

Matthew 24A

- Welcome back to our study of the Gospel of Matthew, and if you're new to our study, you've picked a great time to join us
 - We're at the end of Chapter 23 and about to begin Chapter 24, and some monumental things happen in Chapter 24
 - We're in the final week of Jesus' earthly life, just a couple of days before Passover on the Jewish calendar
 - It's Tuesday afternoon of that week, and Jesus has just spent the past three days teaching in the temple
 - He's been speaking to large crowds and enduring constant harassment and inspection by the religious leaders
 - Jesus sparred with these men in four rounds of testing, and after it was over, He emerged triumphant and un-indicted
 - Jesus demonstrated He was above reproach, and that He was the spotless Lamb of God, ready to die for Israel's sins
 - Then at the end of His final exchange with these leaders, Jesus delivered a scathing rebuke in Chapter 23
 - He pronounced seven woes on them, judging them for their hypocrisy and for leading Israel into her own judgment
 - They misled the people, robbing them of their wealth, the Messiah and ultimately the Kingdom
 - So Jesus declared these men would be excluded from the Kingdom and face a fate in hell
- Now six months earlier, at the end of Chapter 12, Matthew recorded Jesus offering Himself to the nation as their king in a pivotal moment
 - Jesus performed a messianic miracle before the crowd, and they recognized its significance, even calling Jesus the Son of David
 - Still the people refused to accept the miracles they witnessed and instead believed the lies their religious leaders told
 - And as a result, that generation of Israel committed the unforgivable sin and forfeited the Kingdom

- If you weren't here for that study, I recommend you return to Chapter 12 of our study to learn about that important moment
- After that moment, Jesus started preparing His disciples for the Church program while He set His mind on Jerusalem and the cross
 - Now six months later, Jesus' death is barely 48 hours away, and His public ministry has ended
 - And as it ends, Jesus makes one last public statement lamenting Israel's decision

[Matt. 23:34](#) "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

[Matt. 23:35](#) so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

[Matt. 23:36](#) "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

- The verses are essentially a footnote to the seventh woe, which we studied last week
 - You remember in the seventh woe Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for claiming to be more righteous than their forefathers
 - In prior centuries, the leaders of Israel routinely persecuted the prophets when they came declaring the truth
 - As John says in Chapter 1 of his Gospel, men loved the darkness and hated the light because it exposed their evil deeds
 - So when prophets came exposing the sins of the people of Israel, the nation's leaders responded by killing the prophets
 - And now with the benefit of hindsight and with hypocritical intent, the Pharisees said that they would know different and done differently
 - They were more righteous than their forefathers, they said, and they would have obeyed the prophets
 - But Jesus said these men were worse than their forefathers because they not only did the same but worse

- The Pharisees persecuted prophets too, like John the Baptist, but even worse, they persecuted the Messiah Himself
- So Jesus condemned those men for their hypocrisy and self-righteous attitudes
- Now in vs.34-36 Jesus adds this footnote, saying He will confirm their hypocrisy and their unrighteousness by giving them more prophets to persecute
 - The religious leaders of Israel will kill and scourge these men and drive them from city to city and some will even die hanging on crosses
 - Who are these prophets that came after Jesus?
 - They are the apostles, who are the prophets of the New Testament era
 - The book of Acts records the ministry of these New Testament prophets and the fierce resistance they faced from Israel's religious leaders
 - Just as Jesus predicted, these men were usually killed, beginning with James in Acts 12, and often mistreated
 - We see the apostles were scourged in Acts 5 and church tradition maintains that Peter was eventually crucified like Jesus
 - These historical accounts confirm the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who said they would acknowledge a prophet from God
- In v.35, as Jesus tells the religious leaders that as they do these things, they will show themselves equally guilty of the blood of all Old Testament prophets
 - The Bible's first prophet was Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, who spoke the truth to his unbelieving brother, Cain
 - As evil Cain witnessed his righteous brother obeying God, it prompted hatred and jealousy in Cain's heart
 - So he responded by killing his brother, and he established a pattern for all history: the unrighteous persecute the righteous
 - As Paul observed in speaking about Isaac vs. Ishmael

Gal. 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

- Those who are of the flesh, unbelievers, will persecute those who are born again by the Spirit, believers
 - It has always been that way and always will be, Paul says
 - That's why service to Jesus in the Kingdom Program leads to persecution...because we stir up those opposed to God
 - And in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were those born of the flesh who persecuted Jesus and those born of the Spirit
- And Jesus says those men shared in the guilt of all those who have done the same before
 - They share the guilt of Cain who killed Abel and with their forefathers who killed the prophets after him down to Zechariah
 - Zechariah was killed in the temple court, where he took sanctuary from Jews seeking to kill him over his prophecies
 - He is the final Old Testament prophet to be martyred before the advent of Messiah
 - So saying "Abel to Zechariah" means all the prophets (and as a happy coincidence, it also spans "A" to "Z" in English)
- The martyrdom of the saints, particularly the Apostles, reminds us that following the Lord comes with risks, and these risks are unavoidable
 - As long as our world has evil people opposed to God who love darkness and hate the light, believers will be persecuted
 - Why? Because we are the light of Christ in this world...meaning we bring the same message of salvation that Jesus brought
 - And therefore we will experience the same reactions to that message that Jesus experienced when He preached
 - Some respond to the Lord's grace in humility and repentance, but many and probably most oppose the Gospel and persecute His ambassadors
 - And the degree of our persecution will be proportional to the degree of our testimony and service to Jesus
 - The more fervently and persistently you witness to the truth, the more the enemy and the world will persecute you

- And if you are hesitant to make known your faith in Jesus, you will escape persecution
- But at the same time, the results we achieve in our Kingdom work are also directly proportional to our willingness to accept persecution
 - When the apostles went out with the message, the Spirit moved through them to convert many thousands to the truth
 - But of course, with that great harvest came great persecution, because the enemy would not sit still while they worked
 - When those men stepped out boldly to proclaim the truth, they stirred up the enemy and the persecution soon followed
 - This is a fundamental principle of faith: the more effective disciples of Jesus will usually be the most persecuted disciples
 - And the most persecuted disciples will also be the most effective disciples
 - If you follow Jesus' footsteps, you will end up where Jesus did
 - And there is an important corollary to this truth: when Christians hide their witness from the world, the church becomes weak and ineffective
 - If we make our goal blending in and avoiding opposition, we may live comfortable lives
 - We will likely avoid persecution, because the enemy has no reason to waste his time on the likes of us
 - He doesn't need to invest His resources in opposing us, because we have done his work for him...we have silenced ourselves
 - But we will also forfeit some measure of reward, because we will have passed up opportunities to serve Jesus
- So then in v.36 Jesus makes a sharp transition into discussing the coming judgment for this generation of Israel, not just for their religious leaders
 - Jesus says in v.36 that all these things will come upon this generation, and "these things" are the outcomes mentioned in vs.34-35
 - So entire generations of Israel will persecute the apostles by joining the religious leaders in scourging and killing them

- And the guilt for these acts will fall upon this entire generation of Israel as a result
- And this generation of Israel will receive a just and swift judgment for it
- First, they will fail to receive their Messiah sent to her, and they will lose opportunity to enter into the Kingdom
 - But more than that, Israel will also lose its place in the land, because the Lord will send them into exile once again
 - And this time that exile will last not decades or centuries but two millennia
- Jesus says that's what's coming for this generation of Israel because they listened to their corrupt leaders and rejected their Messiah
 - And Jesus closes the chapter lamenting this sad and unnecessary future in vs.37-39

[Matt. 23:37](#) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

[Matt. 23:38](#) "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

[Matt. 23:39](#) "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

- Now this passage will be very familiar to you because we examined these verses during our study of Matthew 12
 - Back in Matthew 12 we studied the moment when Israel officially rejected Jesus as their Messiah
 - Jesus had performed an unmistakable sign proving He was the Messiah, and the crowd recognized the meaning of that sign
 - But their religious leaders credited Jesus' miracle to Satan, and the crowd sided with the religious leaders rather than with Jesus
 - In that moment, that generation of Israel blasphemed the Holy Spirit and committed the unforgivable sin
 - In response to their rejection, Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation using the same words we just read here in Matthew

- They were unwilling to receive Him, so Jesus declared that He would leave Israel's house desolate
- In other words, Israel's temple as well as her place in the land would be taken from her as a result of their rejection of Jesus
- And Jesus said this state of desolation would remain in effect until the day came when Israel called out to Jesus in repentance
- That's the way Jesus ended the scene in Matthew 12, but we didn't find these words recorded in Matthew...we found them in Luke 13
 - Luke records the first time Jesus spoke these words and Matthew records the second time Jesus spoke them here
 - Jesus issued this lament the first time at the moment Israel committed the unforgivable sin and lost the Kingdom in that day
 - Now Jesus makes the same statement a second time as His death approaches and His earthly ministry wraps up
- As such, they became Jesus' parting words to the people He came to serve and save, and they set the conditions for His return
 - After this moment Jesus will not teach or address the people of Israel publicly again
 - His ministry to Israel has finished and the nation is now under judgment and there will be no turning back
- But Jesus isn't finished preparing His disciples for their mission to follow
 - And in fact two of the most important teaching moments in all of Jesus' earthly ministry take place during the next 36 hours
 - Jesus delivers an extended teaching on how the present age ends leading to Jesus' return
 - Secondly, Jesus teaches His disciples about the Communion Meal as they celebrate the Passover meal prior to His crucifixion
 - Let's move into the first of these moments, the Olivet Discourse, which starts in Chapter 24

Matt. 24:1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

[Matt. 24:2](#) And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

- Jesus has finished His third day in the temple and as the day ends, Jesus follows His usual practice of leaving the city to sleep in the nearby hills of Bethany
 - The road home from the temple took Jesus out the East gate and down the Kidron Valley and up the other side to the top of the Mt of Olives
 - From there it’s a short walk to Bethany where Jesus has been spending the nights, probably with Lazarus and Martha
 - It’s Tuesday afternoon, and it’s been a long and stressful day for Jesus and the disciples
 - So as they walk out of the temple, some of the disciples begin to admire the amazing construction of Herod’s temple
 - Herod’s temple was one of the most impressive construction projects ever undertaken in all history
 - The massive foundation stones Herod set are so large that we struggle to imagine how they were worked and placed precisely
 - The building was the longest building project Herod ever undertook and it wasn’t completed in his lifetime
 - In fact, it wasn’t even completed in Jesus’ lifetime...the temple wasn’t completed until nearly 40 years after Jesus died
 - And then it was destroyed by the Romans barely four years later in the great revolt of AD 70
 - So here in AD 28, the disciples are truly fascinated at the project, and they point out the progress to Jesus, Who responds abruptly
 - Jesus offers no compliments but instead He promises that this massive structure would be torn down, stone by stone
 - Jesus’ prediction was astounding and unbelievable
 - It was like hearing a person telling us that one day the entire World Trade Center towers would be turned down brick by brick
 - And yet these men believed Jesus because they knew He was the Messiah and they trusted His word

- So when they heard that the temple would be taken down in a day to come, they began to wonder how that could happen
- And naturally, they assumed an event of that magnitude meant the world was ending or something equally momentous
- But the disciples don't say anything in response to Jesus, not at first, but later as they reach a stopping point they come to Him

Matt. 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

- Matthew says the disciples came to Jesus privately and asked Jesus a series of questions
 - And these questions serve as our outline for most of the next two chapters
 - In v.3 Matthew records three questions
 - (1) When will the temple destruction happen?
 - (2) What will be the sign of your coming?
 - (3) What will be signs of the end of the age?
 - But we know the disciples actually asked four questions in total
 - Because in Luke's account of this conversation, we find the additional question

Luke 21:7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

- So putting both passages together, we have the following four questions that Jesus was asked:
 - (1) When will the temple destruction happen?
 - (1A) What are the signs of the temple's coming destruction – from Luke's Gospel
 - (2) What will be the sign of your coming?
 - (3) What will be signs of the end of the age?

- Virtually everything Jesus says from this point forward in Chapters 24 and 25 will be in response to these four questions
 - We'll spend weeks studying this discourse in Chapters 24 & 25, and these four questions will serve as our outline for that study
 - But before we start, there are a couple of quirks to the Olivet Discourse that we need to understand
- First, in addition to answering the four questions, Jesus gives a fifth answer to a question the disciples didn't ask Him
 - Jesus will explain to His disciples what will NOT be signs of the end of the age
 - This advice will be very helpful, because as we'll see, some of the signs Jesus gives are easily confused with ordinary events
- And then secondly, Jesus won't answer these questions in the same order they are asked
 - Instead, Jesus gives His answers in an order which better suited His purpose in revealing these things
 - The order Jesus answers them in will be His extra answer first, followed by 3, 1, 1A, and then 2
 - How do we know that Jesus rearranges His answers?
 - By the nature of what Jesus says, we will be able to tell which question He is answering
- If you've studied this chapter, then you know there are some strongly differing opinions in the church how to interpret Jesus' answers in this chapter
 - And much of that disagreement centers on when these events happen in history and in their relation to one another
 - And perhaps you've heard some of these debates or even participated in them
 - And if so, then I bet you've probably wondered why there is so much disagreement over this area of the Bible
 - Well one of the reasons for these endless disagreements is found in the simple explanation I just pointed out

- Our interpretation can go sideways if we miss important details in the text, like the changing of the order of questions
- We overlook that detail, but then we proceed ahead with our interpretation unaware that we are on the wrong track
- Like a ship that starts its journey just a few degrees off its proper heading...it eventually ends up hundreds of miles off track
- So in the case of Matthew 24, we have people who make one or more of these simple mistakes or perhaps they learn these mistakes from others
 - The key to get our “ship” back on track is to recognize our error in the beginning and retrace our steps through the text
 - Sometimes we may encounter someone who can explain our mistake to us in such a way that we make that correction
- But most of the time, in my experience, Christians can’t explain why they believe what they believe, especially in this area of Scripture
 - And so the debates become intractable with no one able to explain the mistakes that created the divide in the first place
 - When you can’t work someone through the Scriptures in a detailed way, you can’t sort out the wrong from the right
- So our study of this chapter isn’t merely a pursuit of knowledge for the sake of it
 - Like our study of all Scripture, we are seeking to understand what God has revealed so we may share that truth with others
 - And as we share the truth, we help unite the Body of Christ
- Unfortunately, there are some in the church who advocate for a continuation of ignorance within the Church in this area of the Bible
 - A well known megachurch pastor once wrote the following in one his his best selling books:

"Today there's a growing interest in the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. When will it happen? Just before Jesus ascended to heaven the disciples asked him this same question, and his response was quite revealing. He said, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'"

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I've given you. Focus on that!' Speculating on the exact timing of Christ's return is futile, because Jesus said, 'No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

Since Jesus said he didn't know the day or hour, why should you try to figure it out? What we do know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it. Jesus said, 'The Good News about God's kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come.' If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy."

- This quote perfectly illustrates the attitude which perpetuates both ignorance and division in the body
 - First, the author clearly doesn't understand the Scripture himself, because he misinterprets the passage he quotes
 - He introduces his comments by saying there is growing interest in Christ's Second Coming, as if to say that's a bad thing
 - But the Bible itself tells us that we should have interest in the future events for the Church

[Heb. 10:25](#) not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- Secondly, he attempts to prove his point using a Scripture verse that isn't referring to the Lord's Second Coming
 - He quotes from a verse in Matthew 24 which says Jesus' return is not knowable, so why bother studying it
 - But that verse isn't talking about the Second Coming of Jesus, as we'll see when we get there
- My point is, this teacher has taken a wrong turn in his interpretation of the text and it's led him to the wrong result which has confused him

- And as a result of his confusion, he is advocating that all Christians stay away from this area of Scripture entirely
- But once again, the real problem is his error in interpreting the text, not the act of studying itself
- Secondly, this pastor labels the study of end times scripture as “speculating on the exact timing of Christ’s return”
 - Endeavoring to understand the Bible’s teaching on end times isn’t the same thing as trying to time Christ’s return
 - Most importantly, this pastor never explains why the Bible provide us with so much teaching on eschatology
 - If we’re not supposed to be interested in matters of the end, why did the Lord give us so much to study about it?
 - In fact, by some estimates, 40% of the Bible is prophecy
 - There is a passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul explains some of the intricate details of events that end this age
 - We will study that passage later during the course of looking at Matthew 24
 - But for now I want to draw your attention to how Paul begins that passage and how he ends it

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

- Paul begins this section saying he didn’t want believers to be remain ignorant of the events of the end times so they would not lose hope
 - Paul goes on to explain the events surrounding the Lord’s return for the Church
 - This is the very event that the author I quoted earlier said we should not examine and should not endeavor to understand
 - Yet here’s Paul talking about that event saying it’s important we understand these things so that we might not lose hope
- What is this hope that Paul doesn’t want us to lose? It’s the hope of our resurrection into a new, eternal body and a glorious eternal future

- When you're living in this world, experiencing its trials and difficulties, it can very difficult to keep your mind on eternal things
 - It's easy to be distracted and become preoccupied with earthly concerns
 - But when we do that, we begin to lose our Christian hope, and we start to live just like the world around us that has no hope
 - And Paul says the antidote to that problem is to learn more about the future awaiting us, not less
- That's why we study chapters like Matthew 24...to remind ourselves of the glorious future the Lord has prepared for us
 - Furthermore, the Scripture says we must make it our ambition to live out our hope in front of the world
 - The Christian hope is in knowing that we have been saved from the penalty of death
 - We have nothing to fear from the end of lives or from the calamities of earthly life
 - And demonstrating that confidence requires understanding why it is true
- Finally, Paul ends the passage with a second statement about hope:

1Th. 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- Paul had just finished explaining the circumstances surrounding the Lord's appearing and the resurrection of the church
 - And then he says the church is to take these teachings and pass them around and share them with one another
 - And we are to do this so that we can comfort one another!
- Ironically, in some Christian circles, sharing a teaching on the resurrection or on other end times events is considered divisive
 - Pastors shy away from teaching it and don't allow others to do so either
 - Some go so far as that author I quoted and try to tell us it's unbiblical to study this material

- But Scripture itself says we are supposed to take this teaching and use it to *decrease* concerns in the church
 - How did Paul expect his teaching on the end times would comfort us?
 - He knew that the better we understood the future, the more we would look forward to it
 - And the more we look forward to the future, the more we will prepare our hearts to please Jesus so we'll be ready to meet Him
- And perhaps best of all, we will be united with our brothers and sisters in our understanding of the Bible and of our future
 - So if you are concerned about division over the study of the end times, the solution to that problem is not less study
 - The solution is more and better study, which is what we will do here over the course of the next several weeks
 - The Lord didn't provide us with so much information to confuse us, much less to divide us
 - We can be confident that the reason it's in the Bible is so that we would understand it if we study it properly
 - And as we study it, we will find our hope in the future growing and our concerns over what troubles us now fading
 - And I can't think of a better time in recent memory when the church needed an eternal perspective
 - Our study through this chapter may not be leading us to stirring extortions to obey Jesus or put away sin
 - But it's no less powerful or important...because it's going to give us what we most need to motivate ourselves to obey: hope