

Matthew 24B

- Today we return to the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, one of the most important teachings in all the Gospels
 - The Olivet Discourse runs from Chapter 24 to the end of Chapter 25, and it gets its name from the place where Jesus delivered this teaching
 - As we studied last week, Jesus exited the temple for the last time a free man on the Tuesday of the week He dies
 - His disciples are following Him through the Kidron valley and up the Mount of Olives to their nightly resting place in Bethany
 - And as they were walking out, Jesus tells the disciples that the entire temple will one day be torn down
 - Naturally, the disciples began asking Jesus a series of questions about that event and about the end of this age and the start of the Kingdom
 - We read those questions last week in v.3

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[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?"

- The disciples asked when will these things (i.e., the temple destruction) happen?
- What will be the sign of your coming?
- What will be signs of the end of the age?
- Then in Luke's account of this conversation, we found an additional question

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[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?"

- Luke recorded a "part 2" to the first question of what will be the signs when the temple destruction was about to take place
 - So putting both passages together, we end up with four questions:

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- 1) When will the temple destruction happen?
- 1A) What are the signs of the temple's coming destruction
- 2) What will be the sign of your coming?
- 3) What will be signs of the end of the age?
- Then I told you there were two interesting details needed to note in interpreting this discourse correctly
 - First, Jesus answers an additional question that the disciples didn't think to ask, which was what will not be signs of the end of the age
 - Secondly, Jesus doesn't answer these questions in the same order they are asked of Him
 - Specifically, He answers them in the order of (4, 3, 1, 1A, 2)
 - So let's move ahead with the answer that Jesus adds of what will not be signs of the end

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[Matt. 24:4](#) And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. [Matt. 24:5](#) "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

[Matt. 24:6](#) "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.

- Luke's version reads similarly...

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[Luke 21:8](#) And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them.

[Luke 21:9](#) "When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately."

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- Jesus' first warning is that no one in the Church should be misled into believing that Jesus had already returned
 - It's one of the constants of this age that people are always guessing the end wrongly
 - They are assuming that minor things are signs of the end, but they are nothing

- Meanwhile, when the real signs do start to happen, the world will miss them...that's what Jesus is teaching us in this chapter
- So the first false sign some will be fooled by are false messiahs, but Jesus says don't believe them
 - They are sent by the enemy, Satan, to deceive the world, but we can be sure these claims are always wrong
 - How can we be so sure that everyone who says they are Jesus is wrong? What happens when the real Jesus actually returns?
 - When Jesus does come back, we can't miss Him, because as we will learn later, He will bring us with Him
 - That's why we can safely ignore anyone who claims they are Jesus...it's always nonsense and it's not a sign of the end
 - But many will fall for these counterfeits, as we've seen in the past, and there will be more to come
 - Isn't it interesting that you rarely if ever see people claiming to be Muhammed or Confucius or Buddha returned
 - Why? Because Satan knows who the real God is, so he doesn't bother counterfeiting the others because they are meaningless
 - And the second sign Jesus says we shouldn't be worried over is wars or rumors of wars
 - In our world, war will be constant along with rumors of wars but war is not a sign of anything by itself
 - When you hear about new violence in the Middle East or world powers threatening each other, it's meaningless
 - These things happen merely because we live in a world of sin, so these things are not signs of the end
- But there will be signs that the end is coming and Jesus begins to give us those signs in v.7, starting with the signs of the end of the age
 - To understand what Jesus is saying, we first must realize what an "age" is in biblical terms
 - Simply put, an age is a long but finite period of human history

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- God establishes ages in the timeline of history to accomplish His purposes in Creation
- Ages have beginning points and ending points, and according to the book of Daniel, our current age began in 605 BC
 - At that time, Babylon attacked Jerusalem and the nation of Israel lost its security in the land as a penalty for perverse idolatry
 - The prophet Daniel says this age will continue through four major world-dominating empires
 - And Israel will not be allowed to dwell securely in their land again until the current age ends and the next begins
- Jesus calls this age the Age of the Gentiles, and Daniel tells us it will end only when the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom on earth
 - So our current age started in 605 BC and it will end when the Kingdom age begins sometime in the future
 - That's what the disciples were asking Jesus about...what signs will the world receive to know that the current age is ending?
- So Jesus now begins to tell us what signs will announce that this current age is coming to its end

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[Matt. 24:7](#) "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

[Matt. 24:8](#) "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

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- The signs of the end of the age will act like birth pangs, Jesus says
 - So we should understand a little of how birth pangs work if we are to appreciate how these signs will work

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- First, we know that birth pangs are painful, as my wife can verify
- They are intensely painful contractions that interrupt normal life for the woman and announce something new is about to arrive
 - So are the signs of the end of the age...they will be painful experiences for the world
 - And they will interrupt normal life in every imaginable way
 - But they announce that something new and better will arrive

- Secondly, we know that birth pangs can start very mildly, even imperceptibly
 - Some women can think that their birth pangs aren't real at first
 - So it will be with the signs of the end of the age
 - They will start mildly, and many will not notice or recognize the significance of them
- Then thirdly, we know that birth pangs increase in severity as time progresses
 - The contractions get stronger and stronger
 - So it will be with the signs of the end of the age as the signs repeat themselves over and over
 - But as they repeat, they will get stronger and the more severe the damage will become
- Fourthly, birth pangs increase in frequency, that is they get closer together
 - The closer together the contractions, the closer the woman is to the end
 - So it will be with the signs also, as they repeat closer and closer together
 - And that increasing frequency is a sign that the end is approaching
- Finally, they ultimately lead to the birth of a new life, and that's where we are headed too in these signs
 - As the pains on the earth increase and the end approaches, so does Christ's return and the start of the Kingdom
 - At that point, a new world and a new life for Israel and all believers will begin
- So that's the comparison Jesus offers for the signs of the end age, and now let's look at the specific signs
 - In v.7 Jesus says that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom

- This term sounds a lot like war, but a moment earlier Jesus told us not to view ordinary war as a sign
- And now we see why He made that distinction, because there will be a certain type of war that does announce the end
- And so we need to understand how to distinguish this special war from the ordinary kind

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- And the difference is found by understanding the phrase “nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom” in its historical context
 - In Jesus’ day, rabbis used this terminology to describe a certain type of war never before experienced on earth

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- The term meant a “world war” involving all nations and kingdoms on earth in a common conflict
- So the understanding in Jesus’ day was that world wars would be a sign of the end of the age

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- This type of war was unprecedented in all human history until the 20th century when world wars first began to happen
 - In 1914 Europe engaged in a war that eventually dragged most of the earth into the fight
 - Altogether, 88% of the world’s nations participated in WWI at some level
 - This was the first time a worldwide conflict had been waged
 - In fact this war was so unique that it was initially called the “war to end all wars”
 - No one had seen such a thing before nor imagined it could ever happen again

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- But they were wrong because not long after WWI finished, along came WWII
- That war was larger and worse than the earlier war, involving 95% of the world’s nations, like birth pangs would predict
- It fits the pattern of birth pangs increasing in severity
- Now we know why Jesus specifically ruled out wars in His earlier answer

- He didn't want us mistaking "ordinary" war for the unique world wars that would mark the end
- We've seen two so far, which means we have entered the period of the end and we should expect to see worse...far worse

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- The next sign of the end of the age is famine in various places

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- Now famine is also common on earth, so to understand this sign we must consider it in light of the birth pang comparison
 - When the end of the age approaches, famines won't just happen once in a while, they will become common
 - And they won't just impact distant people, but they will impact us too
 - That's what Jesus means by "various places" – He means in places everywhere, places where you didn't think it could happen
- And they will be more severe and painful than anything we've seen before
 - So it will be by the increasing severity and frequency that people can see famines as a sign of the end
 - But remember, in the beginning of birth pangs, they can be so mild that it's hard to notice
 - And so it will be with famine...the initial stages of this sign may be subtle and overlooked, at least at first

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- Today, there are indications that famine is growing in severity and frequency and impacting more people than ever before
 - Even some industrialized nations have begun to experience food shortages for various reasons including the pandemic
 - Food prices are steadily increasing and supplies are running short
 - Inventories in grocery stores are also limited and dependent on regular resupply
 - As we move further toward the end, this sign will only increase

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- Finally, Jesus says look for earthquakes to increase, and since measuring earthquakes is a science, it's easy to track the fulfillment of this sign

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- A search at the USGS website reveals trends in earthquakes in the U.S. and worldwide over the past century or more
 - The data shows a general rise in earthquake activity worldwide in recent decades
 - In particular, the number of high intensity earthquakes in the U.S. have increased dramatically in the past three decades

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- States like Oklahoma and Arkansas have seen unexplainable rises in earthquake activity on an order of magnitude
 - These are not normal variations and they have scientists stumped
 - And in looking at the previous decades compared to the prior century, the rise is especially dramatic
- The average number of high intensity earthquakes per decade in the prior century was 110 and remained consistent from decade to decade

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- But in the first decade of the 21st century the number increased to over 150
- And in second decade of this century we've already recorded 165
- This is a 43% increase over the steady pattern of the 1900s
- So we have world wars, increasing famine and increasing earthquakes, just as Jesus told us would mark the end of the age
- But Luke gives us another sign of the end of the age, one that you may find particularly interesting in light of our current circumstances

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[Luke 21:10](#) Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,
[Luke 21:11](#) and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

- Luke reports that Jesus also mentioned plagues in various places

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- A plague is the spread of disease over a wide area, otherwise known as an epidemic or pandemic
- Jesus said these would begin to happen in various places, meaning around the world

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- A worldwide spread of disease by itself isn't very meaningful, but in combination with the other signs, it's very telling
- So world wars, famine, plagues and earthquakes are signs we're near the end of the age and all these have been increasing in the past century
 - They follow the pattern of birth pangs, getting worse and more frequent as time goes on
 - For those who know their Bible, these events are completely understandable and in fact were told to us in advance
 - But the unbelieving world has no recognition of these things, and in fact they would like to believe it's all temporary
- As these things kick off and disrupt our world, everyone longs to go back to the life we knew before
 - But the Christian who knows his or her Bible realizes this is the new normal and there's no going back
 - Like a mother preparing to give birth, once the birth pangs start there is no stopping until that child is delivered
 - So once the signs of the end of the age begin, there is no turning back and no stopping until the age ends and the new age comes
 - We are on a one-way trip to Jesus' return
- So for us who read these truths in Scripture and see the events in our world today, we should be encouraged and excited even
 - The pages of the Bible are coming alive right before our eyes and we know that the Kingdom age is right around the corner
 - We aren't wishing for death, neither for ourselves nor for the rest of the world
 - We want to live as long as the Lord allows and we certainly prefer to live in a peaceful, calm world
 - But sooner or later there will be a generation of believers who live at the end of the age, and that generation will know these turbulent times
 - And that generation will be privileged to experience things that earlier generations could only barely imagine

- That generation will see the prophecies of the Bible coming true before their eyes
- And that experience builds faith... if you understand what you see
- Jesus says that the only way we enter the Kingdom age is after this age ends and someone will be there to see it end
 - And by all accounts, we are among the privileged to see these things and to live through them and it is exciting
 - It's not so much fun when your world feels like it's falling apart and you can't find toilet paper or go to church
- But look around...our world is rocking and reeling and it's only just started...your Lord is preparing to return and time is short!
 - So as the signs appear, take heart in the chaos
 - Because we know that we don't have much longer to wait and this is what we have been waiting for
- Remember last week I introduced this section of study by saying that study of prophecy in the Bible isn't divisive or futile
 - Some pastors tell us that we can't know the things revealed in the Bible about the end and therefore we shouldn't study them at all...
 - It's our privilege to have these truths revealed to us, and if we turn a blind eye to them we neglect this blessing of God
 - Moreover, suggesting that we should ignore the word of God because it just confuses or distracts us is close to blasphemy
 - Our Lord is not a God of confusion, and He gave us His word to bless us with knowledge that would help us serve Him better
 - In fact, the Bible itself encourages us to study prophecy, as evidenced by the fact that 40% of the Bible is prophecy
 - And a proper study of prophecy brings believers together in a shared understanding of the future Jesus has waiting for us
 - We will be united by our learning so that in unity, we all gain eyes for eternity

- And now we're learning studying prophecy helps prepare us for the things that come upon the earth in the end
- In his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul teaches an extended section on the events that will come about at the end
 - He talks about the Lord's return for the Church and the beginning of Tribulation, a time of great turmoil on the earth
 - And in the middle of that teaching, Paul inserts the following statement

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

- Think about that statement for a moment...Paul says we should comfort one another with his words concerning the end times
 - An in-depth understanding of the Lord's coming to claim the Church saints and of His Second Coming are a comfort
 - They are not divisive or troubling or confusing or frustrating or anything other than comforting
 - Look, if study of prophecy scares you, you're not doing it right because the Lord says He gave it to us as a comfort
- What's more, Paul says we are to comfort one another with prophecy teaching
 - We're supposed to share what we know about these end times events with other believers for the purpose of comforting them
 - The Lord promises it will comfort another believer when you tell them that plagues like the coronavirus are appointed by God
 - He brings them to warn His children that the end is approaching and with it the dawn of the Kingdom is right around the corner
- So how do these things comfort us? It's simple...they tell you that the chaos we see around us is not random nor is it a problem that needs to be fixed
 - Earthquakes, famines, and pandemics are not the problem...they are signs from God that the solution is coming
 - Look, there is only one solution that will fix the things that make this world such a hard place to accept

- If you believe there is injustice in this world, you are right
- If you believe there is hatred and lawlessness, you are right
- And if you mourn the tragedies of disease and hunger and violence and natural disasters and wish they would end, God agrees
- And the solution to all these things is Jesus present on earth ruling a Kingdom filled with His glory and free from sin and rebellion
 - Because the problem we're facing on earth is sin and it's everywhere
 - And it's only going to be dealt with when the Lord returns
- So when you study your Bible and you realize that the events that rock your world are signs that the solution is about to appear, you get excited
 - It's like preparing for the last set of final exams before you graduate from high school or college
 - It's hard and it's no fun, but at the same time you're excited because you know the graduation is right around the corner
 - So it is with these signs of the end of the age...they tell you that Jesus is right around the corner
 - And we're among the privileged generations that get to see these things
- So comfort one another with these words...know the signs and share them with others
 - And continue with us in this study in the weeks to come...