**Matthew Sermon XVI**

**Preparing to Meet God**

**Review:**

Matthew 23:1-39 Seven Woes on the Pharisees.

v. 4 These religious people tie “heavy burdens” What are these burdens? They are religious duties which are not tied to loving God.

Gal 5:6 The only thing that matters is faith, expressing itself in love.

Are you straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel?

The “camel” is justice, mercy and faithfulness.

The questions for you:

Are you willing? Are you willing to be gathered under the wings of Jesus? Are you willing to accept the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness to God?

Today: Preparing to Meet God.

Q: to get us started. Are you ready, right now, to meet God?

Matthew 24:1-39 End Times

Note the transition Matthew 23:39 Jesus is saying his final good-bye to the temple. He is done with the old Judaism. “You will not see me again until…” Leads straight into the “Olivet Discourse” Matt 24-25.

Matthew 24:1-3

Now, Jesus goes up on the Mt. of Olives, which is on the East side of the city. This is fulfillment of the prophecy in Ezekiel 11:22-23. When God left the temple, he went up on the Mt. of Olives. At that point, the temple was doomed! Symbolically, when Jesus leaves the temple, it is doomed. Matthew 24:2 Jesus points toward the temple. See those stones. Not one will be left on another.

v. 3 The end of the age is both the end of the Jewish age (AD 70) and the end of the “Christian age” The end of the “last days” when Jesus comes back. The disciples confuse the two and Jesus never clears up the confusion—for a reason.

As we go forward, keep three things in mind:

1. This is about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the end of Jewish age.

2. This is about the second coming of Jesus at the end of the age.

The two are theologically connected as a coming of the Kingdom, as a “Day of the Lord.” This is similar to Ezekiel who often intertwined the two.

3. Practical: This is about our need to stay focused and to be prepared to meet God.

The interpretation is hard, but the application is straightforward.

Matthew 24:4-14

v. 5 Josephus (The Jewish Wars) tells us about many of these false Messiahs.

v. 6 “the end” is the end of the Jewish age in AD 70.

Jesus: Do not get distracted by wars, rumors of wars, famines, pandemics, great recessions, and (even legitimate concerns about social justice) earthquakes, persecutions, people falling away, false teachers,…

People will always tell you these are the absolute last days. Jesus’ advice: Ignore them!!! They are just “the beginning of birth pangs.”

v. 13 The key: stand firm to the end!

v. 14 Jesus’ vision of the gospel being taken around the world was completed by AD 70. Acts 1:8 “to the ends of the earth.” Acts 17:6 These men have caused trouble all over the (Greek and Roman) world.”

Matthew 24:15-25

v. 15 is key. “as spoken by Daniel” (Daniel 9:27, 1 Maccabees 1:57)

The Abomination of Desolation is when Antiochus Epiphanes put a statue of Zeus with his face on the statue on 167 BC Daniel 11:31 and also when Titus offered pagan sacrifice at the same place (as prophesied in Daniel 9:27).

All of this is fulfilling prophecy and prefigure.

AD 70 Titus burns down the temple and offers pagan sacrifice on the site (Josephus)

v. 16 “flee to the mountains” Eusebius tells us that they fled to Pella.

Josephus’ Jewish Wars give much detail to these terrible times.

v. 17-25 Again, don’t lose focus. Don’t go for false Messiahs and end-time prophecies. (Moonies, Mother Goddess, JWs etc…)

About v. 26 it switches to end times/the second coming of Christ.

Matt 24:26-35 Be ready!

v. 27 Now we are talking about the second coming—the return of Jesus.

The real actual end will be unmistakable. Don’t worry about that. (ex sudden darkness in Spokane after Mt. St. Helens) This is NOT the chaos of the Jewish Wars.

v. 29 classic apocalyptic literature. Not literal. (parallel: Isaiah 13:10, 34:4)

v. 30 note: All the peoples (not just Jerusalem) [Matt 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn. We will either mourn now, or we will REALLY mourn when Jesus comes back because it will be too late. Man, I am really in trouble now!]

v. 31 A loud trumpet call reminds Jews of the Feast of Trumpets at which the Rabbis told the Jews to be ready for the day of Judgment. It is a foreshadow of the second coming and final judgment.

v. 32-34 So sorry. This could be confusing, now he switches back to AD 70 (forty years later) Q: How many of us right now listening to this service will still be alive in forty years? (this generation will not pass away)

Matt 24:36-51 This is what this entire discourse is leading to/about! Be ready! Now our sermon starts.

It will be a complete surprise. There will be no specific identifying sign. It will be sudden. Do not listen to those who say differently (and there are many).

v. 37 As in the days of Noah. People laughed at Noah.

v. 38 Eat, drink and be merry. They will laugh at us. You are too uptight. Why are you always in church? Illustration at CU: Are you studying for a final exam?

But when it started raining and the door to the ark was shut….  
They laughed at the Jews marching around Jericho, but when the walls fell…

Thy ridicule you, but when Jesus comes back. It will be awesome. Imagine what it will feel like. I was right!!!!!

v. 40-41 One will be taken. This is not a rapture. Some will be taken to Jesus’ side and others will not. So… Where will they go? Where did those not in the ark go? What happened to those in Jericho? (they died… they were judged)

v. 42 Keep watch! That’s it!!!

What should I do to prepare for the coming of Jesus? Now let’s apply this:

Live as if it might happen today. v. 43 If the owner had known… But the point is that he does not, so live that way every single day! v. 44 be ready.

Q: How to be ready? v. 46 be doing good when he comes!!! (or when you die)

(like in the Parable of the Tenants in Matt 21)

Live as if it will not happen in my lifetime or in the lifetime of those who come after me. Do both!!

If you were to die tomorrow, how would you act today?

Plead with my friends to become Christians, call my family, tell them I love them.

Well… act that way today!!!

Illustration: They guy in Milwaukee who died while Ron Quint preached.

v. 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him faithful.

v. 48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, “My master is staying away a long time…” Q: Is there a sin you have been holding onto and concealing? What do you need to do today? Is there a deeply unresolved relationship in your life? What do you need to do this week?

I’ve got time…. Maybe so, but act as though you do not!

v. 51 Note: “He will be cut to pieces…” If you are in Christ and the Holy Spirit lives in you, you may not need to fear this, but how will you act anyway (given that this is your mother or your brother or your co-worker?

Matthew 25:1-13 The Parable of the foolish and wise virgins. Same message.

v. 1 At that time… When Jesus returns, or the day you die…

a. Matthew 24:36-51 Be ready for Jesus to come back today.

b. Matthew 25:1-13 Be ready for Jesus to come back several years from now, (v. 5 It was a long time coming…) or not until after you die.

This week, this month, have you been wise or foolish?

All ten “virgins” are symbolic of people who have been saved!

v. 4 kept oil in reserve. v. 5 a long time—like 2000+ years.

v. 7 A short wick burns dimly but a too-long wick wastes fuel and produces soot. A well-trimmed light burns brightly but does not waste fuel.

Q: How can you keep your lamp full?

Notice that those with extra oil could not share with those who ran out. You cannot vicariously drag your brothers and sisters to heaven.

We share the Christian life together, but we enter heaven one at a time.

v. 11-12 Do not let yourself be these foolish virgins. Stay close to God, keep your Christian commitments, stay close to brothers and sisters, stay tied in to the church, walk in the light, be open…

Summary:

Keep watch, be ready! You do not know when Jesus will come back (or you will die).

Be ready for Jesus to come back today.

Be ready for him to come back after a long and fulfilling spiritual life.

Keep watch, be ready!