

- **\*READ Matthew 24:1-3\*** As the Lord and His disciples are exiting the temple, the disciples take a draw Jesus's attention toward the grandeur of what stood before them. Our Lord, not being one to ever waste a teaching opportunity, takes a moment to burst their bubble by foretelling of the coming time when not one of the stones would be left upon another. Such statement would certainly have floored those who heard them for how could it ever be that this grand place of worship would at some point cease to be?
  - Obviously concerned and intrigued, the disciples come to Jesus just a bit later and ask Him to further expound upon that which they had just been told. When would the end of the age take place? How would these things happen? What signs would precede the occasion? To the Jew hearing that this would happen, it was paramount to the entire world ending. So there questions to Jesus in essence are asking, "What comes the end?"
  - This question was asked to our Lord some 2,000 years ago, but this question still continues to be asked even today. In fact, we are kind of at a high point for end times discussion and predictions because of what all has been happening all around us. From the natural disasters of hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes to the rumors of wars between global powers to the wild notion that earth was supposed to be destroyed by some sort of ghost planet within the last couple of weeks...we have many people look to different sources and asking the same question, "when comes the end?" We are going to take a few minutes this morning to consider this question, and we are going to seek to answer it from the ultimate source which is the Word of God.
- I. Mankind has always been fascinated with knowing when and in what manner this world will end.**
- A. This question by the disciples in **Matthew 24:3** was by no means the first question about the end and it was certainly not the last time the issue was pondered. In fact, if you were to simply google "end times predictions" you will get well over 2 million hits. The first one that popped up for me was a wikipedia page that detailed over 150 end times predictions dating back to the first century. That first prediction was actually predicated on the Jewish revolt against Rome which did lead to Jesus's prophecy coming to fruition, yet it was only the end of the Jews and not the world.
  - B. Continuing on though, this list of predictions, accompanied with references, notes dozens of different predictions coming from monks, religious zealots, bishops, popes, philosophers, and more. And the ways in which the world would end vary just as much. Some would say that the world was going to end by plague. Others said a flood would destroy the world. Still others focused much on the supposed teaching of Scripture concerning the Apocalypse. While some predictions were secular in nature, the vast majority of man's end times predictions are influenced by their faith and words of Scripture. Here in lies much of the issue.
- II. Many have sought to use the Bible to validate their predictions concerning the end of the world.**
- A. The issue isn't that people look to the Bible for answers, but the issue occurs when the usage is actually misuse and misapplication of what the Bible says. Consider what we started off the lesson with from **Matthew 24** and then add in the parallel accounts in **Mark 13 and Luke 21**.
  - B. These three Gospel accounts all record this conversation between Jesus and the disciples. Yes, Jesus does indeed mention wars, persecutions, earthquakes, and others natural disasters. (**Matthew 24:6,7; Mark 13:7-9 Luke 21:10,11**) And Yes, we do seem to see these sorts of things taking place today. However, there is a simple statement made by Jesus that shows that what He says in these particular places does not have its fulfillment in our time, but it has already been fulfilled. Notice this time stamp statement that is found in all three Gospel accounts, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." This statement can be found in **Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; and Luke 21:32**.

- C. Another key point to consider is that not all judgment type language must refer to the end of the world. Language such as the darkening of the sun and stars falling from heaven can easily be referring to judgment on a national scale. **Isaiah 13:1,9-11** uses this type of language, but it is clearly seen in this text that it is referencing Babylon (*"The oracle concerning Babylon"* v.1), yet some want to apply these verses to end times scenarios. It is almost as if any reference to the day or the coming of the Lord (**Matthew 24:3**) is automatically a reference to final judgment, but time and time again through Scripture that this just isn't the case. It can simply be referencing a judgment of a particular people.
- D. Also, we can look at the fact that many of these so-called end times predictors seem to pipe up and coincidentally get their pockets padded when things such as are happening now begin to take place. People such as Pat Robertson, John Hagee, Harold Camping and others have built entire theologies and followings that are based around end times predictions. These false teachers take advantage of the ignorance that so many have of Scripture and they use it to turn a profit. Yet, time and time again, these predictions fail. But why do they fail? To borrow a line from a fellow preacher Shane Scott, *"These predictions are wrong because they distort the Bible into a source of speculation rather than edification."* How right brother Scott is. This collection of God-breathed writings was given to us so that we might be built up. Even those who experienced these events in their lifetimes were made better and strengthened in their faith by that which was written and prophesied long before. How wrong we are when we use God's Word to create hysteria and doubt, when it is only meant to build us up in Him.

### III. The truth is that we have no way of predicting when this world will end.

- A. Let's finish up this morning's lesson talking about what Bible actually does have to say about the end of this world and the final judgement. If you take the position that Jesus makes a transition in focus in **Matthew 24:36**, from talking about the judgment of Jerusalem to the final judgment then you would easily come to realize that it is impossible for us to know when the end is coming. The angels do not know. Jesus Himself, as He reigns in heaven, is unaware of when it will take place. Only God the Father is knowledgeable as to when the end will come.
- B. Apart from this verse and its teachings, I can't think of a better place to go to consider what we might know about the end than that of **II Peter 3**. This entire chapter focuses on the end and what disciples need to know and how they needed to carry themselves concerning the final judgement.
- C. Peter begins by reminding these brethren to remember the words that had been previously handed down concerning the coming of Jesus. These "last days", that we are living in as well, will give place to mockers who will say that God isn't actually going to come back. **(vv.1-4)** However, what they miss is the fact that time doesn't pass for God like it passes for us. **(v.8)** They might mock that God is taking his sweet time, but Peter says that the God who created the world will come to destroy it when He well pleases. Yet, He isn't swift to return because He wants to give man plenty of time to be able to repent and turn to Him. **(v.9)**
- D. For many, this still does nothing for them because they want to know when the Lord will return. There are some things that we will just never know, and this happens to be one of them. While the destruction of the Jews might have been preceded by signs and such...there will be no such signs when it comes to the final return of Jesus. Peter indicates that it will be like a thief in the night. **(v.10)** But this is the only time we see this language being used to describe the Lord's return. Paul actually uses the exact same language in **I Thessalonians 5:1-6**. Notice that Paul also says that with this being the case, disciples must seek to be ready at all times.

#### **IV. Therefore, we must be ready at all times to stand before our God in judgement.**

- A. Both Peter and Paul direct the Christian's focus to the fact that we need to be ready at all times for judgement because we simply don't know when that is going to take place.
- B. Paul says that we need to be alert and sober, and the rest of the chapter of **I Thessalonians 5** goes on to detail how they could be ready and prepared. Peter also goes on to highlight the need for preparedness in **II Peter 3:10-14**. This day of judgment that will come like a thief in the night will be the destruction of the known world. Everything we know about this life will be destroyed and burned up with intense heat. Everything will be finished.
- C. Peter brings this to the mind of the Christian because this ought to lead us to be prepared and ready for the unknown. We know what is going to happen. We know this world will end, and we know beyond that we will die unless the end comes first. Therefore with these things in mind, Peter instructs that we always seek to be prepared to take hold of that promise of the new heavens and the new earth. But in that place only righteousness will dwell so we must strive to live that life that is spotless and blameless before Him. **(vv.11-14)**
- D. The people in Jesus's day were given signs to be on the lookout for so that they could make the preparations for that day of judgment. No such signs have been given to us. A great many people sure wish there would be signs because they'd like to be able to live their lives as they'd like and then get ready at the last moment, but no such fortune has been given to them. The end will come, but we won't know the time...so we must always be ready. We must live with the mentality of what Paul writes to the Romans in **Romans 13:11-14**

While many people might be running around like Chicken Little proclaiming that the sky is falling and the end is near only to be proven wrong and mistaken, we must continue to be a people who are living as if the day is truly near. This is the true test of our faith and commitment to Jesus. It might seem appealing to live for Him when we know the end is near, but those who truly love Him will live for Him even when there is no assurance that the end is near. May God help us to be content with what we know concerning the end. We know it is coming, and we know everything will be burned up, but no one knows when exactly this will be. All we know is that it will come like a thief. Therefore, let us all be resolved to be ready when that day finally does come. **\*PRAYER\***