

Preparation For The End Times: Lesson 7

Matthew 24 & 25

Memory Text: “For false Christ’s and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

Setting The Stage: Let's start off with a question this morning. **Have you ever found yourself in an awkward situation because you weren't adequately prepared?** For years, the motto of the Boy Scouts has been "Be prepared." It's a good motto to follow in our everyday life and especially in our spiritual life.

In our texts today, we discover that Jesus want us to be prepared for His second coming. It will take a special type of preparation to stand during the last days and be ready to meet Jesus. Rev. 6:17 asks, “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Sunday – A Powerful Confirmation Of Prophecy

Matthew 24:1-25

Matthew 24 outlines the signs indicating how near Jesus’ return is. At the end of Matthew 24, and all of Matthew 25 teaches us how to stand during the last days and be ready for the second coming of Christ.

Matthew 24:1-3. The disciples asked Jesus when the temple would be overthrown, for them, marking the end of the world and the return of Jesus. In response, Jesus provided a description of the signs preceding the events of both the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming. In mercy, He blended the two events together so the disciples wouldn’t be overwhelmed with what was to come upon the world in the last days.

Local/Worldwide Principle: In this discourse, Jesus provides for us a key in interpreting Bible prophecy. In Jerusalem Jesus saw a world headed for destruction. What was going to happen on a local scale to Jerusalem would happen on a worldwide scale at the end of time. Some have called this sermon a “little apocalypse.” Jesus moves from literal Israel, the temple, and Rome to spiritual Israel, temple, and Rome. Understanding this principle is imperative in unlocking the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and will keep us from a futuristic interpretation of prophecy, which essentially reverses the order – from worldwide to literal.

Matthew 24:4-8. Jesus tells us that before He returns deception will abound (v. 4), false Christ’s and prophets will arise (v. 5, 11), there will be wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places (6, 7). Lawlessness will abound (v. 12). But in case someone tells you that these things have always happened, remind

them of Jesus words in v. 8, which indicate that these things will become more frequent and intense just as a mother experiences before giving birth.

War: ForeignPolicy.com featured an article entitled, “10 Conflicts to Watch in 2018”. It referenced the tensions that exist between N. Korea and the U.S. due to Kim Jong Un’s push for nuclear arms; the U.S./Saudi/Iran rivalry (likely to eclipse other Middle Eastern fault lines in 2018); the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar with over 600,000 refugees fleeing into Bangladesh; the Yemen war with over 8 million people on the brink of a famine; the war in Afghanistan; the civil war in Syria that has taken close to a ½ million lives; weak states across the Sahel region struggling to manage an overlapping mix of intercommunal conflict, jihadi violence, and fighting over smuggling routes; the crisis in Congo; the conflict in eastern Ukraine that has claimed over 10,000 lives; humanitarian crisis in Venezuela creating increased civil unrest.

Famines: Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth. Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five - 3.1 million children each year. One out of six children -- roughly 100 million -- in developing countries is underweight. 66 million primary school-age children attend classes hungry across the developing world, with 23 million in Africa alone.

Pestilence: Malaria, AIDS, influenza, bird and swine flue, ebola, zika virus, STD’s, etc.

Earthquakes: 72 earthquakes in the past 24 hours (5.0 in Sata, Argentina); 866 earthquakes in the past 7 days (5.8 in Western Indian Antarctic Ridge); 3933 earthquakes in the past 30 days (6.9 East New Britain, PNG); 41,138 earthquakes in the past 365 days (8.1 Chiapas, Mexico).

Matthew 24:25: “See, I have told you beforehand.” (cp. John 13:19)

These signs can seem overwhelming, but Jesus said, that they are signs telling us we are nearing home. We are getting closer to Jesus return. Endurance, perseverance, and God’s grace is needed now more than ever.

Monday – Enduring to The End

Matthew 24:9-13; Hebrews 12:1

Matthew 24:13: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

Was Jesus teaching salvation by endurance? We are saved by grace through faith. But there is something to be said about holding on. If you happened to land yourself in the ocean you would find salvation in the floatation device thrown to you in the water. But it wouldn’t do you any good to hold on once and then let go. You would

have to hang on until you were brought into the boat. Because we haven't entered heaven yet, we have some holding on to do.

Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

We are in a long-distance race that requires endurance. Long-distance runners often reach a point in the marathon where they "hit the wall". That means that they experience a sudden loss of energy. And the only way to finish the race is by sheer will. But the Christian running in this race, while he/she might feel like they've spiritually "hit the wall", need to understand that will won't get you to the end, but looking to Jesus will (v. 2).

Why would we need to endure till the end in the Christian race? We haven't finished the race yet. But Jesus identifies some real reasons why endurance is needed as we run the last lap in earth's history.

Matthew 24:9-12: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." (cp. Rev. 13:11-17; 14:12)

"To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason." (5T, p. 136)

The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique. The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit. I want to run all the way with the flame of my torch still lit for Him. How about you?

Tuesday – The "Abomination Of Desolation"

Matthew 24:15; Daniel 11:31-35

Matthew 24:15. This phrase is mentioned three times in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Among the Jews an idol or heathen symbol was termed an "abomination" (1 Kings 11:5, 7; 2 Kings 23:13, etc.), or something offensive from a religious point of view (Ex. 8:26).

In Luke's parallel account of this sermon preached by Jesus, he explains what the "abomination of desolation" first refers to: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near." (Luke 21:20) As the desolating armies of Rome with their abominable pagan standards were about to breach the

holy city, God's people in the city knew it would be time to take their flight. But Jesus said there's a second application of this idea in **Daniel 11:31-35**.

We know the time of the end began in 1798, because over in Daniel 12:4-9 Daniel is told to seal his book until the time of the end, and then is given a time period – a time, times, and half a time (or 1260 day/years). We know from history that the medieval church was in power from 538 until 1798.

On top of this, Jesus' words would have another application in the end of time, when Babylon, the mother of harlots and the "abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5) and the kings of the earth would unite to desolate God's people through the enforcement of the mark of the beast – the ultimate abomination which takes God's sacred day, the Sabbath, and desecrates it by transferring it to another day.

"The time is not far distant when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation, in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath, will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains." (Last Day Events, p. 121)

Wednesday – The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

Deception will be rampant in the last days. Jesus warns us four times in Matthew 24 not to be deceived. Specifically though Christ is warning about being deceived in four areas pertaining to His return: 1) the manner of Christ's coming, 2) the timing of Christ's coming, 3) Christians attitude toward His coming, and 4) the Christian responsibility while waiting for His coming.

Jesus told four stories that illustrate the attitude and activity of the waiting saints just prior to Jesus return. Among the identifying characteristics of those looking for His appearing, Jesus mentions those that will 1) endure to the end (v. 13); 2) will be witnesses to the power of the gospel (v. 14); and 3) will be faithful and wise (v. 45) – illustrated in the parables of the faithful and wise servant, 10 bridesmaids, businessman distributing responsibilities to his employees, and the sheep and the goats.

Matthew 25:1-13. The ten bridesmaids went forth to meet the bridegroom. The ten bridesmaids represent God's people, those that profess a pure faith. And what are they doing? They're waiting for the bridegroom's appearing. The bridegroom represents the coming of Jesus. And what is the bridesmaid's responsibility? They are to help illuminate the way for the bridal party to the bridegroom's house.

However five are wise and five are foolish. A line of demarcation is drawn. In the church, some act wisely while others act foolishly. The wise took lamp with oil. The

foolish took lamps but no oil, or no extra oil. The lamp God's people carry is the word of God (Ps. 119:105). The oil they were to carry, which was the fuel to keep their lamps burning, represents the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6).

The difference between the wise and the foolish doesn't necessarily lie in the doctrine they believe (both were virgins), but what the doctrine has done for them personally. An oil lamp isn't worth much on a dark night without oil. A flashlight is useless without batteries. A light in your house isn't any good without electricity running to it. The lamp is just an instrument and its only purpose is to make something happen - produce light!

In this parable, as in life, the light is neither the lamp nor the oil. It's not specifically doctrine no matter how pure, or how much is known; nor is it the Holy Spirit. *The light is the reality of a Christ-like life; a person transformed by the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit, molded by Biblical principles.*

Thursday – Using Your Talents

Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Corinthians 14:1; 1 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10

Matthew 25:14-30. The theme of the parable has to do with our first service to God and mankind – the development of ourselves for the glory of God and the benefit of humanity. Once a person has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior their very first loving duty is self-development; that is the process by which a person's abilities are gradually developed.

The Bible's emphasis on self-development runs like a thread through its pages. We are not asked to compare or measure ourselves with each other, but to become all that we can become as laborers together with Christ, and thus do the greatest amount of good we can do.

We've all been given abilities. Those abilities are a gracious gift from above, whether you like the gift you've been given or not. Whatever our natural or acquired abilities may be, each of us are given opportunities to improve what we have to give to someone else's needs. That's why we should pay attention to developing everything that will improve us wherever we are or in whatever kind of work we may be doing. And improving these personal areas reflects the intent of the parable.

What are the talents we've each been given? Mind, time, influence, health, money, kind impulses and affections, and spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:1: "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts,"

1 Timothy 1:6: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

1 Peter 4:10: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

Are we improving the talents God has given us for the benefit of humanity and the glory of God?

Friday – Further Thoughts

“The man who received the one talent ‘went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.’ It was the one with the smallest gift who left his talent unimproved. In this is given a warning to all who feel that the smallness of their endowments excuses them from service for Christ. If they could do some great thing, how gladly would they undertake it; but because they can serve only in little things, they think themselves justified in doing nothing. In this they err. The Lord in His distribution of gifts is testing character. The man who neglected to improve his talent proved himself an unfaithful servant. Had he received five talents, he would have buried them as he buried the one. His misuse of the one talent showed that he despised the gifts of heaven. ‘He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.’ Luke 16:10. The importance of the little things is often underrated because they are small; but they supply much of the actual discipline of life. There are really no nonessentials in the Christian’s life. Our character building will be full of peril while we underrate the importance of the little things.” (Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 355, 356)