

The Return of the King

New Castle Bible Church

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Text: Mathew 24:15-31

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Kevin preached from Matthew 24 two weeks ago, and I want to pick up where he left off. Matthew 24 is about the end times.

Jesus and the disciples were walking the streets of Jerusalem. Matthew says that he and the others “came to point out to [Jesus] the buildings of the temple” (v. 24:1). Massive buildings. Massive stonework. Truly overwhelming. But Jesus says, “You see all these...” *it will all be thrown down.*

That might be like standing at Ellis Island when someone says, “You see that Statue... she will soon be demolished.” You would have some big questions! If you were new to the country, you might think entering America means opportunity... better days are ahead! But the Statue of Liberty, possibly our most iconic symbol of freedom—it’s going to be demolished?

The disciples entered Jerusalem expecting more than ever before that Jesus would soon establish the Kingdom—overthrow the Romans and usher in an age of blessing. But “you see all these...” all these massive building... it will all be thrown down. *Don’t get too attached.*

Jesus’ words drew the disciples to ask Him about it. The text draws us, pulls us into it to do the same. *Jesus, when is this destruction going to happen?*

And what about the kingdom?

When are you coming to establish it? What will be the sign?

Jesus told the disciples first, not to be led astray—Matthew 24 verses 4 and 24. Don’t be surprised by wars and conflict, natural disasters, famines, or persecution. People are going to say this is it. Because of *this* conflict or *that* disaster, the world is coming to an end! But don’t believe a word of it. Don’t be led astray or deceived.

The world will not end due to climate change.

The world will not end due to a lack of natural resources.

The world will not end due to famine, floods, or nuclear fallout.

As serious as all of these problems may be, the end isn't something we cause. Nothing we do speeds up or slows down the end of time. This is God's story, with chapter after chapter revealing His glory in man's redemption. And so, the story does not end with man's failure, but God's triumph—God's triumph over sin, over death, over Satan.

- The last chapter of history is about a King who establishes His kingdom with wave after wave of glory radiating outward from Jerusalem. Justice rolling down like water, and righteousness like a river to the ends of the earth.

But when, Jesus?! When will these things be?!

Not yet.

And so, we, just like every generation of believers before us, hope and keep waiting for the return of the King.

Our text today takes us to, what I believe, is the 2nd half of the Great Tribulation. Before God's triumph will be a time of great tragedy. Things will become so desperate, so dark on the earth that it will seem humanity is on the verge of extinction.

It will seem to the Jewish people who have turned to Christ for salvation that Christ isn't coming, that God may have just broken His promises, that Satan wins. It will seem that way for a time, and many professing believers will fall away.

Jesus encourages His people to stay ready. Don't lose heart. Don't lose hope. Don't be deceived, but stand firm. Hold fast. Ready yourself for the King by holding fast to the truth. That's the main point of our passage. It's an exhortation for future believers in the Tribulation, but each of us today needs it as well.

We must be ready for the King. How? By clinging to three truths...

- I. Know that deceivers will arise.
- II. Know that trials will come.
- III. Know that your King is faithful.

Please stand for the reading of our text today...

Matthew 24:15-31 — “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had

not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Then if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, “Look, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out. If they say, “Look, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This is the reading of God’s Word. You may be seated...

Be ready for the King by holding fast to the truth. The first truth to grasp is that deceivers will arise during the Great Tribulation. In fact, one deceiver will come who surpasses all who ever came before him—the man who will bring an abominable desolation upon Jerusalem.

I. Know that Deceivers Will Arise (v. 15, 23-26)

I fully realize that we won’t be here to witness the event of the Great Tribulation. If you are saved, you will be raptured to be with Christ before any of this happens (1 Thes 4:13-18).

However, much of what will happen in the Tribulation is happening in our world now.

Are there wars today, nation rising up against nation? Yes.

Do we hear about famines and natural disasters today? Of course.

Are believers being persecuted in places today? Definitely.

Do false teachers exist today? Absolutely.

The Tribulation isn’t the beginning of evils never before seen, but the sudden intensification of evils already happening. What happens in the future is significantly worse than anything happening today—worse, but not altogether different. Thus, all that Jesus says in this passage has great application for each of us.

There is no shortage of deceivers in our world today, but the Great Tribulation will see many more. The fruit of the world's greatest deceiver will be something called the "abomination of desolation" in verse 15. What's that all about?

An abomination in Scripture was always a great offense to God, either a perversion of one's body or a perversion of worship. For instance, Scripture views adultery and homosexuality as abominations as well as idolatry and child sacrifice.

So, the phrase refers to an event that's not just destructive, but a kind of destruction that's horribly offensive to God.

Daniel 9:24-27 foretells a prince who will make a covenant with Israel. He will make peace with Israel for 3 ½ years and then quite suddenly make war upon Israel for the next 3 ½ years – thus, we have 7 years of Tribulation.

Daniel 11:31 – "Forces from him [the prince] shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate."

Antiochus IV, also known as Epiphanes which means "God Manifest." He stormed the Jewish temple in 167 B.C., sacrificed a pig on the altar, forced the priests to eat it, and made the Jews worship Zeus. That's an abomination that desolated use of the temple... and yet, that was small compared to what's coming.

The disciples knew the history of the Maccabees and what happened with Antiochus IV. They may have thought what happened in the past fulfilled Daniel's words, but Jesus says it wasn't even close.

Israel's rejection of her King and the kingdom has meant suffering upon suffering until the King returns. What Antiochus did was merely a foretaste of things to come. Someone far worse is coming.

Who? 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 refers to this person as "the man of lawlessness... the son of destruction." And what will he do?

He "opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

That's the abomination of desolation.

1 John 2:18 says many antichrists have come. Yes, false teachers are everywhere, but this prince is *the* antichrist—the most abominable, most destructive deceiver of all time.

The antichrist does not start out as a horrible deceiver. His true colors are hidden during the first half of the tribulation. He will seem to be a friend to Israel, one who actually brokers peace between Israel and the surrounding nations (Daniel 9:27). Every U.S. President in my lifetime has tried to broker peace in that region of the world... and this man will succeed..

He won't be the only deceiver during the Tribulation. We have false teachers today. The Tribulation, however, will have far more who are preying upon the Jewish people (v. 23-26).

“Look, here is the Christ!”

“There He is!”

“Look, He is in the wilderness”

“Look, He is in the inner rooms.”

False teachers all over the place offering false hope... and no prophetic voice to stand against it. The church will have already been raptured, which will create a spiritual vacuum or void.

When there's a vacuum, something always rushes in to fill it. In this case, remove the true church from the world, and error will quickly rush in.

At the start of the Tribulation, there are no believers in the world. Not one. As those 7 years progress, God's Spirit draws some to salvation... but believers in the Tribulation will be as a pure drop of water amidst a flood of iniquity Error and evil will engulf the world.

Blaise Pascal — “Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.”

Falsehood has been established in the past, it's well established today, and in the Tribulation it will be very well established. Know that deceivers will only continue to arise. May we be a people who love the truth!

II. Know that Trials Will Come (v. 16-22)

Know that deceivers will arise. Know that trials will come.

The false teachers that arise in the Tribulation will be convincing, but why will people follow them?

Because they're desperate—desperate for hope, desperate for relief. The second half of the Tribulation will be an awful time to be alive, which makes it tempting to listen to anyone who offers hope.

And that's what false teachers offers—hope. “Look, He's in the wilderness!” *Let's go!*

When you're suffering, you're more susceptible to believing lies. Suffering can grow our faith, but it can also leave us desperate for relief. False teachers and cults thrive on desperate people. They do today, and they will in the Tribulation.

So, how bad will it get? Well, Jesus said when you see someone abominably desolate the temple, run!

“Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains!”

Get out of there!!

“Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house!”

“Let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak!”

Houses had a stairway on the outside of the house to get to the flat roof. People dined on their roofs—it was elevated, breezy, a bit cooler.

Laborers often left their outer garments back at the master's house before working the field.

Both statements forcefully say that when the antichrist reveals his true colors, *the danger will be so imminent, so close to every home, there won't be time to pack up and get to safety. It's far too late for that.*

“And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.”

Some may be so far along in pregnancy that they can't run. The weather may be so bad that others can't go anywhere. And, if the antichrist reveals his true colors on the Sabbath, there are Jews who will refuse to travel.

When the antichrist shows he is no friend to Israel...

Matthew 24:21-22 — “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

This “man of lawlessness” will masquerade as a “man of peace.” His intent will be to lull Israel into a false sense of security. He wants the Jewish people to trust him and follow.

This man has one aim: to wipe Israel off the map. Genocide. He will attempt to eradicate every last man, woman, and child who is Jewish... and will stop at nothing to achieve his purpose.

The Lord said that if the Great Tribulation was “not cut short, no human being would be saved.” Cut short, cut down to 3 ½ years. The whole Tribulation period is 7 years where “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” The planet set ablaze with war.

If the Lord let these events run their course, He says the world would be so violent that all humanity would cease to exist. Not a single person left to fight. No one left alive.

Indeed, trials will come. But that doesn't answer why. Why Israel? Why would this powerful prince, the antichrist, care about some little nation on the Mediterranean? Because he's Satan's man.

Satan attacked God in ages past and was cast out of God's presence, according to Ezekiel 28. He could not attack God directly, so He attacked God's image—mankind. By attacking Adam and Eve, deceiving them, Satan plunged the crown jewel of God's creation into sin and death and eternal ruin... yet, God promised a savior (Genesis 3:15).

But the attack continued to the point that Satan then deceived nearly the entire earth. According to Genesis 6 violence became characteristic, men killing one another as might made right everywhere. Violence and deception... until God flooded the entire world.

After God made His covenant with Abraham, Satan tried to put an end to Abraham's descendants through famine. He tried in Exodus 1 to have all the male children of Israel murdered. He tried in 2 Chronicles 22 to end the royal line. He tried in Esther to have all of the Jews exterminated.

We do not have enough time to trace all of Satan's attacks, but his attacks against humanity--whether large or small--are proxy battles in His all-out war against God. Satan lives to mar God's image. He hates God, and he hates God's people. He is a blasphemer, a liar, a murderer, a deceiver—and such will be his servant, the antichrist.

The man of lawlessness will be hell-bent upon destroying Israel... because if Satan destroys God's covenant people, God's covenant fails. Satan cannot destroy God, but if he can eradicate God's people, He can show that God is like him, a liar.

So, towards the end of the Great Tribulation, Israel will be in a dire situation. The antichrist will have her surrounded. It's the Battle of Armageddon. Revelation 16:16 mentions it, and Zechariah 12 draws the picture. The antichrist will have "all the nations of the earth" gather in one final push to destroy the Jews. Not just a city under siege here—no, this will be an armed force so large as to put an entire nation under siege.

Ezekiel 38 refers to Arab nations coming from the North against Israel.

Revelation 9:16 refers to an army 200 million strong!

Like a snake coiling its prey, these armies will wrap themselves around Israel. There will be no escape. It will seem hopeless as if Israel won't even last the night.

*I thought the Lord said He would bless the nations of the earth through Israel?
Didn't He say there would be a glorious kingdom? Didn't He promise us a land?
And where is our Messiah? Where is the One who's going to save us?*

During the Great Tribulation, deceivers will arise and trials will come. The antichrist will seem so close to achieving Satan's victory. But, in the end, the King will prove His faithfulness.

III. Know that the King is Faithful (v. 27-31)

When the antichrist begins to squeeze the life out of Israel, something very unexpected will happen. Rather than snuffing out the life of a people, the armies of earth will reel with pain... like a snake realizing its squeezing a cactus.

Zechariah 12 says that Israel will become like a flaming torch amid dry wood—all it takes is a small spark to send a forest up in smoke. That's the picture here—small spark sending the armies of the earth up in smoke.

Zechariah keeps saying over and over again all that the Lord will arise and do on that day.

“I will make Jerusalem like a heavy stone”
“I will strike [every enemy] with panic”
“I will strike [them] with blindness”
“I will make [Israel] like a blazing pot in the midst of wood”
“I will give salvation”
“I will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem”
“I will destroy all that nations that come against [her]”

The messiah will miraculously empower His people, giving even the most feeble divine strength. Israel will be completely outnumbered, yet winning... and when the battle is over, the armies of the earth lying defeated...

Matthew 24:27 — “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.”

When the King returns, the whole earth will know it.

A flash breaking the darkness with rays of light,
blanketing the earth as far as the east is from the west. A new dawn arrives.

The world at that time will be like a war zone, or as verse 28 says, a “corpse.” And Christ will descend upon it like a vulture descends upon a corpse. He comes with salvation for His people, but horrific judgement for the unbelieving world.

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky. The light of Christ's coming will be so brilliant, it will blot out the noonday sun... totally drowning out all other lights.

Israel will realize that the One who empowered us is the same One we nailed to a cross. Our true King, Jesus Christ, died to save us and here, on this day, He fought to keep us.

Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! But on this day it will be the city that mourns in repentance. Zechariah 12:10 says God will do one last thing:

“I will pour out on the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look upon me whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn [son].”

Israel will mourn in repentance.

Hosea 14:7 looked forward to the day that Israel would “return and dwell beneath the shadow of [her King].”

Haggai 2:7-9 longed for God to come to “fill [His] house [once again] with glory... [glory] greater than the former... and give peace.”

Joel 3:18 wanted to see the “day the mountains [would] drip sweet wine, and the hills flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah [overflowing] with water.”

Despite Israel killing God's prophets, rejecting His kingdom, crucifying His Son... the day the prophets longed to see is still coming.

Despite all of Israel's sins and all of Satan's attacks... nothing will stop the return of the king.

Israel will enjoy a glorious kingdom ruled by our benevolent King, all because He who promised is faithful. Throughout the Tribulation deceivers will arise, and trials will come, but the King is faithful.

Friends, our Lord said He's coming, so may we say as John did, “Come Lord Jesus. Come.”

COMMUNION

With the Lord's return in our minds, we have a special opportunity to celebrate today through communion. The cup and the juice are symbols of our Lord's body and of His blood. What we are about to do is a symbol of our fellowship with one another as a church body and with our Lord. This symbol looks back on our Lord's sacrifice and looks forward to His coming. For this reason, communion is only for believers.

If you have fellowship with Jesus Christ, but didn't pick up the elements as you walked in this morning, please raise your hand and our ushers would be glad to take them to you. Don't be embarrassed at all, just raise your hand... we would love for you to celebrate with us.

Before we partake together, I would like to spend a moment in prayer. The apostle John eagerly wanted the Lord to return, but is that where your heart is at today? Are you longing for Him to come to take you home... or longing for lesser things at the moment?

While seated, please prepare your heart, by confessing to the Lord any sin and any lack of desire you may have for Him and His coming. **As the musicians play, let us go to prayer...**

[1-2 minutes / musicians will play / stand to the side]

[Return to podium, close this time w/prayer]

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 – “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.””

Please stand as we sing.

[Exit stage]

1 Corinthians 11:25 – “In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.””

Church, as we look back on the King's sacrifice, we look forward to His return. May it be in all of our hearts today what was in John's heart, the very last words of Scripture, “Come, Lord Jesus! Come!”

[Benediction]