

Matthew 24C

24C-1

- We're returning to our study of the Olivet Discourse this morning, beginning with our outline of the questions Jesus answers in this chapter
 - His disciples asked Jesus to explain His remarks that the temple would one day be destroyed
 - They also asked Him to explain how the end of the age would come and how He will enter into His Kingdom
 - In our study last week, Jesus began His response by telling the disciples what would *not* be signs of the end

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- Next, Jesus answered their third question on what would be the signs to announce the coming of the end of this age
 - As we learned last week, an age of history is a long period of time that has a beginning and an end
 - According to Daniel, our current age began in 605 BC when Babylon conquered Jerusalem
 - This age is continuing today and will last until Jesus' Kingdom arrives on earth

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- And as this present age nears its end, the Lord will give the world signs
 - Jesus says those signs include world wars, famines, plagues, and earthquakes
 - These otherwise ordinary events are recognizable as signs because they will occur in a manner similar to birth pangs
- Over time they will increase in severity and frequency culminating in a cathartic birth of a new age at Jesus' return
 - This pattern of increasing signs started in the early 20th century and have been accelerating ever since
 - So consider yourself on notice...we're fast approaching the end of the age

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- And now we move to Jesus' next answer, explaining the destruction of the temple and the signs of that destruction (Q1 & 1A)

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- But as we do, we find another quirk to the Olivet Discourse... Matthew doesn't record the answer to this question at all
 - In Matthew's gospel, the narrative jumps from explaining the end of the age to explaining His coming into His Kingdom
 - Matthew jumps from question #3 to question #2, but Luke does include the answer to question #1 (and 1A)
- We can see this difference clearly when we compare the two Gospels side by side
 - Before the two Gospels diverge, both Matthew and Luke are both tracking through Jesus' answer to question #3
 - Then there is a break, and Matthew and Luke go in different directions
 - Matthew 24:8 continues with "then" while Luke backs up with "before all these things"
 - So Matthew is moving forward in time to Jesus' (fourth) answer to question #2 on the signs of Jesus' coming
 - While Luke is moving back in time to cover Jesus' answer to question #1 and the temple destruction in the first century
- Yet when we compare these two passages, we also notice that the language of Matthew 24:9 and Luke 21:12 are extremely similar
 - Both describe persecution of the saints so it would be easy to assume both were describing similar moments in time
 - In reality, they are talking about two different periods of history, one in the past and one in our future
 - This similarity is simply a reflection of the fact that persecution is a common experience for all believers
 - Persecution happened shortly before the temple was destroyed in the first century and it will be present at the end of this age
 - Nevertheless, by the context of each passage we can see they are actually talking about different times
 - And if we continue down the page of Matthew 24, we'll see clearly that Jesus is talking about the circumstances of His return

- And if you scan down Luke 21, you can clearly see that Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD
- And later, at the very end of Luke 21, we find Jesus' answer to the question about His second coming also

24B-6

- So Luke gives us all the answers but Matthew skips the answer to question #1
 - So if we want to understand the full Olivet Discourse, we would have to study Matthew 24 and then jump to Luke 21
 - But we're studying Matthew's Gospel, so we'll stay in Matthew and just summarize the answer to #1, since it's history to us
- First, Jesus says that before the destruction of the temple, the church would see persecution especially of the church leaders
 - They would be dragged into synagogues and before governors of Rome, which we see recorded in the book of Acts
 - The persecution of the church in the first century was an early sign of the coming destruction of the temple
 - And then in Luke 21:20 we read that the city of Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies
 - This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the end of the temple was drawing near

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- That sign occurred in AD 66, when the Roman general Cestus Gallus was sent from Rome to put down a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem
 - The Roman siege eventually resulted in the Roman army penetrating the city walls in AD 70 and destroying the temple
 - Josephus was a Jewish military commander captured by the Romans who later chronicled the Roman Jewish wars
 - And during the fall of Jerusalem, he witnessed the destruction and wrote about it

24C-8

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), [Titus] Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple...so all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem]...was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that

dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to...a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.

And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again. But though he [a foreigner] were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it.

- Josephus claimed that 1.1 million Jews were killed in the city
 - The Temple was burned to the ground and the city was utterly laid waste
 - Titus celebrated the great military victory by commissioning an arch which is still visible in Rome today
 - It shows the Romans' carrying away the implements of the Temple
- Those are the signs Jesus gave His disciples to know that the temple was about to be destroyed in the first century, and they played out exactly as predicted
 - And those who heard Jesus' word and believed them were able to save themselves from that destruction when the time came
 - Jesus said when you see armies surrounding the city, flee the city and don't return
 - Those who obeyed His word escaped the carnage but those who didn't understand or believe Jesus' words died in the attack
 - They were among the 1 million Jews who died that day
 - In this detail we find a third reason for why we study prophetic passages like this one in Matthew
 - In our first two weeks studying this passage, I've given two reasons why Christians should spend time in prophecy

- First, biblical prophecy is a study of our common future, and the more we study that future, the greater our Christian unity
 - Gaining a shared understanding of our shared future brings us a shared identity, which helps unite us for a shared mission
- Secondly, study of the end times will bring the believer comfort and hope, Paul told us last week
 - Our hope comes from understanding we are promised a glorious future in the events that end this age
 - Moreover, we also learn that believers will be spared from the wrath of God and the turmoil that comes upon the earth
 - Knowing these things, we can face the end of the age with confidence and anticipation and hope that great things await
- And now we have a third reason to study prophecy...because the Lord often shares future details with His children so we won't become collateral damage
 - In the Olivet Discourse Jesus gave His first century disciples a warning to flee Jerusalem as the Romans arrived
 - And those who listened and learned Jesus' word were ready to escape the city when the signs started
 - Because they knew prophecy, they were spared the Roman onslaught
 - But they had to have studied and understood Jesus' warning...Jesus didn't force every believer to know how and when to escape
 - Undoubtedly, some listened and benefited while others ignored prophecy and were caught up in the turmoil
 - Obeying Jesus' warning to flee Jerusalem certainly didn't change *whether* a believer went to Heaven when they died
 - But it sure did make a difference in *when* and *how* they went!
 - Similarly, we don't have to understand prophecies about Jesus' coming for the Church or how the last days play out in order to be saved
 - To be eternally saved, a person needs only to believe in Jesus crucified to pay for our sins and resurrected to give us eternal life

- If you believe that, then when you die, you will be ushered into Jesus' presence by the angels to be with Him forever
- So studying prophecy doesn't impact your salvation, but remaining ignorant of prophecy might bring you more trouble than necessary
 - Like those believers in the first century, we who ignore Jesus' words do so at the risk of being caught up in difficult events
 - And at the very least, if we study prophecy, we can make sense of and find hope in things that others are despairing over
- Speaking of which, let's continue with the next part of Matthew's discourse, which now goes to (the fourth) question answered
 - Jesus gives us signs of His coming into the Kingdom, beginning with a brief overview of the circumstances right before His return

24C-9

Matt. 24:9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

Matt. 24:10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

Matt. 24:11 "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

Matt. 24:12 "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

Matt. 24:13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Matt. 24:14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- We need to see this description as an introduction to the signs that precede Jesus' return and the appearing of the Kingdom
 - And notice, tribulation and persecution will once again be the backdrop for important prophetic events
 - Just as believers were persecuted in the 1st century before the temple's destruction, so it will happen again before Jesus returns
 - Jesus says believers will be persecuted, martyred and hated by everyone on earth because of their association with Jesus
 - And I believe these signs will also follow a birth pangs pattern in that a new kind of persecution will emerge, greater in severity and frequency

- Though before Christians were persecuted here & there, now & again...at the end it will be everywhere and all the time
- It will be impossible to be a Christ-follower at the end of the age and not be hated, persecuted and threatened with death
- Moreover, this intense persecution will cause some Christians to stumble
 - In v.10 Jesus says many believers will fall away, betraying one another and even hating one another
 - To understand what Jesus is talking about we need to look more closely at the Greek words being used in this verse
- The most common Greek word in the Bible for “fall away” is *apostasia*, which means apostasy, a repudiation of a previous-held belief
 - But that’s not the word Matthew used here
 - Here Matthew uses the Greek word *skandalizo*, which literally means to stumble or to take offense
 - So a better way to translate v.10 would be “at that time many believers will stumble”
- Jesus is not talking about Christians turning away from their faith in Jesus but rather Christians stumbling (i.e., sinning) in the face of intense persecution
 - They will stumble into sin by betraying other Christians to save their own skin and even to the point of hating other Christians
 - And though that sounds extreme, it’s not hard to imagine this scenario when you remember human nature
 - If we take any two people, even siblings or a married couple, and put them in a life or death situation, some will react badly
 - Some may even turn on one another in the way Jesus describes, and He says that’s what happens at the end of the age
 - In Luke 18:8 Jesus tells us that when He returns, He will find very little faith on earth waiting to receive Him
 - Of course, these bad behaviors aren’t changing the eternal future of these believers

- We are all saved by our faith alone, not because we live a sinless life
- Therefore, no amount of sin in our lives can stop the grace of God (Hallelujah!)
- Nevertheless, these believers will leave the earth with a witness that's been compromised by their fears and selfishness
- I wonder if these believers would have behaved differently had they understand the prophecy of Matthew 24?
 - Remember, Jesus is talking about something still in our future, so these words we read now will be available them
 - If the believers of that future day had studied and understood them, would they have stumbled in the ways Jesus describes?
- Would they have given into temptation to hate one another had they recognized the true reason for the persecution as Jesus explained it?
 - Would they have betrayed their fellow believers merely to save their own skin knowing Jesus' return was right around the corner?
 - Now you see the power of studying prophecy...it helps you serve Christ well under difficult circumstances
 - Not every believer will live through these difficult events of course, but some will
 - And the one who lives through them with an understanding of prophecy will respond in ways that preserve his or her witness
- Returning to the passage Jesus says His coming will be met by false prophets misleading many on the earth, and by lawlessness increasing everywhere
 - Once more, false prophets and periods of lawlessness come and go regularly in various places and at various times
 - But as we approach the end of the age, the birth pangs will increase such that false prophets will be everywhere
 - And lawlessness will become the new norm as society crumbles under the weight of hatred and pride and depravity
 - As a result of the breakdown in society, Jesus adds in v.12 that people's love will grow cold

- As innocuous as that comment may sound, I think it's one of the most frightening statements in all the New Testament
- Because even during the best of times, humanity struggles to show love for one another
- In fact, most of the time love is being drowned out by selfishness and pride, jealousy and strife, malice and hatred
- So as rare as love is today, imagine a day when love grows cold, meaning it goes away entirely
 - The Greek word translated "grow cold" in this verse describes a fire dying out and becoming cool to the touch
 - That's the image Jesus uses to describe the state of love in the world at the end of the age
- And that's truly terrifying...when you see how heartless our world can be now...imagine how cruel it becomes when there is no love at all?
 - How ruthless and destructive will people be? How frightening will life become? How could anyone feel peace or safety?
 - I must assume that the hopelessness produced by this change will be part of God's plan to prepare hearts for Jesus' return
- I find confirmation of this in v.14 when Jesus says the Gospel will be preached to the whole world in that time and will reach all nations as a testimony
 - Take note of that last phrase...it will be spoken as a testimony which means it is not necessarily intended to save the whole world
 - It will reach the whole world and some will be saved by it, but many more will not, and to them also it will be a testimony
 - Remember, sometimes a testimony is given to persuade but other times it's given to convict
 - Then in v.13 Jesus adds that the one who endures to the end of the age will be saved, which is a curious statement
 - Because we know enduring difficult times is not the means of personal salvation
 - Yet at the point of Jesus' return, enduring to the end will have impact on the opportunity for a certain group to be saved

- As we studied in our Revelation class, Daniel teaches that our age ends with a seven-year period called the Tribulation
 - Those seven years culminate with Jesus' Second Coming, and during Tribulation the things Jesus said here all come true
 - During Tribulation, the book of Revelation describes a great persecution of believers
 - And it foretells of great lawlessness and the absence of love and of powerful false prophets deceiving the world
 - And during this time, Revelation says the Gospel goes out into all the nations as a last opportunity to believe and be saved
- Then there comes a moment at the very end of the seven years when the Bible says the Lord pours out His Spirit on all Jews on earth
 - According to Zechariah, the Spirit will bring these Jews to faith leading them to cry out for Jesus as He returns to them
 - That's the event Jesus is referring to here...the moment when all Israel is saved, specifically those Jews who endure to the end
- What v.13 tells us is that these signs of Jesus' impending return all take place during this coming period of human history called Tribulation
 - In other words, Tribulation is itself the sign that Jesus is about to return, because Tribulation is the final seven years before His Second Coming
 - They will all occur in a relatively brief period of history that ends the age
 - And for those who live during this period of history, all these signs will be announcing that the Lord's return is soon to follow
 - So by way of contrast, the signs that announce the end of the age take place over centuries and are witnessed by many generations
 - But the signs of Jesus coming will occur only during a short period of seven years to be witnessed by those of that time
 - And as the world nears the end of those seven years, the signs will become particularly intense
 - Next week we study the rest of Jesus' answer to this question, which will take us to v.35

- And in that final section, Jesus gives tremendous detail of what the world of Tribulation will see to know He is about to return
- Meanwhile, I'm sure some of you have been wondering whether these things will impact you personally or perhaps a family member?
 - You may be wondering will future loved ones have to experience the difficult times Jesus says are coming before He returns?
 - And the answer is, it depends...
- First, we know the signs that announce the end of the age are for everyone on earth, and in fact those signs are already happening
 - We've already seen world wars and we're seeing increasing earthquakes and famines and plagues, and that's continuing
 - And some believers will be caught up in these things, and truly there is no way to escape them
 - They are simply part of life at the end of the age, and we shouldn't worry about them
 - The Lord is in control, and the day of our death is already appointed to us, according to Scripture
 - So in the meantime, make every day count and in the words of Paul, to live is Christ and to die is gain
 - Secondly, there are some signs that will only come upon those who have not believed in Jesus Christ beforehand
 - The truly scary signs that Jesus said will announce His return are reserved for those who live through the Tribulation
 - We're going to learn later in this chapter that the Lord has a special plan for His Church to protect us from those signs
 - Of how He will take the Church out of the way prior to the onset of those signs in Tribulation
 - Paul reassured the church of this in several places including in 1 Thessalonians:

24C-10

1Th. 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

[1Th. 1:10](#) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

- Paul says the Church waits for the Lord to come from Heaven and rescue us from the wrath of God to come on the earth
- And now we have a better understanding for why this is God's plan: because Tribulation is a sign to the world of Jesus' return
- If the events of Tribulation are signs to the earth that Jesus' return is imminent, then it makes sense that the Church wouldn't need to experience these signs
 - Because when Jesus returns to the earth, the Bible says we will be returning with Him
 - Revelation 19 describes the moment of Christ's Second Coming, and notice who joins Jesus at His return

24C-11

[Rev. 19:7](#) "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

[Rev. 19:8](#) It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

[Rev. 19:11](#) And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

[Rev. 19:12](#) His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

[Rev. 19:13](#) He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

[Rev. 19:14](#) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

- When Jesus returns, He will be accompanied by His Bride, the Church saints, who by that time will have been collected into Heaven
 - Meanwhile, the Lord gives the world signs to know of His Son's return, but those signs clearly aren't meant for the Church
 - We won't need to see the signs of Jesus' Second Coming...we participate in His Second Coming!

- Here again, why do we study the end times prophecies of the Bible?
Because they help us prepare for what's coming
 - Knowing that wars and earthquakes and famines and pandemics are signs of the end of the age, we prepare our hearts and minds
 - We will not lose our heads nor live in fear that compromises our witness or erodes our trust in God
- Likewise, knowing that the signs of Jesus' Second Coming are reserved for Tribulation, we can live in peace knowing we aren't appointed to wrath
 - Moreover, we should also feel great urgency in speaking to our unbelieving friends, neighbors, family members and strangers about Jesus
 - Because if you know that the end of the age is near, then you also know that the Tribulation is coming soon
 - And if you understand what life in Tribulation will be like, then you know why it will be a horrible thing for anyone to be there
- So by your study of prophecy, you have every reason to make Kingdom work your priority
 - We are all on notice...the signs are all here...we don't know how much longer they will last but that doesn't matter
 - We know enough to be faithful in our mission to be ambassadors for Christ
 - Don't become worried or fearful by the world's descent into turmoil...Jesus said it was going to happen
 - Neither should we make our goal fixing this fallen world...but rather our goal is rescuing as many people as possible out of it
 - Next week we will finish Jesus' answer to the signs of His Second Coming before moving into the most important part of this discourse
 - The part that follows describes our future apart from these events, and that's a discussion you won't want to miss
 - Meanwhile, look up for your Lord's return is near