

Matthew 24:1-31 | “The Signs of Christ’s Coming”

Preached on May 19, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Matthew 24 this morning, and we will be covering verses 1-31 today. *[pause]*

Since we are tackling a larger portion, I won’t get into all the nitty-gritty details, but we will see what Jesus is telling us, which will help us to be good, faithful disciples. *[pauseeee]*

So the next couple weeks are going to be on the topic of the end times. *[pause]*

Now for some of you, this makes you excited, as you love the subject of the end times.

And for others of you, you may not like it as much because to you it’s just so confusing and overwhelming. *[pause]*

But no matter what you think about the end times, Jesus talks about it, and it’s the next topic in the Gospel of Matthew, so we need to talk about it. *[pauseeeee]*

So what are the signs of Christ’s coming? *[pause]*

It’s interesting because just not long ago there was a lot of talk about the end times around the time of the total eclipse. *[pause]*

Some people tried to point out that the path of totality was going to pass over 7 cities named Nineveh, and acted like that meant something important.

Other people pointed to the fact that the eclipse was on 4/8, there was a 4.8 magnitude earthquake, and that Exodus 4:8 said something about signs. *[pause]*

People were going crazy over that stuff! *[pause]*

Some social media influencers were doing whole segments based on these things, and getting people all worked up about it.

But what does Jesus tell us about the signs of His coming, and how should we respond to them? *[pause]*

That’s what we will learn today in the first half of Matthew 24, so let’s READ it. *[READ]*

If you remember right before this, Jesus had pronounced judgment upon Israel and Israel’s leaders for their rejection of Him.

And He told them that their house was going to be left desolate. *[pause]*

This may have led the disciples to wonder how this could be, for they point out and marvel about how amazing the Temple is to Jesus.

Yet Jesus declares that the Temple will be destroyed, which did eventually happen in 70 AD.
[pause]

But it's in the context of the Temple being destroyed that the disciples have some questions.
[pause]

You see, to them the Temple being destroyed meant that something significant was going on and that the end of the age was coming.

So that's why they have some questions. *[pause]*

They ask, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" *[pause]*

Jesus won't specifically answer the 'when' question, but He will give signs or indicators of when it will all go down. *[pauseeee]*

So what does Jesus teach us here?...

There are signs of Christ's coming.

We all notice signs that something is going to happen. *[pause]*

Often we can notice the signs that we are going to get sick.

They are the early indicators that you are most likely coming down with something. *[pauseeee]*

We can also perceive signs that something is breaking because we see cracks, leaks, or corrosion.
[pause]

These signs are indicators, pointers, or signals that something is about to go down - you are going to get sick or something is going to break. *[pauseeee]*

An illustration that Jesus uses is of childbirth.

He calls these signs "birth pains". *[pause]*

Think of a pregnant woman before delivering her baby.

She goes into labor and the labor signifies that the baby is on its way out. *[pause]*

It's painful, but it's a sign of something wondrous.

So also, most of these signs will be painful, but it's pointing towards the glorious coming of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

The first signs that Jesus talks about are the early signs.

They are what He calls, "the beginning of the birth pains". *[pause]*

You see, the very beginning of a woman's birth pains doesn't typically mean that the baby is coming out *immediately*.

Rather, when the birth pains begin, it's usually well before the baby will arrive. *[pause]*

So also, these birth pains are signaling the coming of Christ, but the early signs do not mean it will be immediate. *[pauseeee]*

So what are these early signs?

There will be turmoil in nature, and turmoil among people and nations.

And I believe that these early signs have been present generally since Christ ascended, but they will get worse and more intense as the end draws near. *[pauseeee]*

Let's first talk about the turmoil involving nature...

He says in verse 7 that "there will be famines and earthquakes in various places". *[pause]*

So as Jesus' coming draws closer, it's like the earth is experiencing turbulence.

In different places of the world, they will experience earthquakes and famines. *[pauseeee]*

There will also be turmoil in the world generally among people, for there will be wars and rumors of wars. *[pause]*

People will fight and it will be intense, for nation will rise up against nation. *[pauseeee]*

There will be religious issues as well...

Many will be false Christs, claiming to be the Messiah, and leading people astray. *[pause]*

The examples of people doing this are endless.

One only needs to think of people like Charles Manson, David Koresh, or Jim Jones to see just a few of the many examples. *[pauseeee]*

These are the early signs, Christ says.

In fact, He says, "this must take place, but the end is not yet".

And that "these are but the *beginning* of the birth pains". *[pauseeee]*

After these beginning birth pains, Jesus appears to be telling us some further earlier signs in verses 9-14...

He talks about how Christians will be persecuted, put to death, and hated by all nations. *[pauseee]*

We are seeing this throughout the world. *[pause]*

America has minor persecution compared to the persecution that Christians across the globe are facing. *[pause]*

The organization called “Open Doors” has been tracking Christian persecution for 30 years, and they claim that persecution has never been higher globally.¹

And if you live in North Korea, Somalia, or Libya it’s the worst in the world.² *[pause]*

As Christ’s coming draws closer, Christian persecution heightens in intensity and scale. *[pause]*

Related to this, Jesus tells us that many will fall away, betray one another, and hate one another. *[pause]*

This points to the fact that many people will turn away from Christianity and become apostates. *[pause]*

They may have claimed to follow Christ in the past, but they will walk away from the faith and turn against Christians. *[pause]*

Often it’s these types of people who are the most vicious towards Christians.

They are on a vendetta against the church, and that’s why they will betray Christians and hate them. *[pause]*

We are seeing this more and more with what is called ‘deconstruction’. *[pause]*

Especially among younger people, they are calling themselves “exvangelicals” and are now attacking the church and orthodox beliefs. *[pause]*

Even Paul said that Christ won’t return until “the rebellion comes first”.³

So this is why we must not be fooled by mere numbers of professing Christians.

For there may be many of them, who are not actually saved, and they will fall away and turn against the church. *[pause]*

After these things, Jesus mentioned false prophets, who will lead many astray.

They may even take advantage of the craziness of the time to deceive others. *[pause]*

If you do a brief browse on YouTube, you can see endless videos and accounts dedicated to the end times, and many of them are just false prophets spewing false prophecies. *[pause]*

People are trying to predict the exact day of Christ’s return.

¹<https://religionnews.com/2023/01/17/christian-persecution-higher-than-ever-as-open-doors-world-watch-list-marks-30-years/>.

² <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>.

³ 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

They are making false prophecies about what this means and what that doesn't mean. *[pause]*

They are false prophets, deceiving others.

And this will happen more and more as the end draws near. *[pauseeee]*

All of this would be enough, right?

But Jesus adds in verse 12 that lawlessness will increase, and love will grow cold. *[pause]*

So the character of people will get worse over time. *[pause]*

People definitely won't want to follow God's Law, and as a result, love for others will greatly diminish. *[pause]*

Society will be increasingly loveless and lawless. *[pause]*

The only law that people will want to live by is the law of self.

They will only care about themselves, and push others to the side in selfish ambition and self-centeredness. *[pauseeee]*

Once again, many of these things have been going on throughout the church age, but they will only increase as time goes on. *[pauseeee]*

But is everything that happens before Christ returns only bad and tragic things? *[pause]*

Nope, for Jesus adds a great, glorious, positive thing that will happen amidst all of these seemingly negative signs.

He says in verse 14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations." *[pauseeee]*

Evil will not win nor triumph.

Wickedness will not stop the gospel's advance! *[pause]*

Amidst all of these seemingly negative things, God is going to do something amazing -- He's going to make it so that the gospel goes forth.

He's going to make it so that the gospel goes from just a few disciples when Jesus ascended to being proclaimed throughout the whole world! *[pauseeee]*

All nations will have an opportunity to hear the truth, and be given an opportunity to turn to Christ. *[pause]*

God desires and makes it happen that throughout the whole world, they will hear the testimony of what Christ has done. *[pauseeee]*

Now Jesus doesn't say that every individual in the world will hear, but that the gospel will spread so far and wide that it's proclaimed *throughout* the world, that is, in every part. *[pauseeee]*

So all of these signs are the early signs of Christ's coming.

Like early birth pains, they are often painful and they are also indicators of something to come, but they are not the end yet. *[pauseee]*

But Jesus doesn't stop there though, for He will go on to share the close-by signs of His coming in verses 15-31. *[pause]*

He heightens the intensity of the signs by indicating that there will be an abomination of desolation, which means, "Run! Flee! Time to go!" *[pause]*

Now this section can be tricky because on the one hand, it appears like He's talking about the destruction of the Temple, but on the other hand, it appears that there are future elements given.

And I think there's a reason. *[pause]*

Jesus seems to be using the Temple's destruction in AD70 as a smaller picture of what will be more intense right before He comes back. *[pauseeee]*

When the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, it was a horrific time, where many, many Jews were killed, and many others fled.

That is a foreshadowing of what will come in the future. *[pauseeee]*

It seems to be that the Antichrist sets up an abomination of desolation in the Temple. *[pause]*

This may be an image that is worshiped, or it may be that he sits in the Temple and pronounces himself to be god.⁴

Either way, it is something abominable that desecrates the Temple and causes horror. *[pause]*

This act leads to a time of great tribulation that will be the hardest, most severe time of all of history. *[pause]*

Once again, false Christs and false prophets will arise and try to lead people astray.

They will take advantage of the time to do their worst.

They will be even able to do great signs and wonders, leading tons of people to follow them. *[pause]*

The deception will be so great that if they *could* lead astray the elect, they would. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ See Revelation 13:14 & 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

This is a good reminder that signs and wonders don't necessarily mean that it's from God, for false Christs and false prophets will be able to do them.

So do not be led astray by every sign or wonder that you see. *[pause]*

Some charismatics and pentecostals will promote their event by declaring, "Signs and wonders!"

But that also will be the slogan of the false messiahs and false prophets, so we need to be careful. *[pauseeee]*

All of these things are close-by indicators that He is coming soon.

But there will be indicators that the time has arrived, and His coming will be *unmistakable*. *[pauseee]*

He says that it will be like lightning that flashes from east to west, and like vultures gathering around a corpse. *[pause]*

Everyone will notice that He has arrived.

It will be no hidden or secret thing, where you have to go out to the wilderness or inner room to find Him. *[pause]*

The sun and moon will darken, the stars will fall, and the powers of heaven shaken. *[pause]*

Just imagine the scene!

The whole universe will be in upheaval, as the celestial bodies will act in ways that are not typical. *[pause]*

Everyone living in the whole world at the time will witness His return, and it will be clear, evident, and indisputable. *[pauseeee]*

So many times people see Jesus as this weak, timid guy, but the picture of Scripture of Him at His 2nd coming is glorious and great.

The powers of heaven will shake at His return, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, as He comes on the clouds with power and great glory. *[pause]*

Did you get that?

Every single tribe, every single unbeliever will mourn at His coming because they will realize that judgment is here and it's too late to turn to the Sovereign Lord. *[pauseeeee]*

There are signs of Christ's coming.

These things are both early and close-by indicators that He's on His way, and they will be proof that He *is* coming back. *[pauseeeee]*

There is no doubt about it, Jesus is coming back and His coming will be glorious and unmistakable. *[pause]*

He will come after the Great Tribulation.

His coming will be obvious for all to see.

And His coming will be powerful and glorious. *[pauseeee]*

People will either mourn over His return, or they will experience joyous rescue, as He gathers His elect to Himself. *[pauseeee]*

This should lead every single person to take account of the state of their soul. *[pause]*

Have you bowed the knee to the Lord, repenting of your sins and trusting in His work on the Cross for you? *[pause]*

What you do with Jesus is a big deal because there are only two options: belief or unbelief.

Put another way: it's either trust or rebellion. *[pauseeee]*

Have you recognized that you are sinner, and in need of saving because of your sin against the Almighty God and Creator? *[pause]*

Have you then placed your faith in Jesus, who died on the Cross for sinners, taking your place and paying the penalty for your sins? *[pause]*

He then rose again, ascended, and will come back again.

That's our Lord and Savior, both glorious and gracious! *[pauseeee]*

I know there's a lot here, but I want to answer this question: "How are we to respond to these things?" *[pause]*

Well in telling us about the signs of His coming, Christ tells us how to respond.

First, he tells us...

I. Don't be led astray.

With the end times comes a unique danger of being led astray by others. *[pause]*

Think about if you found yourself in a burning building, wouldn't that fear and intensity lead you to follow someone who said, "I know the way out, follow me!?" *[pauseeee]*

This is because when intense, chaotic times happen, people become more prone to believe lies and follow seemingly promising things. *[pause]*

As fear grips you, you are looking for answers that will bring you security.

And what people tend to do is they use the end times and the tumult of the day to claim that they are the Messiah or declare some false prophecy, which leads people astray.

But Jesus says, “See that no one leads you astray.” *[pause]*

We need to beware, be on the lookout, and watch out for lies and deception. *[pause]*

As Jesus tells us a couple times about their deceptions, “do not believe it.” *[pauseeee]*

The key is to trust Christ’s Word, not the false words of false Messiahs and false prophets. *[pause]*

We must fall back upon the Word of God, not the word of man.

Even in hard, intense moments, we cannot look outside of the Scriptures for answers, but we look *to* Scripture for the answer. *[pauseeee]*

In hard and difficult times, where do *you* look for truth?

Do you truly believe that Scripture is sufficient to give you what you need or are you looking for new answers? *[pause]*

As the world and our country gets worse and worse, is it causing you to cling closer to the Bible or to look to the so-called end times experts and political influencers of the world, who claim to have the answers? *[pauseeee]*

Don’t be led astray, but as the times get harder, our hold onto the Scriptures should get tighter. *[pauseeee]*

The second thing that Jesus tells us to do (or more specifically, ‘not to do’) is...

II. Don’t be alarmed.

There are two dangers when it comes to the subject of the end times: being led astray or alarmed. *[pause]*

As we just talked about, people get worked up, and are easily led astray by false prophecies or lies.

But another danger of the end times is being alarmed. *[pause]*

I see this in so many people when they talk about the end times -- they get so worked up about it and they seem to be in fear. *[pause]*

They hear about some earthquake, news in Israel, or something else like that and they seem terrified, or at least talk as if this is something you should be alarmed about. *[pauseeee]*

But when talking about the end times, what does Jesus command us?

DON'T be alarmed when these signs come. *[pauseeee]*

Back in verse 6, when talking about the wars and rumors of wars, and the early signs of His coming, Jesus says, "See that you are not alarmed." *[pause]*

The idea is that you must be alert and watch out so that you are not alarmed. *[pauseeee]*

If you are not intentionally "seeing to it" that you are not alarmed, you will be alarmed.

And the reason is because it would be very easy to let the false messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes alarm you. *[pauseeee]*

You see, often our default in chaotic times is fear.

And 'to be alarmed' is to be disturbed, agitated, frightened, and troubled.

It's like *you* are inwardly in turmoil as the outside world is in turmoil, but Jesus tells us not to do that. *[pauseeee]*

What's amazing is that Jesus gives us reasons for not being alarmed.

He says that we should remember that the presence of false messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes are NOT the end. *[pause]*

He says, "See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, *but the end is not yet.*" *[pauseeee]*

We don't have to be alarmed at those early signs because they are only "the beginning of the birth pains". *[pause]*

Their presence doesn't mean that the end is here. *[pause]*

When you see the early signs, it means Jesus' return is closer, but it's not actually time.

So if anyone tries to say that the presence of wars, earthquakes, or famines means that Christ is coming immediately, then they are completely wrong.

Jesus told us that these things are NOT the end. *[pauseeee]*

Some people point to earthquakes and famines, or wars and false messiah's, and say, "Look! Jesus is coming *now!*"

But we must take Jesus at His Word! *[pause]*

He clearly taught us that these things are not the end.

There are only the beginning or early signs, so they do not indicate that He will come immediately. *[pauseeee]*

An even more encouraging reason not to be alarmed is given here, for Jesus says, “See that you are not alarmed, *for this must take place.*” *[pauseeee]*

Think about why that may be encouraging. *[pause]*

It’s encouraging because it reminds us that these things are under the sovereign control of our God! *[pause]*

They are not random, unforeseen, chaotic events showing a world out of control.

Instead, they are divinely sanctioned events that “must” happen before the return of Christ. *[pause]*

So even the most seemingly wild and chaotic events in the world are under the control of the Lord.

No wonder we do not have to be alarmed! *[pause]*

We follow the sovereign God, who providentially oversees and controls everything in the universe. *[pauseeee]*

Do you understand what this means?

It means that Christians should be some of the calmest people in the world when crazy things happen. *[pauseeee]*

When we talk about the end times, we shouldn’t look like we are in constant fear or get worked up about it all.

But rather, we should confidently trust our God who reigns over even the turmoil of the end times. *[pause]*

So next time someone tries to point to some sign as being the sign of the end times, you can think, “My God is in control.” *[pauseeee]*

The third thing that Jesus tells us about how to respond is to...

III. Faithfully endure to the end.

A temptation that comes with hard times is to give up. *[pause]*

I remember playing on sports teams, and when the practices and training got hard, some people quit. *[pause]*

I remember working at jobs, and when people realized what all was involved in the job, they left. *[pause]*

This is because when hardship comes, it’s tempting to want to just throw in the towel. *[pause]*

So also, the hard, difficult nature of the end times will tempt many to give up on following Jesus.
[pauseeee]

As many others fall away, so people will wonder, “Are they right? Maybe Christianity isn’t true, for just look at how so many people are saying that it’s oppressive, hateful, and ignorant.”

[pause]

As many others are led astray by false prophets, so people will start considering more and more the false things that are spoken about and walk away from the truth. [pause]

As lawlessness increases and love grows cold, so people will question God’s Word and His control.

And that’s why Jesus says in verse 13, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

[pause]

We are called to persevere in the faith! [pause]

It’s not that our perseverance saves us, but that true faith perseveres. [pause]

It is a person’s perseverance in the faith that demonstrates that they are one of God’s elect, and they are the ones who are saved. [pauseeee]

There are many professing Christians, who are not true Christians, and it’s the hard times, especially during the end times, that will lead them to walk away from the faith. [pause]

It’s hardship that tests the genuineness of our faith.

So the call for those who confess Christ is to endure! [pause]

Endure the hard times, endure the great falling away of many others, endure the onslaught of false teaching, lawlessness, and lovelessness.

Endure, knowing that at the end, there is salvation! [pause]

It is assured to us who truly follow Christ, and what great hope and security we can have!
[pauseeee]

Amidst the turmoil of the end times, we can endure knowing that Christ *is* coming back, our Lord and Savior *is* returning! [pause]

Amidst the craziness of everything that will happen in the world, we can endure knowing that God is in control. [pause]

Amidst the news of more and more people falling away, we can endure knowing that salvation for us is assured. [pause]

And even though during the end times, it *appears* like evil is winning, we can endure knowing that it will not win, for the gospel will go forth throughout the whole world.

For we see that His mission will be accomplished, as Revelation 7 tells us that someday....

“A great multitude...from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages” will be “standing before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out...‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”⁵ [*pauseee*]

Jesus’ call to us is to *endure* in the faith; endure to the end. [*pauseee*]

You see, Jesus’ teaching on the end times is not given to us merely so that we can create lists and timelines, it’s given to us so as to prepare us. [*pause*]

He teaches us these things, so that we would be faithful to the end.

For as He says in verse 25, “See, I have told you beforehand.” [*pause*]

These things are not unforeseen, but known and shared with us, so that we will not be led astray or alarmed, but faithful to the end, keeping our eyes on our returning, glorious Christ.

⁵ Revelation 7:9-10.