

The Memoirs of Peter
The Future According to Jesus, Part 2
Mark 13:3-37
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Tonight as we begin our study of Jesus' famous prophetic sermon, I don't want to start there. I want you to turn back with me as we begin to Isaiah's prophecy, Isaiah 44. My mind has been on this passage, and interestingly enough, last Sunday I think Mike Fabarez, as he was preaching, came to this text, but it's the proper introduction for what we're studying in Mark 13. Isaiah 44:6:

“Thus says Yahweh, the king of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none.’” And then Isaiah transitions to the absolute stupidity of idolatry.

What distinguishes our God, the true, the living God, from all the idols of the nations is that not only that He is living as opposed to nonexistent, but that He can declare the future. He can proclaim what is coming, and He always has. Go back to Genesis 3:15. And in the Garden of Eden, it was proclaimed by, I believe, the preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, to Adam and Eve in the Garden, the very One who would ultimately be the, the One who would come. He made this promise: that a child would be born, the seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent. And of course, that prophecy was fulfilled thousands of years later in the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God is always telling us what's coming. Isaiah's prophecy is filled with those kinds of predictions. Isaiah prophesies that a man named Cyrus would come and would free God's people and send them back to their land. That was 150 years before a man named Cyrus did exactly that. Also in Isaiah's prophecy, he points ahead in those famous chapters 7 and 9 to the Messiah 720 years before Jesus' birth. So it's not surprising, is it, that when our Lord is on the earth, when

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God incarnate is here, that He does what distinguishes the true and living God from all other false gods, and that is He declares the future. He tells us what's coming.

You see, Jesus gave us the end of the story. His death, His resurrection, the ascension – that wasn't the end of the story. He gave us the end of the story. He very specifically prophesies what will happen from the time of His ascension through His second coming. We don't have to be surprised. He's told us. Our world has not seen the last of Jesus Christ. He will return.

And in a remarkable sermon – we call it a sermon, and it is, but really it was only given best we can tell to four disciples. Four of them heard this magnificent sermon where He predicts what's going to happen from His ascension through the age in which we live all the way to His second coming. That amazing sermon was recorded in three places in the gospels. It's recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 (that's the fullest version), in Luke 21, and in the gospel we're studying, Mark 13. Because it was preached on the top of the Mount of Olives, it's commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse.

Now the early verses of chapter 13 set the context for this famous sermon. Let me read it to you again. It's been a couple of weeks since we looked at it. Mark 13:1:

“As Jesus was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.’ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?’”

It's late on Tuesday afternoon, perhaps near dark on Tuesday afternoon of the Passion Week. Jesus got up in disgust as He watches this poor widow put in everything she has to live on. He sees a system that has literally abused this woman, a false religious system that has taken advantage of the disenfranchised and the poor. And He gets up, and He leaves the temple mount with His disciples, never to return.

Jesus' explicit prophecy of the destruction of the temple happened as He came out of the temple and was going away according to Matthew 24:1. They probably left the eastern gate of the city and went up and across the Kidron Valley and then wound their way up the Mount of Olives.

Again, just to reorient you, you see the Dome of the Rock. That's where the temple would have been in the time of Jesus. Then you have the yellow line representing the valley that is the Kidron Valley. North you can see is to the right in this picture, and so we're looking west. And then you see the Mount of Olives circled there in red.

Here's a little different orientation. There's the temple mount. You see the Kidron Valley in the, in the foreground there. And then this is taken from the temple, from the Mount of Olives; or actually that's probably an aerial, but over from that direction. Here is the temple mount on the left. You see a little bit of what the Kidron Valley looks like and how steep it is, and then the Mount of Olives on the right. So that's just to orient you a little bit.

This is what the view would have been from the Mount of Olives looking back over the temple mount. Of course, this is today so you see the Dome of the Rock.

In Jesus' day, it would have looked something like this. This is a model of Herod's temple. But this is the perspective – He would have been looking back from the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives sits about 150 feet higher than the temple mount. And He would have had a bird's eye view of that magnificent structure.

It was in that context as He is seated apparently after coming out of the, out of the temple, coming across the Kidron Valley, going up the Mount of Olives the better part of a mile probably. They get to the top of the Mount of Olives, and they sit. And four of Jesus' disciples come to Him with a question. They're asking for clarification. They heard His remarkable statement about the destruction of the temple. And now as they look back across it, they say, "Lord, help us understand."

"Tell us (verse 4), when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" That question brought the longest answer Jesus ever gave to His disciples' question anywhere in the New Testament. In addition, it's the longest message by Jesus on a single theme of any kind in Mark's gospel. And it's the longest recorded sermon about the future that we have in the gospels.

Now what were they asking? We learn from the other gospels that the disciples were really asking three distinct but related questions. Matthew tells us this is how they asked: "Tell us, when will these things happen (and by the way, those numbers are added. Those are not in the original text. I just want you to know that. Now that's for clarification.) Tell us, when will these

things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and what will be the sign of the end of the age?”

Those were their questions. So they were asking basically when will the temple be destroyed, what are the signs of Your coming, and what are the signs of the end of the age.

Now as we learned two weeks ago, they didn't see those as three distinct events separated by many years. That was not what their view of the last times was in the first century. Instead, they saw these three events they were asking about as three events that would occur in kind of a rapid fire, staccato-like fashion – one right after the other.

The Old Testament had predicted the Messiah would come so they were anticipating the Messiah, but they had a specific idea of what it would be like when Messiah showed up. And last time (and I won't take time to go through it in detail but just to remind you) last time we reviewed the view of last things that was common in the first century. We can reconstruct that from the documents that were written in the silent 400 years between the conclusion of the Old Testament and Jesus and the New Testament.

And when you look at those body of writings, this is what you discover. Here's what they would have expected when Messiah came. There would be a period of great tribulation before Messiah comes. That is, understand they knew Jesus was here. They, they weren't saying that; instead, they were saying we know before He fully manifests Himself as Messiah, before He reveals Himself and sets up His kingdom, there's going to be a great tribulation. Then Elijah will return as a forerunner announcing Him. Then comes the manifestation of the Messiah. There'll be one final attack of hostile powers against God's people. Messiah will decisively destroy those hostile powers.

And then He will renovate Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. He'll gather the dispersed Jews from around the world, and He'll establish His Messianic kingdom as the center of the world. He'll renovate the entire earth. Then comes the general resurrection of the dead and the last judgment. This was the view of last things, or eschatology as it's called, in the first century. This is what they would have been expecting.

Now in their minds, in the disciples' minds, Messiah would only come to earth one time. They didn't understand the two comings, as you and I do, separated by many years. They thought He

would come, and at some point while He was here, He would fully manifest Himself to everyone as Messiah. And when that happened, all eleven events here would unfold in close succession.

So when they asked Jesus about the signs of His coming, they expected that He would soon manifest Himself fully and establish His kingdom. When they asked about the signs of the end of the age, they expected that would follow right on the heels of His manifesting Himself. So their eschatology was quite simple. Jesus manifests Himself as the Messiah, and all of these events then occur in quick succession, including the defeat of Israel's enemies and His establishing His kingdom.

You can see their mistaken expectation in a couple of New Testament passages. Let me show you. Look at Luke 19. This will help you get inside their heads a little bit. Luke 19:11. This was actually while they were on their way to Jerusalem for the last Passover after the salvation of Zaccheus. Verse 11 says of Luke 19: "While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and (watch this) they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear (what?) immediately."

They didn't really get the whole death thing that He'd talked about and the resurrection. They, they still were very unclear on that. In fact, we're told in Luke's gospel that, that their minds had been intentionally clouded by God not to get the whole story. But, So they didn't understand how all that fit.

But what they did expect is that Jesus would establish His kingdom, manifest Himself, very soon. You say, well surely after all the life of Jesus – His death, His resurrection and leading up to the ascension – they got it, right? The forty days when He was teaching them after His resurrection? No, they didn't get it.

Look at Acts 1. And by the way, this encourages me because I'm pretty thick-headed. I'm slow to learn and so were they. Acts 1, and watch verse 6: "So when they had come together, they were asking Him..." This is now after those forty days. You go back to verse 3: "He ... appearing to them over a period of forty days (after the resurrection) and speaking of things concerning the kingdom of God." Okay. For forty days, He's teaching them about the kingdom of God. Verse 6: "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'" (Is it now?)

Okay, we get it. You, you, there was the death and, and there was the resurrection, and now You've been alive for forty days. You've shown Yourself. Is this it? Are You finally going to manifest Yourself as Israel's Messiah and establish Your kingdom?

“He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power ... and ... be My witnesses....’”

So, the question then (back in Mark 13), the question really was: “You, Jesus, our Messiah, are here. That must mean the end is near, but what will be the sign that in the near future You are specially manifesting Your presence as Messiah and inaugurating Your kingdom? How are we going to know in the next few days or weeks when that happens?” So there are three questions then about the destruction of the temple, the signs of His coming and the signs of the end of the age. Assume that they're all going to happen together.

Now with that background, we come to the sermon itself. And in this sermon, apparently only given to four of the disciples who asked the questions, Jesus answers all three of their questions. Most Christians would agree on how Jesus answers the first question, and that is when the temple will be destroyed and how. That is only recorded by Luke. Turn there with me, and let's get that first question answered,. What about the temple and its destruction? Luke 21:20. Now I say most – there are people who would not agree that this is talking about 70 A.D. and the destruction of the temple but rather about the end of the age, - but here is I believe Jesus' answer to the first question:

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

In other words, God is going to demolish the city of Jerusalem and its temple, and it's going to usher in a period of time in which Israel is not the focus of God's current program. That's happened. There's the answer to the first question. Jesus didn't tell them when, but He told them how to know. Verse 20: “... when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies....” Alright? When,

when you see the Romans coming, run. It's going to happen. And in fact, in 70 A.D., just two years after the construction on Herod's temple was completed, it was destroyed and not one stone was left upon another. That prophecy came true just as our Lord said it would.

Now in the rest of Luke 21 and in Mark 13 and in Matthew 24, Jesus answers the other two questions. And He answers them together: What are the signs of Your coming, and what are the signs of the end of the age? Now tonight, I just want to introduce this sermon to you because it's very complex.

You know, in God's providence, I've ended on two of the most complicated, debated passages in the New Testament – the one we've studied this morning and the, the Olivet Discourse we're studying on Sunday night. But it's good. I'm enjoying it, and hopefully we can bring some clarity to it. But tonight, I just need to introduce it to you because there are some things that need to be cleared up. You need to understand the different ways people interpret this sermon. And you need to get the big picture of the flow of Jesus' thought. You need to see the forest before we start looking at the trees.

So let's begin. And I want to begin by looking at the various ways this prophetic sermon is often interpreted. So let's look at the primary interpretational approaches. When people look at this sermon, how do they interpret it? What approaches do they take to it? Although there are almost countless ways this passage has been explained, in reality there are only a handful of choices.

Sadly, many approach this sermon having already established their view of end times, their eschatological perspective, and they simply read their overarching view onto this text. Often the results are confusing, even nonsensical, and in one case, as I'll show you, heretical.

So let's begin. What are the ways people approach this sermon? It tends to be from their own theological foundation. Let's look first at the a millennial approach. Don't be scared by that word. "Millennium" – that's thousand years; 'a' is the, the negation of that. These are people who don't believe – these are believers, Christian brothers, who don't believe (or most of them are – I'll show you in a minute there are some who aren't because of the heresy they're involved in, but for the most part these are Christian brothers.) They don't believe that Christ will establish a 1000-year reign on earth after His second coming. They don't believe there is such a thing ("a millennium") – there is none.

Now how do they interpret it? Typically, a millennialists believe that what Jesus describes in this sermon, in all three accounts, happened primarily in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. This view is called preterism. P-r-e-t-e-r-i-s-m, preterism. Although they agree on this basic understanding, a millennialists take two very different approaches. One is called full preterism or hyperpreterism. These people believe (and this is really bad), but these people believe the Olivet Discourse was completely fulfilled in 70 A.D. at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (and here's the key), including the second coming. They believe whatever the second coming means, it happened in 70 A.D.

They build their entire view on a misunderstanding of Jesus' words when He says in this sermon: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." They say, "Well, see? That must mean Jesus was saying everything I'm telling you is going to be fulfilled within one generation's time. So it had to be all happening at the destruction of Jerusalem."

Of course, that means they have to redefine the second coming. They redefine the second coming as a spiritual event rather than a bodily return as Jesus promised. You remember when He lifted up in the ascension, what did the angels say? "This same Jesus, whom you've seen going up into heaven, will so come (what?) in like manner as you have seen Him go (in a body, a glorified body)." They also hold the same thing for every believer. They don't believe (the full preterists or hyperpreterists) they don't believe any of us will be raised bodily but just spiritually.

This view not only misinterprets the passage, but it crosses the boundary of orthodoxy into heresy. It's really no different than what Paul addressed in his letter to Timothy. Look at 2 Timothy 2. You remember this group? He tells Timothy in verse 14: "Remind them of these things, solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the hearers." You, Timothy, study carefully; handle the Word of God accurately, and avoid, verse 16, "worldly *and empty* chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene." And then Paul identifies two men: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus [now watch what he says about them], *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some." And in verse 19, he essentially says they don't belong to Jesus. They had crossed the line into heresy. That's full preterism.

It's really no different than that – says it already happened. There are not many who hold that view but there are some, and they have a loud voice on the internet. You might come across these, these full preterists or hyperpreterists.

The other view is far more common, and it's the one most of our amillennial brothers hold to. We can call it partial preterism. This view says the Olivet Discourse was completely fulfilled in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, except for the second coming. Everything else (everything else) Jesus said was about what would happen in 70 A.D. but the second coming. We're still waiting for that.

Now there are a number of arguments against this partial preterism view. I mean, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and of Jerusalem was a terrible thing. A million Jews died. It was a horrific event, but it doesn't rise to the level of Jesus' words in Mark 13. Historians tell us that in addition to those million people who died at the destruction of Jerusalem, from A.D. 60 to A.D. 80, there was a famine, there was pestilence, there was a fire, there was a massive earthquake that struck the Roman Empire. It was in the summer of 79 A.D. that Vesuvius erupted, destroying the city of Pompeii. But as bad as all that was, it doesn't begin to rise to the level of what Jesus describes in this sermon.

Look down at chapter 13, verse 19: "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and" [watch this, and what?] "never will." In other words, the time I'm talking about is going to be the absolute worst time ever in human history on the planet. 70 A.D. was bad, but it wasn't that bad. In fact, we could probably point to other times, more recent, when it was worse – the world wars, when Stalin, for example, killed 20 million of his own people, when Hitler killed six million Jews, and on and on it goes. So it wasn't that bad.

Whatever Jesus is describing in this passage; it must be the absolute worst in all of human history. And when these events are fulfilled, there are going to be some remarkable signs in the heavens. Look down at verse 24: "But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven (probably a reference to meteorites), and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken." None of that happened in 70 A.D., and none of it's happened since.

But the real kicker comes in verse 26: “Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great glory and power.” And Matthew says it’s going to happen right after the tribulation of those days.

Now obviously, that didn’t happen in 70 A.D. You can see though why the full preterists are sort of forced by their theology logically to go there, but that didn’t happen. So this doesn’t fit the passage. It doesn’t explain the sermon, but it doesn’t rise to the level of heresy like the first view does. R.C. Sproul, a dear brother whom we love and appreciate – he takes partial preterism as his view in his book “The Last Days According to Jesus.”

Alright, there’s a second approach, and we won’t take as long with each of these. You just needed to understand that one. In addition to the amillennial approach, there’s the postmillennial approach. What is a postmillennialist? Dissect that word. After – “post”; “after the 1000-year reign.” This group believes that Jesus will return after a wonderful millennium on earth. In other words, the gospel is going to be so powerful it will exert a greater and greater influence on the world until there will be a gradual improvement of the world. And things are going to get better and usher in a golden age we’ll all enjoy. And after that golden age, Jesus is coming back.

They got a real problem with this sermon because they believe, in essence, the millennium is now. And their view calls for the world to get better and better. Have you read this sermon lately? That is not what Jesus promises. In fact, He promises it’s going to get worse and worse. So essentially the postmillennialist doesn’t have a coherent interpretation for this sermon because it doesn’t fit. It doesn’t fit his theology.

There’s the liberal approach. The liberal rejects all supernatural intervention in the world so he denies the fulfillment of all prophecy – couldn’t have been predicted ahead of time because God isn’t talking to us, and no man could predict it ahead of time so that couldn’t have happened. So typically, liberalism simply summarizes the Olivet Discourse with the general idea that there’s going to be victory in the end. It’s all going to work out.

And then finally, there’s the premillennial approach. The premillennialist believes that Jesus will establish a literal, geopolitical reign on the earth after the second coming that will last either – and it differs (some believe it’ll last literally a 1000 years; others believe it describes a long period of time) but regardless a literal, geopolitical reign. He believes that Jesus’ prophecies here in this passage will be fulfilled in specific events that are yet to occur. This is the view that our church, our elders, and I take.

But even with those who take this literal, premillennial fulfillment, there's a difference of opinion on how to interpret the Olivet Discourse. Some say the entire sermon is about the great tribulation and the second coming. It's all about the very end. You take the entire package, and you say all of that is in the future at the very end. That's one approach. The predictions of the Olivet Discourse are about the end of the age. This view tends to be the view of classic dispensationalism – the Scofield's and the Ryrie's and so forth. They would say that nothing in Jesus' sermon here was fulfilled in 70 A.D. or since. So they would say this is how you would outline this, this sermon. Verses 5 through 23 are about the tribulation. Verses 24 through 32 are about the second coming. And verses 33 to 37 are a warning to be ready, get ready for the second coming. That's one approach.

A second approach premillennialists take is to say that the first part of this sermon is being fulfilled throughout this age, the church age, but the rest points to the future end time events. And again, there are basically two options people take here, and it's all a matter of where do you break. Where do you say, Okay, up till this point, He's talking about what's happening now in the age in which we live. Where do you draw that line? One view draws that line after verse 8. Chapter 13, verses 5 through 8 they would say are from Jesus' ascension until end times. And then chapter 13, verse 9 – that picks up with the end, the great tribulation and the second coming. You'll notice, look at where verse 9 breaks: "Be on your guard; for they will deliver you to *the* courts, and you will be flogged in *the* synagogues, you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them." They say, Okay. Now draw a line. That's all that comes before that is now. But when you go to verse 10, you're crossing over to the future, to the end.

The other option says no, the line ought to be drawn after verse 13. You'll notice you have the gospel being preached in verse 10. You have more discussion about people being arrested and, and being betrayed by family members, being hated because of Jesus. But then, you'll notice in verse 14 there is a transition: "But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." Alright? So this view says that through verse 13 is from Jesus' ascension up to the very end of human history and all the events of end times, and verse 14 begins with the great tribulation and the second coming.

I tend to think that the second of these is truer to the text and is really where I personally have landed. And I'll show you that as we work our way through. There's no obvious reason to break the text after verse 8 and, in fact, verses 5 through 13 are not signs of the end. Look at verse 7: "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place;

but that is not yet the end.” Verse 8: “... These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” But when you get to verse 14, there’s clearly a transition to what is a sign of the end: “But when you see (verse 14) the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be,” then you know it’s happening. Get ready. Here’s the sign that it’s coming. Alright? So that’s the approach as we work our way through this sermon that I will take in explaining it – essentially, letter ‘b’ there under that second choice. Option two – there is a break, I believe, between verse 13 and verse 14.

Now let me show you if you take that approach (let’s move then) – those are the approaches. Let’s look at the basic flow of the sermon if you take that approach, alright? First of all, chapter 13, verses 5 through 13 – that takes you from Christ’s ascension to the midpoint of the tribulation period. There are things that Jesus wants us and His disciples to know about what will happen in the world after He leaves, but before the end comes. And here’s what they are.

There are several things about this period He wants us to know. First of all, there’s going to be some time that will pass. It’s going to be a future time when the end comes. Remember, the disciples expected Jesus to manifest who He was immediately. But in this section, Jesus says that’s not true. Verses 5 through 8 – there’s a lot of stuff that has to happen, and yet it’s still the beginning of the birth pangs.

Verse 10: “The gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” Verse 22 – there has to be time for false Messiahs to arise and lead many astray. So Jesus was telling them, listen from where we are right now, sitting on the Mount of Olives in the Passion Week, don’t think this is going to happen next week. There’s going to be some time.

Secondly, it would be a worsening time. This runs counter to the postmillennialist view that everything’s going to get better and better in every way. It’s a worsening time, and Jesus uses the image of birth pangs. Jesus compares the flow of history from His ascension until the end to contractions that a woman experiences in childbirth. And I think He does that in several different ways. I think just as contractions for a woman begin lighter and less frequent and gradually become more increasingly intense and frequent, I think in the same way Jesus is saying both the natural and the man-made disasters that I’m going to describe to you will gradually grow more intense and more frequent as we get to the end of the age.

Also like contractions, there will be times of peace and calm between the contractions, between the troubles, but those times of peace and calm will grow shorter as we get closer to the end.

Jesus is implying that periods of peace and calm will become increasingly hard to find as we get near the end.

There's another part of that illustration of birth pangs, and I love this. The pains that a woman experiences in giving birth promise a wonderful outcome; in the case of a woman's contractions, a new baby. And you can see the pain of the process turns immediately into a face of joy when that mother looks at her new child. In the case of the events Jesus is describing, they are painful, but the end is good. They're going to usher in His coming and the birth of a new age.

Notice the things Jesus says are going to grow worse. In verses 5 through 8, He says that natural and man-made disasters will increase – wars, famines, earthquakes, all kinds of disasters, both natural disasters and man-made disasters like war. They're going to increase. In verses 9 through 13, persecution will increase. In Matthew's gospel Matthew adds that Jesus said lawlessness would increase and most people's love would grow cold. But when all those things happen, when they keep increasing, notice what Jesus says in verse 8, at the end of verse 8: "These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

What does that imply? It implies that as those kinds of events (disasters, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, persecution, etc.), as those events occur throughout the church age, they're more like Braxton Hicks contractions than the real thing. The real labor hasn't started yet. During the tribulation period, those same kind of events will occur, but they will occur in far greater intensity and in relentless wave after wave. So all of the false Christs, and all of the wars, and all of the famines, and all of the earthquakes that we've experienced since Christ left this planet are only Braxton Hicks contractions compared to what's coming. In a sense, the real thing hasn't started. But when it does, the world will know. It'll be a worsening time
It'll also be a difficult time for believers. We already touched on this. Verses 9 through 11 – believers will be persecuted by civil authorities. Verses 12 and 13 – they'll be persecuted by their own families. But it will, at the same time, be a time for the gospel to grow and advance. Verse 10 says: "The gospel will be preached to all the nations." Verse 14 of Matthew 24 puts it this way: This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Now during this period from Jesus' ascension until the tribulation period begins, or the midpoint of the tribulation, we need to be careful. Jesus says we must beware of false Christs (verses 5 and 6). We must beware of false signs. Jesus was warning His disciples not to misread the significance of contemporary events like wars and natural disasters. Does that ever happen? Do

Christians ever pick up the newspaper and go, “Psh, there you go. The end is here.” Jesus says, “No, the end is not yet.” And He says also I want you to beware of the false hopes of peace and acceptance – not going to happen. Christians are not going to be loved. They hated Me. They’ll hate you. And that hatred will only grow more intense as we get to the end. His followers must never diminish their allegiance to Him.

Although all those things will occur through the church age until the midpoint of the tribulation, understand this. Their fullest expression will come in the time called the tribulation. In fact, when we get to this portion of the text next week, I’m going to show you the correspondence between what Jesus describes in verses 5 through 13 and the judgments mentioned in Revelation chapter 6. It is remarkable how the two intersect. So we experience these things now but (we’ll experience) the world will experience them on steroids when the end comes. So all those things occur now.

The second section of this sermon occurs in verses 14 to 23, and it is the great tribulation – from the midpoint of the 7-year period called the tribulation to the end, the last three-and-a-half-years. That term “great tribulation” (let me go back here, that term “great tribulation”) likely refers not to the entire 7-year period, but to the last half because Matthew says in Matthew 24:21 – in fact, go back there. Matthew 24:21 – he helps us understand what the great tribulation is. And we’ll look at this in detail. I’m just giving you an overview. Matthew 24:21. Verse 15: After the abomination of desolation (there it is) spoken about by Daniel.... That happens, as we’ll discover, at the midpoint of the tribulation period. Verse 21: “For then [after that happens] there will be a great tribulation....” That doesn’t mean the first half is all roses. It just means the second half of the tribulation will be hell on earth. The judgment of God will break forth dramatically.

The third part of this sermon, just to keep going through the flow here, is the second coming. It occurs in verses 24 to 27. And then the final part comes in verses 28 to 37, and that’s the exhortation for us to be alert and to be ready for when these things happen. So that is where the sermon’s going. That gives you a structure and outline. We’re going to look at what Jesus says is going to happen throughout human history until the tribulation comes. We’re going to look at what He says will happen from the midpoint of the tribulation to the end. We’re going to look at the second coming. And then we’re going to see a call to be alert and to be ready for that.

As we finish our time tonight, what are some key practical lessons from this sermon for us? We’ll see some as we work our way through, but let me just give you a couple. I can’t get away

from this one because I think this is Jesus' point. This is where we started tonight. God is in control of human history, and He's directing all events to one predetermined end.

What does verse 8 say? "... Those things must take place..." It's written. It's done. God has already decided how the story ends. It's already written, and it will happen just as He decides.

A second lesson and this is key for us – when the world is in turmoil because of natural or man-made disasters, we don't need to be afraid. Look at verse 8. Mark 13:8: "For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will *also* be famines. These things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs." And He says you don't need to fear. Go back to verse 7: "When you hear of [these things], do not be frightened..." Folks, it's going to get worse. It may be that it's soon that our Lord will set in motion the events that are described in this chapter. It may happen. It may begin tonight with the rapture. We may not go to sleep. We may be raptured during the night. We may leave tomorrow. It may begin very soon.

But until that happens, we're going to experience the Braxton Hicks. Things are going to get worse. They're going to look worse. It's going to look like the end is coming perhaps at times. We could have another world war. We could have a nuclear holocaust. Don't be frightened. It's not out of control. God's on His throne. He's mapped out the end, and it will happen exactly as He's decided. Our Lord told us it would be like this. Life on this planet is not out of control. Instead, it is marching deliberately and irresistibly toward the end God has already determined. So don't be misled trying to read God's providence. Don't try to marry the newspaper headlines with prophecy. Just sit back and realize it's going where God said it would go. And someday our Lord will come for us, and all of these things will be set in motion.

Finally, Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth in a way that no one will miss. This is the big story. This is the part you can't miss. This is the end of the story. He's coming back. We believe He's coming back for us in an event called the rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4. And then the tribulation period will be ushered in by the man of sin and his revelation according to Thessalonians. But at the end of that period when He's reclaimed the world, He is coming back and not a single person will miss it.

My question to you is do you believe that? Look at verse 24:

“But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN [Jesus says] COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. And He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, [those who have suffered through the tribulation period who were, came to faith in Christ during that time] from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.”

It’s going to happen. Do you believe it? Are you living like you believe it? And are you truly prepared? Jesus promised. You can bet it will happen. Are you ready for when it does?

Let’s pray together.

Father, increase our faith. Lord, we live in a world where many people, like in Peter’s time, mock: “Where is the promise of His coming? Everything continues just as it always has since the beginning of the world.” Father, help us to remember that You have intervened before in this planet. You intervened with a worldwide flood. You intervened by sending Your Own Son into the world. Father, help us to realize that You will intervene again, and help us to live in light of that.

And Father, I pray for those here tonight who claim Christ but aren’t really His. They live their own way. They run their own lives. They don’t care about His Word. They don’t care about the things that matter to Him. Father, wake them up to the reality that one of these days, what our Lord promised will happen. Lord, may that reality frighten them to Christ. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.