

The Prophecy of Our Lord

by Charles Ryrie

Charles Ryrie's sermon explores Jesus' teachings on the signs of the end times, the rise of anarchy, and the role of the Antichrist in the tribulation period.

Duration: 36:26

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 24:3, Matthew 24:44

Topics: "Eschatology", "Second Coming"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Jesus' conversation with his disciples about the signs of his coming and the end of the age. He emphasizes the importance of being alert and ready for the future, as believers do not know the exact timing of these events. The preacher uses the analogy of a sports game without a visible clock to illustrate the unpredictability of the future. He also mentions the prophecy of the destruction of the temple and the significance of Jesus' second coming and the establishment of his kingdom.

Transcript

Beginning tonight and continuing in the two sessions tomorrow, we're going to have a little mini-series on prophecy. And I want to begin tonight with a discussion of what our Lord believes about the future. Years ago I was teaching a home Bible class, and this was quite a spiritually mixed group, so I thought it might be helpful to take the theme, what Jesus believed about certain things.

And we did that for a number of weeks. Somehow the unbeliever, and sometimes believers, have the idea that what Jesus said about something is more important than what Paul said about something, which of course isn't true. But in case you still think that's true, I will cater to your ignorance and talk to you tonight about what Jesus believed about the future.

And then tomorrow we will talk about several other aspects of things that are yet to come. I invite you to turn to the passage we're going to look at tonight, which is in the 24th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 24, the so-called Olivet Discourse.

And it has that label because it was given to a select group of the disciples on the slope, the side of the Mount of Olives, just at sunset. It was Tuesday of Holy Week, assuming a Friday crucifixion, and the Lord went out with a couple of the disciples to the side of the Mount of Olives. And of course this was not a large mountain like we have in some parts of this country, but more a big hill in my judgment.

And there on the slope of the Mount of Olives, they were looking westward at the temple area that lay before them across the Kedron Valley. And the gates of the temple, the 24 gates of the temple, would soon be closed. The pilgrims were streaming into Jerusalem for the Passover time.

The temple was a magnificent structure, took many years to be built, actually was not yet finished when the Lord spoke these words. The completion of the temple was just a few years before it was destroyed. It was started about 20 B.C. and not finished until about 64 A.D. And it was destroyed, of course, six years later when Titus and the Romans besieged the land and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

In that 134 day siege of Jerusalem and Palestine, probably half a million people were killed. And when the Roman armies got to Jerusalem, they were so incensed at the opposition that the Jewish people had been able to raise up against them, that even though they were under orders not to destroy the temple, they did it. And they did it right down to the foundation stones of the temple, because the rumor was circulated that there was treasure in those stones and the soldiers wanted to get their hands on any gold or silver that might be there.

So as the disciples looked over the scene, looking into the sunset and the temple area, the Lord had said to them, verse 2, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And they could hardly believe that would be true, for some of the foundation stones of the temple were huge, I mean huge, like 37 feet by 12 feet by 18 feet. And to think that those would be thrown down as they actually were when the soldiers literally tore them apart looking for the gold they thought was stored there was just an incredible prophecy for our Lord to make.

So as they sat upon the Mount of Olives, verse 3, the disciples came to him privately and said, Tell us, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age? What did Jesus believe about the future? I want to focus on three or four things tonight that come from this particular conversation, I think discourse is a little too formal a word, this conversation that our Lord had with a handful of disciples that evening. First of all, he gives a number of signs, a number of things that are going to happen roughly in the section beginning at verse 4 and concluding at verse 14. A number of things that look kind of scattered, miscellaneous, hard to put together.

Let's look at a few of them and then I'll give you a single word that I think covers most of the characteristics of the end of the age, that is the time just before his second coming. He says, verse 4, Take heed, no man deceive you. That means some people will be deceived.

And if I can put together with that what is said in verse 11, Many false prophets shall rise and deceive many. There will be deception in the religious realm at the conclusion of this age, during the tribulation days. He says, verse 6, There will be wars and rumors of wars.

All of these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Nations shall rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms. There will be upset upheavals in the national life of the world, in the realms of nations, wars between nations and kingdoms fighting against kingdoms.

In the middle of verse 7, the Lord says, There will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in different places. That is, there will be upheavals in the natural realm that affect people, some things they can have no control over, like famines and earthquakes in different places. I don't want to minimize the seriousness or the severity of any of these things, it's so easy to read these words and just sort of pass over them.

But deception, religious deception, people saying, I'm the Messiah, I'm the true prophet. We see glimmers of these in many places, sometimes in airports in our nation. The intensity of famine, which none of us really has known, I suppose, and pestilences, that is diseases that follow often from these natural upheavals, and earthquakes in different places.

And I suppose most of us have never been in a serious earthquake. We read about these things, but they're kind of foreign to us. They happen somewhere else to other people.

And if we've experienced it, it's probably a little tremor that shook for a few minutes and maybe some aftershocks. But we haven't had to live through the devastation and the resultant destruction that an earthquake will bring. About a month ago I was preaching in California, and suddenly everybody looked directly at me with great intensity.

And I thought to myself, what in the world did I say? Was it that good? I ought to remember that. But I couldn't think what I'd said that would make everybody just suddenly fix their gaze on me. And then people began to talk.

And of course what was happening was we were having an earthquake. It did lend credence to my message, believe me. They were very attentive from then on.

And the reason I hadn't felt it for some unknown reason to me, I hadn't felt it, but I guess the platform wasn't as affected. But the reason everybody was looking was that over here behind me was a large wooden plaque that went from one side to the other side of the platform. It was suspended there, hooked there, and it had a verse for the summer on it.

And of course it began to sway in all directions, and that's how people knew there was an earthquake. Finally somebody got up and told me what was happening. That was nothing really, nothing.

There was no danger, there was no damage. Nobody was killed. People were just shaken a little bit for a few seconds.

But there will be earthquakes, real difficult upheavals. The Revelation says every island and mountain shall be moved and shall flee. I can't imagine what that will bring in relation to worldwide devastation that will come in those tribulation days.

As a result of all of this, the Lord says in verse 12, Iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall grow cold. Now if you put all of this together, these religious upheavals, the law being broken in the spiritual realm by false deliverers and false prophets and false Christs, the laws that govern society, nations, relations with other nations, being broken by wars and attacks against other nations, and the laws, the natural laws of nature, being broken by the uncontrollable forces of famine and pestilences and earthquakes. In other words, if law is upset, broken down in the religious realm and in society and in the political realm and in the natural realm, then when law is broken, what you have is anarchy.

So I want to suggest that maybe a word that will cover many of these characteristics from verse 4 on is the word anarchy. As the age comes to a close, we may expect to see, according to Christ's teachings, we may expect to see increasing anarchy, not only in political and governmental affairs, but in religious affairs and even in nature, where the laws of nature are disrupted and broken. And as a result of that, love, verse 12, and trust, and normal relationships, things you can count on, will not be able to be counted on, and thus hope will be extinguished.

How can that be? It just seems incredible that civilized people could give themselves to anarchy. But they will, and they do. I remember having a little preview of this, but startling to me, so startling I will never forget it, walking through Pennsylvania Station in New York one time and seeing signs in all of the corridors and concourses, signs that said, there is a curfew in Philadelphia from 8 p.m. till 6 a.m. There is a curfew in Baltimore from 7 p.m. till 7 a.m. There is a curfew in Washington from 9 p.m. till 6 a.m. Do not plan to arrive in these cities during those hours, because there will be no way you can leave the station.

This is the United States of America, and the reason there were curfews in those major eastern cities was because of anarchy. There were riots, they were uncontrollable, and one of the ways to try to control them was to put the population under that kind of curfew in each of those cities. And I thought, as I looked at those signs, I thought, is this the USA, where we pride ourselves on law and order in society? Could it be that here is a little sample of how civilized people can give themselves to an anarchy type of condition? If you ever read *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, you remember that the impossible happened.

Here were highly civilized, intelligent, skilled, trained, educated, democratic people, who little by little gave away their rights, their legal rights, to a man named Hitler. And he came to power, not through a coup, but legally, because there seemed to be a situation that might lead to anarchy, a breakdown of all law and order, and into that kind of situation stepped the man Hitler and said, I can bring order out of this chaos. And the people believed him, and they followed him.

Now because there will be all of this kind of disruption and anarchy in the tribulation days, and people will not be able to count on anything, things they had counted on, because there will be this kind of upheaval and upset and the breaking of all kinds of laws, people will find themselves in that same kind of situation, looking for someone who can at least promise them some sort of order out of the chaos, the chaotic conditions that will pertain during those days. And there will arise a man who will say, I can do it. Follow me.

Give me your allegiance. And I will bring order out of these chaotic conditions. He might even be able to deceive them into thinking he could do something about the famines and the earthquakes and the pestilences and so on.

But he'll certainly tell them that he can do something about the wars between nations, and he can save them from their difficulties, and people will believe him, and they will give their allegiance to him. And of course his name is Antichrist. He's got other names in the Bible.

He's called the willful king. He's called the abomination of desolation here in this passage. He's called the beast.

And he's called the lawless one. The man of sin. How ironic that a man who says, I can bring order into this situation of anarchy, is in reality the lawless one.

He's the epitome of anarchy. And yet he'll say to people, I can do something about it. And when it's too late they will find out as they found out with Hitler.

When it's too late they will find out he isn't the lawful one, he's the lawless one. For that's what he's called in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. So the second thing the Lord says that the world can expect in the future is Antichrist. Now he's introduced in this passage in verse 15.

When you therefore see the abomination that makes desolate, when you see him, the one who was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, when you see him standing in the holy place, then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains and so on and so on and so on. I think verse 15 would be in my judgment a good test question for people to see if they understand the English language. The test is what is the form of the word stand in the verse.

Of course it goes with the abomination of desolation. When you see him stand in the holy place. You hear this verse read and it's not read with great clarity sometimes as if we're to stand in the holy place or something.

When you see the abomination of desolation, the one spoken of by Daniel the prophet in Daniel 9.27, when you see him stand in the holy place, then do something. Now the Lord has focused on the midpoint of the tribulation days. One of the great events that will happen three and a half years after the rapture of the church and three and a half years before his second coming to the earth in power and glory.

And one of those great events at the midpoint of the tribulation is that this man will stand in the holy place. That is in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. I don't know how magnificent the temple is going to be.

I don't think it has to be magnificent. It could be a prefab temple thrown up very quickly. But it's been there for several years and the Jewish people have had the privilege and protection to offer their sacrifices and to worship again in that holy place.

And now suddenly their protector, the man who made the treaty with them at the beginning of the tribulation, suddenly their protector says, it's all over boys, you can't worship God anymore, you've got to worship me. Now in case you're getting lost, let's make a little timeline chart using the edge of the pulpit here. In this corner, from your viewpoint, we'll make the rapture of the church.

This is when we'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It's at this point, very shortly thereafter, that the man of sin, the Antichrist, makes the treaty with the new Jewish nation and among other things he guarantees them the right to establish their worship in Jerusalem. He will protect them.

Israel will not be able to go it alone. She will need and seek the protection of this great political leader, the Antichrist. He's political as well as religious.

So he'll sign that treaty with them and part of the guarantees will include their right to worship in a rebuilt temple, which they'll build I'm sure as quickly as they can. Things will go on relatively well for the nation, Israel, during the first part of the tribulation. So right here where the microphone comes down, that'll be the midpoint.

But suddenly at the midpoint, this man who was their protector says, you must worship me. He says, I want to be your God. And he will then do the most despicable thing that he can do and that is he will go into the Holy of Holies and set himself up there and demand to be worshipped.

That's exactly the same thing that Paul referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2. And he says when this man opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that as God, he sits in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. And he says now, worship me. So the Lord's advice in the face of this is get out of Jerusalem.

Get out of Judea, get out of Palestine, get away from this center where the persecution is starting. So the next few verses talk about how urgent it will be for the people to flee in that day when the man of sin, when the Antichrist says it's time to worship me. Let the one in Judea, verse 16, flee to the mountains.

Let him who is on a housetop not come down to take anything out of his house because you don't want to waste any time getting out of the city. Either let him that's in the field return back to take his clothes for the same reason. It is urgent to leave as quickly as possible.

Warn to those that are with child and those that nurse a child in those days because that will be a hindrance to a quick getaway. Pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day for that also would be a hindrance to a quick getaway from Jerusalem. That's a strange verse, isn't it? How many prayer meetings have you been to in your life? Hundreds? I'm sure many of you.

Have you ever heard anybody get up and say Now I want to suggest we pray as the Lord commanded that our flight be neither in the winter nor on the Sabbath day. Anybody ever heard that request made? How come? What's the matter with all you disobedient Christians? Didn't Christ say it in red letters? How come you don't pray that? How come you never request that? I'll tell you why. Because whether you know it or not, whether you want to acknowledge it or not, you are dispensational.

And you know that that's a prayer that has no purpose today, but will have a very important purpose in the tribulation day. It will be a very important prayer to pray then because if the Antichrist should do this in the winter and if, for example, he should choose a day when there's one of those rare snow storms in Jerusalem, it will just be terrible getting out of the city. It doesn't often snow in Jerusalem, but it does occasionally.

And when it does, they're not prepared for it any more than many southern cities are. And it's very difficult to get around. Things move or grind to a standstill when they have snow in Jerusalem.

I suppose the Antichrist should choose that day to demand that he worships. Or suppose it's the Sabbath day. That's not Sunday, of course.

That's Friday sundown until Saturday sundown. Suppose he chooses to do it Friday evening. It will be very difficult to get out of Jerusalem because most public transportation shuts down for the Sabbath.

Not everybody has a car. So anybody who's there whenever that happens will hope that he has a neighbor that has a car or somebody that has a motorbike or some sort of faster than foot transportation that he can use to get out of Jerusalem. Suppose the Antichrist does it on a Sabbath snowy winter day.

That would be as smart as the Egyptians who declared war at Passover in 1973. That was a smart military tactic because the nation Israel was shut down essentially for the holy day of Passover. The Passover war was almost lost by Israel and that was one of the reasons because when the enemy decided to begin it.

Antichrist is in the future. We'll talk a little more about him in the morning and some of his other plans for the world but here the focus is simply on what he's going to do in Jerusalem when he sets himself up to be worshipped. And then the Lord says there's a third thing coming.

Just to keep our alliteration. Anarchy will give way to Antichrist because Antichrist will move into that vacuum that anarchy brings and will say I can do something and of course a strong man can do something. The trouble is he's a deceiver.

What he does is not what people expected. He brings a certain amount of order but it's an order that focuses on worshipping him. And Antichrist rather than leading to good times will lead the world to Armageddon.

That's the third thing the Lord talks about as we move through the passage. Now of course I'm not looking at every verse. I can't tonight.

But just highlighting some of the things that Christ says are coming. And when the Lord gets down to talking about his second coming he says in verse 28 wheresoever the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together. And this of course is a capsule of what Armageddon will involve among other things at the time of the second coming of Christ.

And again we'll talk about that more in detail in the morning. Armageddon. The great carnage that will occur then as the rest of the armies the ones that are still fighting of the world gather together in Megiddo in the north of Palestine to fight each other.

And then when Christ comes in the midst of that battle they will turn and fight their common enemy, the Lord. And the result of that will be in more detail what is capsulized in verse 28 where the carcasses, the eagles will be gathered together to clean up the carcasses. What is capsulized there is detailed in Revelation 19.17 I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried with a loud voice saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven come and gather yourselves together to the supper of the great God.

You may eat the flesh of kings the flesh of captains the flesh of mighty men the flesh of horses them that sit on them the flesh of all men free and bond, small and great. And I saw the beast, there he is the Antichrist who came to power out of anarchy leading the nations to Armageddon and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army that is against Christ. And the beast and the false prophet were defeated and cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

But how can the earth stand all the pollution of the corpses that will result from Armageddon? It couldn't except for this supernatural gathering together of the birds of the heavens the eagles gathered together to clean up the carcasses to keep the earth from being just incredibly polluted because of the corpses that will follow that battle. And then in the midst of that battle the Son of Man will appear and will come and set up his kingdom. And that kingdom we'll talk about tomorrow evening.

Now that's not a very pleasant prospect, is it? But it's the truth. I just want to briefly mention two other things the Lord says. He says in chapter 25 that those who do not believe can only expect anguish.

Certainly anguish if they live into the tribulation days. But if they don't live to the tribulation days or if they do and are killed in some of the persecutions and judgments and earthquakes and famines and if they live to Armageddon the anguish not of Armageddon or of earthquakes or of famine or dying of starvation but the anguish of outer darkness in hell. And just notice very briefly in chapter 25 or perhaps we could look at verse 41.

Depart from me, cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Or verse 46, thee shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. Or in verse 30, cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.

That means a place where there is not a glimmer of light. The phrase used only two other times in Matthew and always in relation to unbelievers. Into outer darkness and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So for the unbeliever the only prospect the Lord says is anguish. The anguish of outer darkness. The anguish of everlasting punishment.

The anguish of the lake of fire. Prepared for the devil and his angels. Christ believed in everlasting punishment.

In verse 46, the two words that are translated everlasting in the first part of the verse and eternal in the last part of the verse are the same. So if life is eternal, punishment is eternal. Punishment is only temporary which some people teach.

Some Christian people teach that the wicked will be punished only for a time and then either restored to heaven after a kind of purgatory of punishment or punished for a time and then annihilated. If that's the case, then eternal life is not eternal life either. You can't make it temporary in the first part of the verse and permanent in the last part of verse 46.

Anguish for the unbeliever. For the believer, the Lord's counsel is back in chapter 24 and verse 44. Therefore, be also ready, be alert, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

Now that doesn't mean throw over your plans, don't make any preparations for the future. It means, well let me illustrate it. I'm sure you watch sports activities.

How often will the announcer talk about how much time's left? The clock says so many seconds are left or the two minute buzzer has sounded for the end of the game, toward the end of the game. Now suppose teams and coaches and spectators were asked to play and watch the game with the clock covered. Only the timekeeper could see the clock and when the time was over he would blow the whistle and the game would be over.

What would that do to the game? It would shoot all the strategy to nothing. It would make every coach tear out his hair because there's no way to plan because you don't know the time. A Christian who does not know something about the future can't be alert, verse 44.

Can't be ready, that is alert. Because he's trying to live life with the clock covered and he doesn't know where we are in God's prophetic program. The knowledge of the future affects the present.

Always. You get ready to go somewhere, the knowledge you're going to leave on Thursday tells you you need to pack on Wednesday and get clean clothes on Monday. The knowledge of the future always affects the present.

And for the believer this means to be alert because we do not know the day or the hour when the Son of Man comes. Hopefully it would be tonight. I hope you hope that.

Not to escape this, though we will, but to see Him whom we long to see. Well, there's just kind of a thumbnail sketch of what our Lord's thoughts about the future were and I wanted to lay that background because I want to fill in certain details in our time together tomorrow. Now you know, you're guessing, you're hoping we're going to sing a hymn.

Would you mind? I'd like to sing a hymn. And this is the one I'd like to sing. I hope you know it because I don't like to sing solos.

You wouldn't like to hear them either. 187, ladies, 187. Do you know this one? Marvelous message we bring, glorious carol we sing, Jesus is coming again.

Well, let's sing 187. Got time to sing all the verses? Okay, we'll sing all the verses. He persuaded us, see?

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