



Matthew 24:22–27

22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 “So if anyone tells you, ‘There

he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 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.

Reflection

Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives, staring down at Jerusalem, haunted as her future passes before his eyes. In 70AD, right where Jesus is sitting, a Roman legion led by the soon to be Emperor, Titus, will similarly be looking down upon Jerusalem. Only they'll have plans to destroy her. Sack her. Burn her to the ground. Not leaving one stone of the temple standing on top of the other. Eerily, these events will also occur in the lead-up to the Passover,

almost to the moment, the same time of year that Jesus pronounces these words of prophecy in Matthew 24. It must have been something to see Jesus' haunted gaze, to see the sadness on his face, as he pronounced these chilling words about the fate of his beloved Jerusalem. Some of his last words before he'd left Jerusalem earlier in the day were these,

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

Desolate. In yesterday's passage Jesus'

mind turned to the human toll; to the pregnant mothers, the nursing mothers, the unborn babies and little toddlers caught up in the horror that would come down upon Jerusalem. 'Flee, run to the hills, at the first sign that the temple is being desecrated, leave. Don't even turn back to get your cloaks, leave all your possessions behind, just get out of there as quickly as you can,' Jesus had warned.

His disciples must have been struggling to come to terms with what he was saying. Not only would the temple be torn down, not one stone left on top of the other (something unthinkable to a Jew), but even worse Jesus had said in verse 9 that they would be persecuted and put to death. What is this nightmare?

Jesus continues in the passage in front of us,

22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

A precious glimpse of hope in a dark chapter. Those days will be cut short, for the sake of the elect, for the sake of Christians. If not, no-one would have survived.

Not to belabour the horror of what took place, its important to match up Jesus’ prophecy with the events that did unfold. The Romans were known for showing no mercy to insurrectionists. They made a public example of them in an empire ruled by fear. They’d line the highways with cru-

cified revolutionary after crucified revolutionary. In the siege of Jerusalem Titus proves no different. Josephus, a Jewish historian who witnessed and wrote about these events in a book called 'The Wars of the Jews' (you can Google it), tells us that Titus built a wall to starve out the Jewish population. And as the siege went on, some chose to surrender instead of starving to death. Those that did were first whipped, then tortured, and then crucified in full view of the inhabitants of Jerusalem looking down from the walls. A horror, that was mercifully cut short for the sake of the elect, but only after five long months of judgment that Jerusalem had brought down on her own head.

Jesus continues, returning to his earlier warning,

23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.

These events befalling God's holy city, Jerusalem, will feel like the end of the world. And that will bring out the 'crazies', as has happened time and time again in the history of the world. So Jesus, again, warns his disciples that in these dark days, many

people are going to claim that the Messiah has come. 'Here he is. There he is.' They'll say. And of course this will be a delight to Satan. He'll get in on the act. He'll give some of the false prophets demonic powers and they'll perform signs and wonders to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect. Don't believe it. Don't believe them. Because, verse 27,

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.

As bad as the fall of Jerusalem will seem for those who live through it, it will be nothing compared to the great and terrible day of the Lord. When I return says Jesus there will be no mistaking that day. As lightening

that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be my Second Coming. It will be unmistakable and the fall of Jerusalem just a foretaste of what will befall of humankind.

On that day I will return from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise (1 Thess 4:16). Then every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess with joy or with a gnashing of teeth that Jesus is Lord (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10–11). The dead, great and small, will stand before my throne, the books will be opened, and everyone will be judged for what they have done (Rev 20:12). Everyone will be found wanting, but those who've put their trust in me, whose

names are written in the Book of Life, will be counted pure, as white as snow, because my blood on the cross has washed them clean, the punishment that was due to them, I took on myself, by my wounds they have been eternally healed. But to those who die outside of a living relationship with me, the horror of the fall of Jerusalem will pale in terms of what awaits them.

Think & Pray

Today again, a passage of Scripture we want to slam shut and try and un-remember. But in good conscience we can't. How to respond? I think in two ways. Perhaps take some time now to think about today's passage from two perspectives. Firstly, think and pray over the unspeakable

privilege and blessing of being counted amongst the elect. God has chosen you. The fate that this passage moves us forward to is not our own. Our eternal reality could not be more removed from the horror of this passage. Next however we must mourn. We must mourn sin's devastating effects and the frightening reality of sin justly punished at the end of days. We must mourn and act. This doesn't mean we need to go out and conquer the world today. But it does mean we need to be ever seeking opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those we love. Pray for opportunities today. And take those opportunities when God gives them to you today.