

**Text: Matthew 24:15-28**

Introduction

I said last week that Matthew 24 is a complex and often confusing passage. It is made even more difficult by the plethora of differing opinions among evangelical writers regarding its interpretation. Some say that all of the events of this chapter occurred in the past, surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Others place all of the events in the future, saying that Jesus is referring only to the time of the appearance of Antichrist. Still others, myself included, think there is a mix here: that portions of Jesus' words in Matthew 24 refer to events in the near term—specifically the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70—while other portions speak of events to come at the end of the age. For such a mix to be present would not be a departure from any standard practices in Biblical prophecy; in fact, prophetic passages in the Old Testament often placed events of immediate fulfillment next to those that appeared far off, for example:

**6For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.  
7There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
From then on and forevermore  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

I have had us read this passage often in discussing how Isaiah predicted not only that the Messiah would be born as a human Baby, but that He would be the Incarnate God Himself. Notice, though, that the statements about His birth and Godhood are here intermixed with the predictions of His coming reign. Taking these verses by themselves while ignoring the numerous passages about Messiah's suffering would lead one to believe that the Messiah was to come and immediately begin to reign in peace and righteousness—very much like most of the Jews of Jesus' day believed. Instead, we know that Jesus was born, and that He is God, and He is King, BUT His earthly government is yet to come. In like manner, I find little difficulty in assigning a past fulfillment to parts of Matthew 24, and a future fulfillment to other parts. This certainly seems to have been the view of some of the great Biblical expositors of the past, particularly John Calvin and Matthew Henry, whose commentaries I normally use when preparing our lessons.

All of that said, there are, again, differing views among genuine, confessing evangelicals regarding these passages. As such, the words of Wayne Grudem, author of a very well-regarded Systematic Theology, are relevant:

...Christians differ over specific details leading up to and immediately following Christ's return. Specifically, they differ over the nature of the millennium and the relationship of Christ's return to the millennium, the sequence of Christ's return and the great tribulation period that will come to the earth, and the question of the salvation of the Jewish people (and the relationship between Jews who are saved and the church).

...it is important to affirm the genuine evangelical standing of those who have differing positions on these questions. Evangelicals who hold to these various positions all agree that Scripture is inerrant, and they have a commitment to believe whatever is taught by Scripture. Their differences concern the interpretation of various passages relating to these events, but their differences on these matters should be seen as matters of secondary importance, not as differences over primary doctrinal matters.

...it is important to realize that the interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors. Therefore the degree of certainty that attaches to our conclusions in this area will be less than with many other doctrines. ...I also think it important for evangelicals to recognize that this area of study is complex and to extend a large measure of grace to others who hold different views.... (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1994, 1095, 1114.)

Section 1

*15"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17"Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18"Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20"But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until*

now, nor ever will. 22"Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:15-22)

The *ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION* in the Book of Daniel. Before we go any farther, let's read about this:

21"In his place a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue. 22"The overflowing forces will be flooded away before him and shattered, and also the prince of the covenant. 23"After an alliance is made with him he will practice deception, and he will go up and gain power with a small force of people. 24"In a time of tranquility he will enter the richest parts of the realm, and he will accomplish what his fathers never did, nor his ancestors; he will distribute plunder, booty and possessions among them, and he will devise his schemes against strongholds, but only for a time. 25"He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he will not stand, for schemes will be devised against him. 26"Those who eat his choice food will destroy him, and his army will overflow, but many will fall down slain. 27"As for both kings, their hearts will be intent on evil, and they will speak lies to each other at the same table; but it will not succeed, for the end is still to come at the appointed time. 28"Then he will return to his land with much plunder; but his heart will be set against the holy covenant, and he will take action and then return to his own land. 29"At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before. 30"For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. 31"Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice And they will set up the abomination of desolation. 32"By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. 33"Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days. 34"Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. 35"Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time. (Daniel 11:21-35)

6And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be until the end of these wonders?" 7I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed. 8As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" 9He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. 10"Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. 11"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. 12"How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! (Daniel 12:6-12)

So, what was, in the time of Daniel, the *ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION*? Jesus told us to *let the reader understand*, so let's try. In between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament the Jews were, from time to time, taken over by ungodly rulers, usually of Greek origin. One of these was a man by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was so vulgar as to set up an statue of Zeus in the holy place, and then sacrifice pigs on the altar and force the priests to eat thereof. (Please recall that pork is forbidden according to Jewish dietary restrictions.) Antiochus put an end to Jewish temple worship for a time. He forbade sacrifices and circumcision, and caused every copy of the Book of the Law he found to be destroyed and its owner killed. He crucified dissenters, strangling their women by hanging their sons that had been circumcised around their necks while they hung from crosses. Jewish worship was not restored until approximately three-and-a-half years later through the armed resistance of Mattathias and especially his son, Judas Maccabeus. (Interestingly, this time frame allows for an almost entirely *past* fulfillment of the Book of Daniel, though certain elements must still lie in the future.)

We've already had one *ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION*. The question remains, will Jesus' prophecy be fulfilled in like manner (or has it already)? My personal opinion is that this was fulfilled during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when the city and the Temple were overrun with Gentile invaders and subsequently destroyed. They were most certainly defiled (abomination) and left desolate. Many of the Jews that resisted the Roman army were killed on or around the altar, and their blood ran throughout the Temple. Moreover, Titus Caesar himself (he was not yet Emperor at this point) entered into the Holy Place as it burned.

However, I have not seen any evidence that an abomination *just like* that of Antiochus occurred then. And, many of the prophecies of Matthew 24 are yet future. So, perhaps this will happen in the future. If this is the case, the Temple will have to be rebuilt, as the Premillennial-Dispensationalist school teaches. If they are right, we can certainly see why the *Left Behind* writers had Nicolae Carpathia sacrifice a pig to himself in the Temple—it was in keeping with the historical precedent established by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Whether it happened in the past, or is yet to happen, Jesus' warnings to believers are apt. He instructs them to flee when they see these events taking place. Assuming, for a moment, a past fulfillment, we see an interesting provision for Christ's people in history. First, the dispersion of believers from Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 8.

**1Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. 4Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:1-4)**

Saul's persecution was fierce, and certainly not desirable. However, God used it to His own ends. When the believers were scattered from Jerusalem, not only were they spared from the coming destruction, but the spread of the Gospel was furthered.

Matthew Henry cites Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* in relating God's provision for the Christians that remained in Jerusalem at the time of its destruction:

Now those to whom Christ said this immediately, did not live to see this dismal day, none of all the twelve but John only; they needed not to be hidden in the mountains (Christ hid them in heaven), but they left the direction to their successors in profession, who pursued it, and it was of use to them; for when the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea saw the ruin coming on, they all retired to a town called Pella, on the other side Jordan, where they were safe; so that of the many thousands that perished in the destruction of Jerusalem, there was not so much as one Christian. (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. 1741.)

Henry goes on to cite Proverbs with regard to this event:

**3The prudent sees the evil and hides himself,  
But the naive go on, and are punished for it. (Proverbs 22:3)**

So, even if the events Jesus foretold here are yet future, the believers of that time should follow the advice of Proverbs and the example of the believers in A.D. 70 and "get out of town."

## Section 2

*23"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25"Behold, I have told you in advance. 26"So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. 27"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. (Matthew 24:23-28)*

This is the third time in this chapter that Jesus warned His followers about the coming of *false Christs and false prophets*; clearly our Lord wanted His followers to be on their guard against this! Because many of our class members were absent last week, I want to repeat the exposition on this subject from last week's lesson.

During this period of time, the Jews were actively and even desperately seeking their Messiah. In fact, even before Jesus' ministry a number of men had arisen claiming to be the Anointed One. The scholar Gamaliel was recorded mentioning several of these in Acts 5.

**29But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32"And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37"After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38"So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to**

**speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:29-42)**

Again quoting Matthew Henry, we have a summary of Josephus's record of men that appeared immediately following Jesus' time claiming to be the Messiah.

[2.] There should appear *false Christs, coming in Christ's name* (v. 5), assuming to themselves the name peculiar to him, and saying, *I am Christ, pseudo-christs*, v. 24. There was at that time a general expectation of the appearing of the Messiah; they spoke of him; as *he that should come*; but when he did come, the body of the nation rejected him; which those who were ambitious of making themselves a name, took advantage of, and set up for Christ. Josephus speaks of several such impostors between this and the destruction of Jerusalem; one Theudas, that was defeated by Cospius Fadus; another by Felix, another by Festus. Dositheus said he was the Christ foretold by Moses. (Matthew Henry Commentary)

Even Simon Magus, who the Apostles encountered in Samaria, claimed to have a special power from God, yet he turned out to be an imposter.

**9Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; 10and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." 11And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. 12But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 13Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. 14Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. 18Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21" You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22" Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23" For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." 24But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Acts 8:9-24)**

Today we are unlikely to encounter a leader that claims to be Christ...at least using this exact term. However, there seem to be a plethora of teachers out there that claim to have a special "anointing" upon their person or message. This is contrary to the New Testament teaching that, while each of us is gifted differently by the Holy Spirit, we share in the same "anointing."

**1Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)**

**13For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)**

In the New Testament Church, the only One that has a special "anointing" is the Anointed One Himself, the Christ, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone claiming to be specially "anointed" is claiming an office that belongs to the Lord only. Even worse, such individuals often claim special revelations from God that are at best tangential, and at worst contrary to the teachings of Scripture. Such individuals preach a false gospel, and are in effect false "christs" that are to be ignored.

**6I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the**

**gospel of Christ. 8But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:6-9)**

God has given us an amazing gift by revealing Himself to us in Scripture. This Book, written over a period of 1,500 years, is God's authoritative revelation of Himself to us. Yet, there continue to be those that seek to ignore, add to, or take away from the Word, thereby modifying or obliterating its message. Why do such people arise, and why do others listen to them? For the same reason that those that killed Stephen did so—the true message of the Gospel is not palatable, and so unrepentant sinners seek a “friendlier gospel.” Unfortunately, this “gospel” has no power to save—it leads straight to Hell!

**I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (1Timothy 4:1-4)**

...so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. What joy we have as God's children that our continuance in the faith does not depend on our abilities, or our strength, or our wisdom, but God's. Even when deceivers sent by Satan himself with the intent of leading away God's people abound, we have confidence that, if we truly are God's people, He will preserve us from following these deceptions.

**27" My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29" My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30" I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30)**

There are lots of pretenders to the Throne, but only One Lord and Christ. When He comes, we're not going to have to go out and look for Him. As we'll discuss next week, when Jesus comes, everyone will see Him in His great glory!

**30" And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31" And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31)**

Even more, when Jesus comes we as believers will not have to go out and look for Him—He'll get us quickly!

**51Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55" O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"**

**56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)**

Let's end today by discussing an interesting statement: *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.* As you're well aware, vultures, buzzards, etc. have no trouble finding a dead animal (or person) to eat from miles away. But, Who is the corpse Jesus is referring to in this statement? Consider the following verses:

**32" And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. (John 12:32-33)**

**14" As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)**

Jesus Himself was lifted up and killed on a Roman cross, and draws men unto Himself. Does “all” mean “all?” Maybe, maybe not. In this life, certainly not. Some, even most people are repulsed by the Gospel of Christ, but those of His elect, those that are being saved are inexorably drawn to Him.

**18For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)**

Yes, in this life only a few will be drawn to Him, but at the end of time all will come to Him and bow the knee.

**11For it is written,**

**"AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,  
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:11-12)**

One day, everyone will stand before Christ, and everyone will bow to Him. The question is will you bow the knee now, in this life, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and going on in the promise and assurance that you are one of His elect, bound to spend eternity with Him never to be lost or cast away? You can have that assurance, as Paul promised in his letter to the Romans:

**9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)**

Or, will you wait, and die without Him, and bow to Him at the last judgment and be cast into Hell?

**11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)**

It's not a question of if we will bow, but when. Jesus is Lord and King. He demands our submission and allegiance, and promises eternal life to all that will trust in Him now. Defy Him, and only eternal punishment awaits.