

The End...Then the Beginning

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(for All Church Bilingual Worship: translation Ryan Leung)

Matthew 24:1-14

¹ As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² Then he asked them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.' ³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' ⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumours 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 this is but the beginning of the birth pangs. ⁹ Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. ¹⁰ Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But anyone who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this good news the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

Thank you, Holy Land Travelers, for giving us a taste of your trip! We have read and heard the Bible passage that was highlighted for you during your trip. We have seen photos and videos that document your memories! We have heard you share about how this pilgrimage has affected you and your faith!

Someone commented that the places that you saw, the streets you walked on in Jerusalem, the boat you climbed into on the sea of Galilee – all of that made the Bible and the stories of Jesus come alive for you. "Seeing the Temple – the destruction of the Temple just as Jesus predicted made Jesus' prophecy real!" you shared.

The tone of voice and the excitement in your eyes told me that your faith was deeper than before seeing the temple ruins. Your faith was stronger than before this trip to experience the scenes of Jesus' ministry! This must mean that Jesus' promise of the Kingdom to come is just as real!!!



Seeing is believing...for us and for Doubting Thomas, right? Remember Doubting Thomas? He was the disciple who needed to see Jesus' hands and side to believe that the man in front of him was his Lord who died on the cross.



I am reminded, too, that this section of Scripture is often called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus here is teaching on the Mount of Olives. It is good to remember that this fifth & final collection of teachings that Matthew gives us takes place just before the Jesus' crucifixion.

After cleansing the temple and dealing with a growing conflict with the religious rulers, Jesus leaves the city of Jerusalem, and begins to prepare his disciples for what's ahead. This passage has been the subject of all sorts of speculation and wild theories about the end of time and the events that will happen at the return of Christ.

But what do Biblical scholars say? Well – one thing to keep in mind is that each gospel had a particular audience that the words were written for.



For example the gospel of Matthew was written primarily to the Jews as an audience, and that is why Matthew quotes the Old Testament prophecies so many times in his book.



Mark was written with the Roman audience in mind and that is why it is to the point, powerful, and practical.



Luke was written to the Gentile audience which is why the marginalized folks are main characters!

- Bottom line for us today is...in order to understand Matthew 24, we need to think like a Jew and understand the Jewish background and mindset.



Just before we got to chapter 24, Jesus was talking about the Pharisees and scribes and called them hypocrites. These are the high priests of the Jewish faith! The temple is the holy, sacred place! The chapter ends with Jesus addressing Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”

That’s when he leaves the buildings and he talks about the destruction of the buildings! What are we to infer? Maybe that the city which is not living following God’s call will cease to exist?



This is difficult to absorb! For those of us who know God as the compassionate God who loves God’s children unconditionally, it’s a struggle to fit the temple destruction into our image of God!



How about a reality check? What’s happening now?

- We witness nation against nation,
- we see on the news and social media - Americans against Americans and neighbor against neighbor!
- Then there ARE the famines and earthquakes
- we see all that Jesus predicted as precursors of the End of the Age...very depressing stuff!



And then I remember a song - “It’s the End of the World as We Know it” – by the group called REM in the late 80’s. The full title is “It’s the End of the World as We Know it **(and I feel fine)!**” So, I take a deep breath and smile! You know what... I think?



if the world is one where the individual is top priority...above everything else...if **the individual** is the highest value of a civilization...then I’m for the end of THAT world!



If the world that I am living in is oblivious to the suffering and pain caused by manmade laws, then I'm fine with the end of THAT world!



If the world we have now does not respect each and all of God's children regardless of who they are, or what their skin color is, or what they believe in or who they love, then I'm fine with the end of THAT world!



AND I rejoice that the end of THAT kind of world heralds in another – one where joy, respect, celebration, compassion, empathy and love lives and thrives! Isn't THAT the kingdom of God? Isn't that Heaven on Earth? Isn't that God's Beloved Community?

Realistically this doesn't happen in a blink of an eye...it might mean that you and I need to partner with God to make it happen – one person at a time, one prayer at a time! Jesus calls these difficult times in the world birth pangs – so maybe *that* means you and I need to be midwives to birth the Kingdom of God in ourselves and others!



Let me tell you about a phone call – just happened day before yesterday.
I have a relative, a self-professed Atheist, who has been having all kinds of trouble

- he lost a job because of some bad choices he made
- he had health issues, medical issues and has been in a very dark place for a long time.
- Some of his family (including me) have not talked with him for years.
- He complained about everything and everyone...he complained about his situation to anyone in earshot
- Needless to say, he drove everyone away.

When he called me on Friday, I didn't want to answer...I saw his number and I confess my heart fell and I wondered, "What does HE want?" I was NOT anxious to have a conversation with him – I had work to do!

Well – I felt guilty enough that I DID answer the phone. I was delighted to hear his voice begin with “I have always envied your faith” and want to talk to you because I am rethinking mine. I was all ears and excited to hear more! He told me that he met a neighbor who offered him a job 2 weeks ago..a job which was right up his alley – installing alarm systems!

He really likes and respects this neighbor – who trusts him, is easy to work with and fully appreciates his experience and expertise. Since this friendship began - he has received 6 requests for resumes, had two in person interviews, several phone interviews and has lined up 3 others. In tears, he says, “I’m thinking there must a higher power” and I get to respond, “Some call it God!”



Something in his voice told me that the world as he knew it has ended – the world where others were at fault for his troubles, where everyone was conspiring against him, where the system has failed him...that world has ended. His new world was being born right now – one with God at center stage and coming into his life.

The birth of a new world, new life, new eyes in a culture or in one person - each time it happens – it’s a miracle – it’s a God Thing!



And with the reminders and experiences shared by our Holy Land travelers as part of you...may your faith continue to grow each day in Jesus’ promise that the Kingdom, the Kindom, God’s Beloved Community will be born at the End of the Age for you, your neighbors and the world! Amen.