

The End of The Age

Matthew 24:1-14, Revelation 6:1-8, Revelation 6:12, 1 John 2:18, Daniel 9:27, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 13:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:3-5, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 1:11, Daniel 11:32-35

Slide 1

To start a discussion on core values, a Youth Pastor asked his youth group: *“What would you do if your doctor told you that you had only 24 hours to live?”*

The students talked about being with friends and family, and the discussion seemed headed in the right direction, but then, Jason, a 13-year-old student said, *“I’d get a second opinion.”*

As we look at our world today, it seems that we’re coming to the end of an age: COVID changed our world.

There’s more unrest and political turmoil, people are protesting everywhere, prices continue to soar, and violent gun crimes are increasing.

Amidst all these crisis, people have various responses. Some panic, some rebel, and some just want a second opinion, hoping the bad news will go away.

How does Jesus want us to respond to all this? Turn with me to Matthew 24:1-14, where Jesus talks about the end of the age and how He wants His followers to respond.

Matthew 24:1-2, *“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

In this passage Jesus was talking about Herod's Temple. Those stones of the Temple were so massive that what Jesus said seemed impossible!

They were taller than I am and nearly 10-12 feet wide. Josephus tells us that master stone masons polished them smooth and generously decorated them with gold.

The Temple itself was huge. It covered about 1/6th of the city of Jerusalem. Its builders built it to last forever, because Herod intended it to be a permanent monument to himself.

The building certainly impressed Jesus' disciples. They were Galileans, men of the countryside, fishermen who knew the lakes far better than they knew the city.

The sight staggered them, but Jesus told them something even more staggering: One day, someone or something would completely destroy that Temple.

Jesus' disciples couldn't believe it, so when they climbed the hill opposite the Temple, they ask Him about it.

Matthew 24:3, "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

They asked Jesus three questions: *"When will these things be?" "What will be the sign of Your coming?"* and, *"What will be the sign of the end of the age?"*

In the rest of the chapter, Jesus answered all three questions but in reverse order, so let's look at Jesus' answer to the last question: *"What will be the sign of the end of the age?"*

Slide 2

Matthew 24:4-5, *“Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many.”*

During times of crisis, people arise who promise to save the world, but Jesus warned His followers to disregard them. Make sure that no one leads you astray; stay true to the Gospel.

Jesus was talking to us today, as well as His disciples. When troubling times come, we must look only to Jesus for deliverance, because Jesus is the world’s only Messiah; Jesus is the world’s only Savior and King.

We’re to ignore other so-called “saviors” because, during the end of the age, false Christs will multiply. In fact, Jesus identified them as the first of several signs marking the end of the age, as does the book of Revelation.

In Revelation 6, when the angel opens the first seal, John sees a crowned conqueror, riding on a white horse,

Revelation 6:1-2, “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.”

This rider is the Antichrist, a world ruler, who’ll promise peace to Israel when he makes a 7-year peace treaty with them.

This 7-year peace treaty marks the beginning of 7-years of tribulation, of which the first 3½ are relatively peaceful.

Then, halfway into his 7-year treaty with Israel, the Antichrist will break that treaty, desecrate their temple, and institute a reign of terror over the whole world.

Revelation 13:5, *“The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months.”*

He will be the ultimate deceiver, promising peace and salvation in a time of crisis, but ultimately bringing in war, famine, and death. At that time, believers will have to resist his lies.

But at any time, we must resist the lies of anyone who claims to be our Savior. Trust only Jesus for deliverance. Trust only Jesus to get you through the crisis, whatever it is.

In April 2016, Harper's Magazine published a story about Jay Miscovich. He claimed to have found hundreds of emeralds in the Florida Keys from a Spanish ship that went down in 1622.

There had been a lot of Spanish ships in those days that crashed on the islands and reefs of the Florida Keys.

Spanish conquistadors had loaded these ships with billions of dollars' worth of gold, silver, and jewels. They sailed those ships from South America to Spain in countless Spanish armadas.

Today hundreds of treasure seekers still look for these sunken treasure ships. Jay claimed that he had found masses of emeralds in the Florida Keys, worth half a billion dollars.

With the advice of a partner, lawyers, and jewel experts, Jay collected millions of investment dollars from private individuals, wall street managers, and a company specifically set up to protect his enormous find.

Jay presented a sympathetic, likeable façade, which fooled many. In the end, the world discovered that Jay Miscovich manufactured the entire story.

He had deliberately "seeded" the ocean floor with emeralds he'd bought on the market and exactly as he hoped, his false claims drew the interest of greedy treasure hunters.

But down the road, unaccountable discrepancies surfaced. For example, a Belgian jeweler found epoxy resin on the surface of the emeralds that could only have been added in modern times.

One investor pulled out, and the entire story unraveled. Investigations and lawsuits plagued Jay, along with lost friends and an estranged family, all in a poisonous atmosphere of distrust and anger.

People today are looking for the jewels of peace and security. So, don't fall for some likeable shyster, who tries to sell you a bill of goods.

Avoid anyone who claims to be your savior, and look only to Jesus for deliverance, especially in these days, which may be a precursor to the 7-year tribulation, or the end of the age.

So, as we approach the chaos of the end of the age, we must not only stay true to the Lord, we must stay calm in the crisis.

Slide 3

Matthew 24:6-8, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains."

When a woman starts her labor, she knows a baby is coming. In the same way, when you see war, famine, and earthquakes, know that the end is near.

Now, war, famine, and earthquakes happen every year, but it seems that they're occurring with more frequency. They'll certainly increase in the last seven years of the age, during the tribulation.

This roughly parallels what Revelation says about the end times. When the angel opens the second, third, and fourth seals in Revelation 6, there is war, famine, and death.

Then, when the angel opens the sixth seal, there's a great earthquake, which leads to worldwide panic.

However, God's people don't need to panic because God planned all this. He even told us about it in His Word. Revelation describes in great detail what Jesus predicted here in Matthew 24.

But God has revealed the truth to us! So, stay calm no matter what the crisis and especially as we approach the end of the age. Paul said the same thing to the church in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 5:3-5, "While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

Even if the world seems out of control, God has it all under control, and He's working all things according to the counsel of His good, acceptable, and perfect will. So, trust Him in the storm and stay calm.

In 2020, Elizabeth L. Silver wrote an article for Literary Hub titled, *On Managing Acute Uncertainty in a Time of Medical Crisis*. In the article, she described talking to a lot of people about the COVID crisis.

In those conversations, she found their biggest concern was fear of the unknown. They could face illness, financial loss, even death, but living with uncertainty scared them the most.

She discovered the same thing when she interviewed people living with various diseases. They feared not so much the disease itself but living with medical uncertainty.

Then Silver contrasted how most people deal with a medical crisis compared to doctors and nurses.

She asked non-medical people for the first word that comes to mind when they hear the phrase “uncertainty in medicine.” Their overwhelming response was “fear,” “blindness,” or “powerlessness.”

Yet when she asked scientists and health care professionals the same question, their first response was “challenge” or “reality.”

They understood and expected this uncertainty because it’s a part of their professional worldview.

In the same way, when a crisis comes, you can view it as a challenge or an opportunity, because Jesus told you to expect it. It’s all a part of God’s plan.

Jonathan McBride, who served as director of the Presidential Personnel Office under President Obama, recently discussed leadership in crisis moments.

He said, *“At the White House, we used to tell a story about an astronaut who posed a question to a group of people: “Say, you’re at the International Space Station and suddenly your oxygen goes out. You know you’ve got about 10 seconds before you start to lose consciousness. What do you do?” People started blurting out all the things they would do first. The astronaut interrupts and says, “No. You think for eight seconds, and then you make one move.”*

Too many people panic in a crisis and make all the wrong decisions. It’s much better to stop and think, then make one move that will solve the problem.

Stop and think about God’s plan in the crisis. Then make the one move He leads you to do.

As we approach the chaos of the end of the age, stay true to the Lord, stay calm in the crisis, and finally stay strong in the faith.

Slide 4

Matthew 24:9-12, “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.”

In other words, persevere through tribulation. Endure to the end. That’s what Jesus encourages His followers to do, but He first warns them of tribulation and apostacy.

People in the world will put you through tribulation because they hate you. Literally, they will pressure you to give up your faith, and some will. Others will give up their faith because of false teachers, who lead them astray.

Fake media and false information will deceive a lot of people, creating division, lawlessness, and hate. How descriptive of our day and age. It seems hopeless, but there's hope!

Matthew 24:13, *"But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

The one who does not fall away, because of the pressure or the lies, will be rescued from losing everything. The one who keeps the faith, despite tribulation or deceit, will be delivered from a wasted life.

In Daniel 11:32, Daniel saw this time when the Antichrist would arise and *"With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but"* Daniel says, *"the people who know their God will firmly resist him."*

Do you want to stand firm in chaos? Then know your God. Don't just know ABOUT God. KNOW God personally. Enter into a close relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

For without God, you'll give into the pressure; you'll believe the lies and give up your faith. But those who have a close relationship with God will make it through! They may stumble, but they won't fall completely away.

In fact, Daniel 11:35 tells us, *"Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time."*

If you trust Christ with your life, you'll persevere! You'll come out on the other end of the trouble stronger than you were before. You may stumble at times, but God will refine and purify you along the way.

Every day, 13 Christians worldwide die because of their faith. Every day, government authorities unjustly arrest or imprison 12 Christians, and every day, kidnappers abduct another five.

So says the *2021 World Watch List (WWL)*, an annual report of the top 50 countries that persecute Christians the most,

This watch list also tells us that 309 million Christians live in places with very high or extreme levels of persecution, up from 260 million in last year's list.

David Curry, President of *Open Doors* said, *"You might think this watch list is all about oppression... But this list is really all about resilience. The number of God's people who are suffering should mean the Church is dying—that Christians are keeping quiet, losing their faith, and turning away from one another. But that's not what's happening. Instead, in living color, we see the Words of God recorded in the prophet Isaiah:*

Isaiah 43:19, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

The church is growing faster today in those countries that persecute Christians the most than in many other countries. So, stay strong in the faith. Tribulation isn't destroying the church; it's strengthening the church.

More than that, in the middle of all the chaos, the Gospel is spreading all around the world! The light is growing amidst all the darkness. That's what Jesus said would happen at the end of the age.

Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

We're seeing the spread of the gospel today like we've never seen it before! According to *Christianity Today*, the map of global Christianity that our grandparents knew has been turned upside down.

At the start of the 20th century, only ten percent of the world's Christians lived in the continents of the south and east. Ninety percent lived in North America and Europe, along with Australia and New Zealand.

But, at the start of the 21st century, at least 70 percent of the world's Christians live in the non-Western world.

More Christians worship in Anglican churches in Nigeria each week than in all the Episcopal and Anglican churches of Britain, Europe, and North America combined.

There are more Baptists in the Congo than in Britain. More people in church every Sunday in communist China than in all of Western Europe, and there are ten times more Assemblies of God members in Latin America than in the U.S.

On 3 February 2016, two different publishers released two news stories that illustrate the turnaround of Christianity in our world.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Deepak Chopra, the Hindu holistic health expert and author of 84 books, spent three days leading a workshop for MBA students at Columbia Business School in Manhattan.

He directed roughly 65 students to sit in silent meditation, with their eyes closed and their smartphones and laptops stashed out of sight.

He invoked Hindu goddesses, featured a band of urban yogis, and asked students to diagram their “soul profile.” That happened here in the United States of America, supposedly a Christian nation.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the earth in the largely Hindu nation of Nepal, Christianity is exploding.

An article on *National Public Radio* noted, *“Now Nepal has one of the fastest-growing Christian populations in the world.”*

According to the national census, Nepal’s Christian population has grown from zero in 1951, to 458 Christians in 1961, to 102,000 in 2001, to 375,000 in 2011, to over a million in 2021.

As missiologist Christopher J. H. Wright has said, *“Missions is now from anywhere to everywhere.”*

Slide 5

Conclusion

The church is growing, and the Gospel is spreading all over the world! Sure, you see chaos as we approach the end of the age, but you can also have confidence that God is at work in the middle of all the chaos.

Mark Mitchell, pastor of Central Peninsula Church in Foster City, California, talked about the time he ran a marathon.

He trained hard to be as prepared as possible, but he did not prepare for the end of the marathon.

A marathon is just over 26 miles, but his trainer told him not to run over 20 miles in his training. That meant the last six miles of a marathon were “no man's land.”

Mitchell said, *“You don't know what you're getting yourself into. You may hit a wall. You may have cramps. You only know that it's going to be tough. But you also try to believe that if you train hard enough, you'll be ready and will be able to cross that glorious finish line.”*

In the same way, as you approach the end of the age, you don’t know what you’re getting yourself into, but you do know how to make it through to the finish line!

Jesus told us how! Stay true to the Lord, stay calm in the crisis, and stay strong in the faith.