

Jesus Talks About The End 19 March 2023

We are on the final stretch of The Gospel Series. Over the next few weeks, leading up to Easter, we are focusing on the Passion Week, the final days of Jesus' life. **Today, we are talking about Jesus' conversation with his closest disciples about the destruction of the Temple and his return at the end of the world.**

The story takes place in Jerusalem in the year 33AD, almost 2,000 years ago, during the annual Passover Festival. Tensions were high, because the city was literally overflowing with people attending the festival, and Jesus' presence threatened the power of the political and religious leaders.

On Sunday, Jesus caused an "uproar in the city" when he rode a donkey into Jerusalem. By doing this, Jesus was publicly claiming to be the "Messiah King arriving in the name of The Lord to bring peace to all the earth." Luke 19:38

On Monday, Jesus caused a dramatic scene in the The Temple by turning over the tables of the money changers and stopping people from buying and selling.

On Tuesday morning, Jesus showed back up at the Temple to teach, but was immediately confronted by the religious leaders. The following hours were filled with a heated exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus silenced the religious leaders and amazed the crowd by dismantling all of their questions.

This brings us to Tuesday evening of Passion Week. Jesus and his disciples were leaving the Temple after a long and tense day.

"1As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of his disciples said, "Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls." 2Jesus replied, "Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!" Mark 13:1-2 NLT

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving the Temple, one of the disciples was taken back by the size and beauty of the magnificent Temple complex. The Temple had been expanded by Herod the Great to almost "double the size." (ESV Study) It took Herod "forty six years" to complete (John 2:20), and it was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world. (Kent Hughes) No wonder the disciple was impressed.

Jesus affirmed his disciple's awe, but quickly let him know about the future destruction of the Temple. He said, "Not one stone would be left on top of another!" Jesus was prophesying total destruction! And this came true in the year 70AD when Rome seized Jerusalem. The historian Josephus recorded that the Roman soldiers pulled the stones apart in an attempt to recover the melted gold off the Temple walls. (Kent Hughes) The Temple was completely destroyed, just like Jesus said it would be.

“3Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, 4“Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?” Mark 13:3-4 NLT

Jesus’ closest disciples came to him privately to ask for more details about when these things would happen. Their first question was about when the Temple would be destroyed. Matthew helps us understand that their second question was about when “Jesus would return at the end of the world” Matthew 24:3 NLT.

These are big questions, and Jesus answered them in his typical teaching style, by being very clear about some details and intentionally vague about others. In some parts of his teaching, it’s hard to distinguish whether Jesus was talking about the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, or his final return at the end of the world. Scholars have generally agreed that Jesus was speaking to both events, but they have fiercely debated the specifics about which event Jesus was referring to at different points in his teaching.

I personally think it’s impossible to get the specifics exactly right on this topic. Jesus even said, “No one knows when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven, or the Son himself,” Mark 13:32 NLT. And I believe that Jesus’ teaching was equally relevant to his disciples back then, before the destruction of the Temple, as it is to us today, before Jesus has returned.

I imagine you may have some strong opinions on this topic as well. Regardless, of what you believe on the matter, I want to encourage you to approach this topic with humility, knowing that “We don’t see things clearly, and we’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist,” 1Corinthians 13:13. And to focus on what we know, the things that Jesus has told us to do in light of his future return.

How did Jesus answer his disciples’ questions?

“5Jesus replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, 6for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many. 7And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. 8Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.” Mark 13:5-8 NLT

Jesus begins by talking about the things that would happen in the world. He said, there will be false messiahs, wars, earthquakes and famines. And the fact is, many of Jesus’ disciples lived to see or at least hear that these things happened within the first century. There was a large earthquake that flattened the entire city of Laodicea in 60AD. Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the city of Pompeii in 79AD. The historian Josephus described a famine in Jerusalem during the Jewish Roman War from 66-70AD. (Kent Hughes) And at the end of the war in 70AD, Rome breached the walls of Jerusalem and completely destroyed the Temple. So we can understand why Jesus’ disciples might have thought that the end of the world was near.

But Jesus went on to say these things are like “the first part of birth pains, with more to come,” meaning there will be more false messiahs, wars, earthquakes and famines until Jesus returns at the end of the world. We know this is true because this has been the case throughout the last two thousand years of

history. Will Durant said, "War is one of the constants of history...in the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war." (Kent Hughes)

9 "When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. 10For the Good News must first be preached to all nations. 11But when you are arrested and stand trial, don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12 "A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, and children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed. 13And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Mark 13:9-13 NLT

Next, Jesus talked about the things that would happen to his followers. He said, you will be hated, betrayed by family, arrested, stand trial and beaten, because you are my followers. And this happened, Jesus' followers experienced these things first hand. The book of Acts tells stories of Paul, and many other disciples, being beaten multiple times, arrested and eventually standing trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin Council, Felix the governor of Judea, and the stand-in Jewish King Agrippa II. (ESV Study) So again, we can understand why Jesus' followers at that time, might have thought the end of the world was near.

Jesus went on to say, "the one who endures to the end will be saved." So we know that persecution was not limited to the disciples in Jesus' time, because the end has not yet come. This means that persecution against followers of Jesus will continue to increase more and more until Jesus returns.

Jesus encouraged his disciples, then and now, to see the persecution as an opportunity to share the Good New. Some of the best and most effective evangelism over history, has happened during some of the greatest persecution. Christianity spread like wildfire during its first 300 years because of Roman persecution. (Bruce Shelley) Communism has also contributed to mass evangelism in Russian and China. We can expect there to be many more waves of persecution, evangelism and mass conversions as we get closer to the end of the world. And when you do face persecution, Jesus said, "do not worry about what you will say," or what you will do, "because the Holy Spirit" will guide you.

14 "The day is coming when you will see the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing where he should not be." (Reader, pay attention!) "Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. 15A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. 16A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. 17How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. 18And pray that your flight will not be in winter. 19For there will be greater anguish in those days than at any time since God created the world. And it will never be so great again. 20In fact, unless the Lord shortens that time of calamity, not a single person will survive. But for the sake of his chosen ones he has shortened those days. 21 "Then if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or 'There he is,' don't believe it. 22For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. 23Watch out! I have warned you about this ahead of time! Mark 13:14-22

"Several times in Jewish history it was thought that Daniel's prophecy of 'the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing where he should not be,' was being fulfilled—most notably during the days

of the Maccabees when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, ordered that an altar to the Greek god Zeus be constructed in the temple (167 B.C.). He also decreed that swine and other unclean animals be sacrificed there...**But Jesus clarified that the complete fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy would be found in (1) the Roman destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, and (2) the image of the Antichrist being set up in the last days.**" (ESV Study)

Jesus goes on to say that those in Judea must leave without packing, and that it would be particularly hard for pregnant women and nursing mothers during this time. "The ancient church historian Eusebius reports that, during the Jewish revolt (A.D. 67), Jesus' warning was fulfilled when Christians fled to the mountains of Pella (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5.3). (ESV Study) After Rome eventually succeeded in sacking Jerusalem in 70AD, Christians and Jews fled to Africa, Asia and Europe, further fulfilling Jesus' words about leaving Judea. The historian Josephus described the horrible scene after the destruction of the Temple, saying, starved women and children "roamed like phantoms through the market-places and collapsed wherever their doom overtook them." (Kent Hughes)

Jesus seems to have switched gears from describing the destruction of the Temple in 70AD to the days leading up to his return, when he said, "there will be greater anguish in those days, than any other time since God created the world, and it will never be so great again." As bad as the destruction of the Temple was, Jesus was saying that things would be worse in the future. So bad, that if he didn't shorten the time, no one would survive.

Then Jesus said to "watch out" for false messiahs and false prophets who perform signs and wonders to deceive God's people. There have been so many people throughout history who have claimed to be the messiah, but they just ended up being liars. Jesus makes it clear in the next few verses that his return will be unmistakable.

24 "At that time, after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

Some people think the sun, the moon and stars are metaphors for political judgment on the nations, while others think these things will literally happen when Jesus returns. (ESV Study) Regardless, what you believe about this, Jesus' return will be unmistakable, he will arrive in "great power and glory," and the heavens will be shaken forever.

28 "Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door. 30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear. Mark 13:28-31 NLT

I love this image of the fig tree, because the fig trees in my yard are beginning to bloom, which means warmer weather is right around the corner! In the same way, we know that the more we see and hear about wars, earthquakes, famines and increasing persecution, the closer we are getting to Jesus' return.

What does Jesus mean when he said “this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place”? This is a difficult verse that has been highly debated. The ESV Study Bible offers up to five different interpretations. The CSB Study Bible simplifies the meaning to only two interpretations, this generation either represents the disciples living at the time of Jesus who witnessed the destruction of the Temple, or the disciples living when Jesus returns at the end of the world.

32 “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. 33And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert! Mark 13:32-33 NLT

I think this is the most important thing Jesus said in this whole conversation, “No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen.” The angels don’t know, and even Jesus himself said he didn’t know. Although, I think he probably knows now that he is with the Father. But the point is that if they don’t know, we definitely don’t know, so we should be humble and do what Jesus said: “Be on guard! Stay alert!”

34 “The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. 35You, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. 36Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. 37I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!”

In classic Jesus style, he summarizes his teaching about his return with a story about a man who went on a long trip. Just like the slaves in the story were given work to do, Jesus has given us work to do until his return, “Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others,” 1Thessalonians 4:11-12 NLT. And like the man told his slaves to watch for his return, Jesus said, we must keep watch and not to be found sleeping when he returns.

To sum all of this up-- We should expect to see more wars, earthquakes, famines and persecution as the day of The Lord draws near. And we need to be on guard, stay alert and keep watch since we don't know when Jesus will actually return!

What would it look like for you to be ready for Jesus to return today or in eighty years?

I don’t think it’s former televangelist-crook Jim Bakker’s end times survival food bucket that cost \$134, or his Peace Of Mind Final Countdown survival food package for \$4,500.

A better and simple vision of being ready for Jesus to return is watching and working for the Kingdom of God.

Watching for his return by praying daily for God’s Kingdom to come. Jesus modeled this for us, with The Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” Matthew 6. If you did this daily, you would be fully alert to God’s presence in your life, ready for him to return at any time.

Working for the kingdom of God in your daily life. The easiest way to do this, is by simply living your "everyday ordinary life," as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others" 1Thessalonians 4:11-12 NLT. If you focus on living a life of humility, respect and good work, people will get a glimpse of life in the kingdom of God.

Do you actually believe that Jesus is coming back one day, and that he could return at any moment?

What do you need to do to be ready for Jesus to come back today?

What would it look like for you to stay ready for Jesus to come back over the course of your whole life?

Prayer— Thank you Father for sending your Son Jesus Christ into the world, to bring us the good news of your love, forgiveness and your kingdom come. We are eternally lost without you. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to stay alert and to be ready for your return. Help us to watch and to work for the spread of your Kingdom as we wait for you. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.