



Matthew 24:28–31

27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

29 “Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be

shaken.’

30 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt)

My passage today picks up on Jesus answering a question about the destruction

of the temple, which Jesus predicted. It has a strange beginning. Perhaps cast your eye back over it before proceeding, I've included v. 27 as well from yesterday's reading.

Big news requires a big response. News about something big on the horizon requires a response. That is true if the news is personal. If someone you know gets married, that's a big deal. You want to know where the wedding is and when it will take place. You need to prepare for it.

But it is especially true for hard news. if a doctor were to give me a diagnosis of a dangerous heart condition, I'd be asking lots of questions! What do I do next? When? How long do I have? What are the signs to look for? What should I do about

it?

It is foolhardy not to respond to the signs.

What about something on a national Level? A million refugees on your border; a tsunami warning; an attack on your nation; a terrorist threat. These are big news requiring a big response. You don't just say – let me know when it's over. You say – When? Date and time, please? And what will be the sign that this onslaught is about to begin? What should I look for?

Matthew 24 is about responding to big news. Jesus' disciples are asking 'when' and 'what are the signs' to look for when the Jewish worship system will be dismantled and replaced. When will the temple be torn down, as Jesus said it would?

Not one stone left on another, Jesus said.
What do we look for?

And Jesus says in our passage today, instead of looking for signs, look for one sign. Instead of signs on earth, look for one in heaven. The sign. And he is the sign.

“Then will appear the sign [which is] the Son of Man in heaven.”

The ultimate sign is him seated at the right hand of the Father. Vindicated. That's what is meant by Jesus' words:

And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven...

They'll recognise what they have done. They will have remorse. They will be moved.

And he will come [to the Father] 'with power and great glory.'

He will be known in all the earth as the one true Messiah; the ruler of rulers; the rescuer of rescuers; the King of Kings. He doesn't rule from Rome. He rules from Heaven! And then he will send his angels – his messengers – to gather believers from the four corners of the earth.

Will this be big news? It will be cosmic! The language Jesus uses is the language of Isaiah 13 and 34:

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

If I knew this was coming, I’d do something!

There are two possible readings of this text, and reasons why they argue this way.

One is that this is what will happen at what is called ‘the Parousia’, even though that word is not used here in our text. At his arrival; at ‘the renewal of all things’ (Matthew 19:28). At his second coming.

He has come the first time. The reader has seen the abomination of the cross; they’ve

seen the resurrection, they know that the temple was torn down by the Romans in 70AD; like lightning is seen all across the sky, like vultures gathering around a carcass, the Second Coming will be obvious and visible to all.

If that reading is correct, then the appropriate response to this big news is to yield to this one with power and glory. In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord, the Son of Man, the King of Kings, and then you will be on the right side of history. You've got the diagnosis, so you know what to do.

The other reading is that all these things happen within the generation of the disciples, since Jesus says in verse 34 "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have hap-

pened”; they all happen within the time frame of the destruction of the temple.

In this reading, this whole text is a group of layered Old Testament passages about the judgment of God having fallen (v. 28) and the Son of Man coming to the Father in his resurrection and ascension (v. 29). Using Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12, Jesus is saying: once the temple has been destroyed, you’ll find a new one. A new temple and a new priest: Me! In Heaven! And then you’ll see the gospel spread out to the four corners of the earth, which is what is happening now.

And it is cosmic! Huge! A huge thing has happened in the heavens about the Son of Man ruling! That news needs to go out to the elect in all the earth. Under this read-

ing, the big response is (you guessed it, it's the same application): yield to this one with power and glory. In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord, the Son of Man, the King of Kings, and then you will be on the right side of history.

You've got the diagnosis, so you know what to do.

Think & Pray

I think first pray that you can get the meaning of this chapter. It is hard. Commentators struggle. It could take a lifetime of working on this text. We've struggled this week. But, interestingly, the upshot is quite simple:

42 'Therefore keep watch, because

you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready...

So keep being ready. And pray that you will have a spirit of readiness.

Pray for patience too. For this is seen in Matthew as the answer to the world's ills: God's decisive action of installing his Son as Lord of all. We need to develop the holy habit of waiting. Pray for peace.