrdom, as well as deception at the hands of false prophets. Many who claim to be Christians will stop following Jesus, and even betray other believers.

It will be a time of suffering for the world and the church, and indeed, we can see this happening today. This does **not** mean the return of Jesus is imminent. In vv5-8 (above), Jesus tells us very clearly that when we see these things, **the end is not yet**. The birth pains are at the beginning stage – they come in waves, and this is just the start of the birth process. No one know exactly when the baby will arrive, though it clearly will! It is the same with Jesus' return.

All that we see, in terms of suffering for the world and the church, **are things that mark life on earth during this gospel age**, and are reminders that Jesus will return at some point in the future. We may not know exactly when that is (his return may or may not be imminent), but

the birth pains have started and they WILL result in the return of Jesus.

Jesus gives us one very clear sign about his return – an activity that, when it is completed, will signal the events just before his return (v14 above). Every nation needs to hear about him and his work to save us from sin, and only when every nation has heard the Gospel will the next stage of Jesus' return happen.

2. The great tribulation (vv15ff above).

In these verses, Jesus speaks of a time of suffering coming on earth that is unlike anything that has happened so far. In the most likely interpretation, Jesus is describing events that took place in AD70 (the destruction of the Temple) and also what will happen at the end of time, weaving the two together. Jesus refers to the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet. Daniel spoke of a rebellion against God by humanity as a whole, led by an individual who had power to deceive the world. This individual (the man of lawlessness or the antichrist) would make war against God's people. Paul writes of him in **2 Thess 2:3-4** (see p4), and John also spoke of an antichrist figure, writing in AD96, after the fall of Jerusalem. This period will also be marked by false messiahs and false prophets who perform miraculous signs, deceiving people into thinking they really are who they say they are. It will be a terrible time of evil and suffering (v21-22 above), but Jesus teaches us that **God is still in control.**

God has the power to cut short this time, to stop the rule of Satan and his human agent, the antichrist. God has the power to bring to an end this godless rebellion against himself.

How will he do this? Paul tells us in **2 Thess 2:8** 'And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming'. This heralds the next stage.

3. The return of Jesus (vv 29ff above)

No one will be able to miss this event (v27, 29)! You won't need someone to tell you Jesus has come. When Jesus returns, he will destroy the anti-christ, cutting short his rule, and will bring with him the souls of every believer who has died to be resurrected, so that we will enjoy uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus forever.

We have seen what Jesus has seen fit to share with us about these times. We are not called on to speculate about what he hasn't told us, but rather we need to see what he expects us to do in the light of his return.

This teaching is given so that we might live differently.

a) We are to live with the expectation every day that Jesus is coming back, as the early church did.

We can be sure that this will happen because some of what he said has already happened. He prophesied the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. 70 years later it happened exactly as he said it would. He has prophesied events that will take place during this gospel age, such as wars and earthquakes. These have happened.

We can have confidence that the great tribulation and Jesus' return will happen as he said.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us faith to believe this so that we **really** believe it.

b) We are to seek to live as the godly people we will be when Jesus returns.

John tells us 'when he (Jesus) appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is'. (1 John 3: 2).

Jesus speaks of the need for endurance (v13 above), to not be deceived (vv4, 23) and to not be afraid (v5). We are to be living faith filled lives that result in obedience to Christ. Peter also brings us this message. (2 Peter 3:11-12 see p4)

God has saved us from sin so that we will not only enjoy fellowship with him, but also live in obedience to him, knowing that we will one day stand in his presence.

c) We are to live proclaiming the good news about Jesus (v14 above)

The only way anyone will stand in the final judgement is if they are trusting in Jesus Christ.

Jesus alone is the one who can ensure we will not be condemned to eternal death at the last judgement, having:

- made atonement for our sins
- lived a perfect life to secure a righteousness for us

That message needs to be proclaimed to **ALL** nations, including nations where there are false messiahs, wars, natural disasters and persecution. God's people are called to go to these hard places to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is not to be silent in the face of danger and threats.

During this period of birth pains, rather than speculating about how or when the end will come, **we are to unite in giving ourselves to see unreached peoples reached with the message of salvation in Jesus' name.**

We may not be called to go, but we all are called to pray, asking God to send workers into the harvest field (even our own children and grandchildren) and to bring gospel fruit. There are many places in the world where people are yet to hear the gospel message that we have had access to for centuries. Many in our own country also need to hear the gospel. **Pray for those unreached in far off lands and both pray and take the message out to those nearby.**

Jesus taught us to pray 'Your kingdom come, your will be done'. Even today you can be praying for this to happen amongst those who still need to hear the gospel.

We need to lift our eyes above this world, to focus on eternity and the return of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

2 Peter 3:10 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies^[b] will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Matthew 28:19-20 ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

2 Thess 2:3-4 ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness^[b] is revealed, the son of destruction,^[c] ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object

of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

2 Peter 3:11-12 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in **lives of holiness and godliness,** ¹² **waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,** because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!