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SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

HOPEFUL ABOUT TOMORROW (PART 2)

Why I Don't Worry: Reading Matthew 24 in Its Context

> In Matthew 24 Jesus answers two questions. The signs answer the first, about the temple that fell in AD 70. For His second coming He gives no sign at all, only a command: be ready. So we refuse to be alarmed, and we are found faithfully doing His work.

MAIN TEXT
Matthew 24:1-3

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SERIES
We're Hopeful for Tomorrow, Week 2 of 2

BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Four orthodox pillars hold up any healthy end times theology: the bodily and imminent second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth.
2. The disciples ask what they think is one question, but Jesus answers two: when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age.
3. Context decides the meaning. Matthew 21 through 23 has Jesus in the temple, and Matthew 24 opens with him departing it, so when they sit on the Mount of Olives staring at the temple and ask when these things will be, his answer is about that temple.
4. The first half of Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the Roman assault on Jerusalem from AD 66 to 70, and Jesus dates it himself: this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.
5. Jesus' first instruction in the passage is do not be deceived and do not be alarmed. Wars, famines and earthquakes are the natural course of life in every century, not a countdown clock.
6. The abomination of desolation is not exotic prophetic code. It quotes Daniel 11:31 and points back to what Antiochus did in the temple, a signal that something already seen is about to repeat.
7. When Jesus turns to the second question at verse 36, he gives no sign at all. No one knows the day or the hour, not the angels, not the Son, only the Father.
8. Since there is no sign, the assignment is readiness, not calculation. Be found so doing, working like Nehemiah's builders with a spade in one hand and a sword in the other.
9. End times speculation has become an industry that leaves believers either panicked or entertained, and either way off mission, when the real urgency is that people meet eternity at their own death.



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/Ft2lMagVKGg



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/hopeful-about-tomorrow-part-2

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is the second message in a two-week series. Last week was a flyover of eschatology: the four pillars, the four views of the millennium, and seeing in a mirror dimly. This week slows down and walks through Matthew 24, the chapter most often used to stir up end times alarm.

Say up front that you are about to challenge how most people read this chapter. The reading here treats the first part of the chapter (the wars, famines, tribulation and abomination of desolation) as Jesus' answer about the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and verse 36 onward as His answer about His second coming. Many in the Assemblies of God read more of the chapter as still future, so hold the details humbly, in pencil, and keep the four pillars in ink.

The last movement turns from teaching to a strong pastoral word against the end times prediction industry. Let it be a word, not a rant: the aim is to get people back on mission.

Introduction

Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, a continual rise in natural disasters. Should we be on high alert? What does the Bible say? Today I want to show you why I'm not worried.

We're hopeful about tomorrow. Not hooked to the TV, not wigging out. No matter what comes my way, I'm going to be hopeful about tomorrow.

REVIEW: THE FOUR PILLARS OF END TIME ORTHODOXY

1. **The second coming of Christ, bodily and imminent.** No one knows the day or the hour. He could come back "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). 2. **The resurrection of the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous.** "The dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). 3. **The final judgment.** Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will spend eternity with Jesus Christ; those whose names are not will be thrown into the lake of fire, the second death (Revelation 20:14-15). This includes the annihilation of all evil. 4. **The new heavens and the new earth** (Revelation 21:1). The restoration of all things, where we will spend eternity if we are born again.

WHY MATTHEW 24 MATTERS

Matthew 24 is a major eschatological text. One author described a newspaper article listing eight reasons the second coming was near, and five of the eight came from Matthew 24. If we misunderstand this chapter, we will be badly off base. We still wear sunglasses at night on these issues (1 Corinthians 13:12), but this chapter, more than any other, will decide whether you go into these days nervous or assured.

And we are in the last days. “In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:2). Breathe in. That’s last days air.

1. One Question Asked, Two Questions Answered

> MATTHEW 24:1-3 ESV
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> [1] Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. [2] But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” [3] As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

The disciples think they are asking one question. Jesus knows they are asking two:

- **When will these things be?**
- **What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**

In the Jewish view of the day, the fate of the temple, the coming of the Messiah and the final judgment were all wrapped up in one event. Even after the resurrection the disciples ask, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). In their minds, if the Messiah is here, it’s about to go down. But Jesus separates His answer into two different events, far removed from each other.

This can be hard to see for two reasons. First, we read the Bible faster than we ought. Second, Matthew’s account is compressed: we are getting a lot of information in a little text, not a word-for-word record of the whole conversation. It takes some work, but you can see where the answer shifts from one question to the other.

FOUR WAYS TO READ PROPHECY

- **Preterist:** everything Jesus prophesied has already happened. In my view, and the view of many others, that falls outside orthodox Christianity, because some things Scripture promises are still to come.
- **Partial preterist:** some of what needed to be fulfilled has been fulfilled, and some is still to come.
- **Historicist:** prophecy has been fulfilling itself across history.
- **Futurist:** nearly everything Jesus said is still down the road, waiting on something crazy to happen in the world. Most of us have been exposed mainly to strongly futurist teaching.

Some things Jesus prophesied have been fulfilled, and some have not been fulfilled yet.

2. “When Will These Things Be?” Read It in Context

What things? Matthew 24 sits in a story that begins in Matthew 21, and all of it happens in and around the temple.

- **Matthew 21:** Palm Sunday. Jesus enters Jerusalem and the temple (Matthew 21:12), drives out the money changers, and the leaders challenge His authority.
- **Matthew 22:** Still in the temple. The question about taxes (really about Caesar's image on the coin), the Sadducees' challenge on the resurrection, and the Pharisees' test of His knowledge of Scripture.
- **Matthew 23:** The seven woes over the scribes and Pharisees.
- **Matthew 24:1:** "Jesus left the temple." In chapter 21 He entered the temple; now He departs it. This may be the most prophetic moment in the chapter. It is Tuesday of the last week, and the covenant is about to shift. Jesus is departing a system that kept everyone in this room outside, and through His finished work we are now included.

Then they cross to the Mount of Olives, which sits well above the temple across the valley, and they sit looking down at it. (Show an image or sketch of Jerusalem, the temple, the valley and the Mount of Olives.)

Illustration: the cancer prophecy. Imagine you are diagnosed with stage three cancer on Thursday. On Sunday a guest speaker looks you in the eye and says, "You were just diagnosed with cancer, but the Lord says you'll be healed this week." On Tuesday the doctor comes out and says, "We don't know what happened, but the cancer is gone." Would you assume the prophecy was about some future, worse cancer you will get one day? Or would you say, "That was the cancer the prophecy was about"?

Jesus has spent days in the temple, debating in the temple, walking around the temple. The disciples point out the temple's buildings. He says not one stone will be left on another. They sit staring at the temple and ask when. Doesn't it stand to reason that His answer has something to do with the temple?

> MATTHEW 24:34 ESV
>
> 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

FORTY YEARS LATER

About forty years later, that temple was reduced to rubble. From AD 66 to 70 the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, trapped people inside the city and starved them. The dead numbered in the hundreds of thousands at the least. When Titus took the city in AD 70, the temple was burned, and Roman soldiers offered sacrifices to their standards in the temple courts. It was one of the worst assaults on the Jewish people in history.

Jesus foretold something that was not off in a distant apocalyptic future. It happened in that generation.

3. Don't Be Deceived or Alarmed

The first thing Jesus says when He answers the first question may be the most important thing to take home today: "See that no one leads you astray" (Matthew 24:4).

> MATTHEW 24:4-8 ESV
>
> [4] And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

It is amazing that we use this chapter to create more panic and alarm than any other chapter in the Bible, when Jesus expressly says, “See that you are not alarmed” (Matthew 24:6). He says these things are disconnected from the end: “the end is not yet.”

Drop a pin anywhere in history and you will find wars and rumors of wars: the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, decades in the Middle East. Jesus is describing the natural course of the world. Don’t treat it as a sign. People will always grab the latest headline and say, “Look, here is the Christ.” Jesus said not to use these things to predict even the event coming soon, much less the end.

Why it feels like the world is getting worse. As we get older, two things happen. We feel less connected to a world that keeps changing (the TV remote keeps getting more complicated), and our lives settle down, so we have more time to watch the news. When every story is a “news alert,” you live on high alert all day long. But as I said last week, things are getting better and better and worse and worse at the same time. It is the best of times and the worst of times.

THREE SECTIONS

Matthew 24 moves in three sections in answer to the first question:

- **Verse 4: routine events.** This is normal, not an indicator.
- **Verse 9: tribulation.** The ramp up: persecution, believers put to death, pressure building.
- **Verse 15: great tribulation.** The big indicators: the temple is about to come down.

Everything in this section can be tied back to what happened around AD 70.

4. The Abomination of Desolation

> MATTHEW 24:15 ESV
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> [15] “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

The phrase sounds strange and distant, but it simply means “the abomination that makes desolate.” Jesus is using language His hearers already knew.

> **DANIEL 11:31** ESV
>
> [31] Forces from him 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.

The Jews of Jesus' day believed this prophecy had already been fulfilled in 167 BC, when Antiochus IV desecrated the temple, set up a pagan altar and sacrificed a pig there, and killed tens of thousands of Jews. The rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt is what Hanukkah celebrates.

So when Jesus says, "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)," He is saying: you are going to see something like Antiochus again. It is a signal to something they had already seen. If I stood up and said, "Look out for 2008," everyone would know what I meant: sell your house. It points to the past to warn about the present.

In AD 70 that is what they saw: those with no right to be in the holy place came in, desecrated it and destroyed it.

The first part of Jesus' answer is not about the distant future. It is about when this temple would be torn down. I'm not saying we won't face persecution in this country someday. But let's be reasonable with our end time theology.

5. "What Will Be the Sign of Your Coming?" There Isn't One

Now the second question, the apocalyptic one: the second coming, the resurrection, the final judgment, the culmination of all things. And Jesus' answer is that there is no sign.

> **MATTHEW 24:36** ESV
>
> [36] "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Not the angels. Not the Son. Only the Father. You can read every article and look at a thousand things, and if you use the first half of Matthew 24 you will come up with plenty of answers about when. But that half is about something that has already happened. That should encourage you: Jesus' prophecy came true, because Jesus is right every time. Because He kept His word then, we can look to the future with hope.

Notice that from verse 36 on, the scary language goes away. There is no more talk of being chased down in the street. Instead there is a steady refrain: be ready. "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

We cannot believe on one hand that the return of Christ is imminent, and on the other hand try to figure out when it's going to happen every fifteen minutes.

The prediction industry. A book called *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* sold millions of copies. If you believed it, what would you do with the money? How many times do we let people predict the end and then let them do it three or four more times? It has become an industry, with books re-released with new dates.

Jesus starts with this: “See that no one leads you astray.” Like we said last week, we become either distraught or distracted. Some live in panic. More of us live entertained, watching end times theology like a sitcom. We like church, but not the kingdom.

Earthquakes, hurricanes and wildfires come and go. They are the natural course of life.

Illustration: after Katrina. After Hurricane Katrina, we visited our sectional presbyter in Pascagoula. His house was simply gone. His wife walked the slab picking up a few forks and spoons, a saucer and some pictures. And he said, “It’s the price if you want to live in paradise.” These things happen. That is when you get steady and steadfast: “I’m on the Lord’s side. God will get me through it.” Jesus is not good and feeble. He is good, all-powerful, and seated high above all things.

6. Be Ready: Be Found So Doing

> MATTHEW 24:46 ESV
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> [46] Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

You need to be found so doing. This is why the distraction matters: entertaining the drama of the end times keeps you from so doing. It is easy to ignore “love your neighbor” when you are reading about dragons, and easy to skip the prayer place when you are trying to predict the future.

Nehemiah’s builders. When Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, the enemy threatened to attack, so “each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other” (Nehemiah 4:17). A spade in one hand, a sword in the other. Keep the sword of the secret place in your hand, one eye turned toward heaven, and keep your other hand on the plow. Don’t put the spade down.

I hope the Lord returns and finds people changing their babies’ and grandbabies’ diapers instead of worrying about nonsense. **I hope the Lord finds you serving instead of sulking, faithful instead of fearful.**

We keep an eye on heaven and our hands to the plow. Our job is not to figure out when, why, how or in what order. **Our job is to be ready.** The second coming will be the great clarifier. This is a great place to write your beliefs down in pencil and move on with your life.

Conclusion: This Far, No Further

Why preach on it at all? Because I have watched people captivated and taken hostage by this. A prophetic voice has to rise in the church that stops playing around.

- **The next time you see someone on TV selling the end, shut it off.**
- **Stop sending money to people who scare you.** Sow into places that are faithful, honest and making a difference, where the gospel is going forth and people are getting saved, not scared to death. We laugh at the man on the street corner with a sign that says, “The end is near, turn or burn,” and then we send the sophisticated version of him $1,000 a month and buy every book he writes.

This world desperately needs Jesus. Not because He is returning soon, though He is, but because so far every person who has come face to face with eternity has met it not through the second coming but through their own death. Everybody's time is limited. These are not curtains, lights and paint. These are souls.

Illustration: "This far, no further." In *Star Trek: First Contact*, with the Borg about to overrun everything, Captain Picard draws the line: "This far, no further." And this very week in 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and refused to recant, because to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

We need people to rise up and say, this far, no further. God wants to do a great work in this city and in this church. Somebody here is deciding today: this far, no further.

Prayer. Lift your hands. Father, by the Spirit of power and authority, meet people in their seats. We call today a day of not looking back. We glance in the rearview mirror, but that's not where we're going. Let what You are about to do in this church supersede anything we have seen before. In Jesus' name.

OPTIONAL: FALSE CHRISTS AND THE LIGHTNING

This section is in the original notes but was not preached on April 19, 2026. Use it if time allows.

> **MATTHEW 24:23-28 ESV**
>
> [23] Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. [24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. [25] See, I have told you beforehand. [26] 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. [27] 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. [28] Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

This is directly about the temple's destruction, but people are still doing it. Preachers make claims and predictions, and Jesus said, "Do not believe it." When Jesus returns, it won't be in some hidden place: "as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:27). The second coming will be obvious. Vultures sense death, dogs sense fear, and false prophets sense people they can take advantage of. Then close with Jesus' own words: no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36).



ABOUT

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