

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 24

by John Wesley

John Wesley's sermon on Matthew 24 emphasizes the signs of the end times, the importance of vigilance against deception, and the necessity of faith and endurance among believers.

Scripture: Matthew 24:2-42

Topics: "Prophecy", "Vigilance in Faith"

Description

John Wesley explains Matthew 24, emphasizing the prophetic warnings Jesus gave about the destruction of the temple and the signs of His second coming. He highlights the importance of vigilance against deception from false prophets and the need for believers to endure through tribulations. Wesley notes that the destruction of Jerusalem was a significant event that foreshadowed greater spiritual truths and the eventual return of Christ. He encourages Christians to remain faithful and wise stewards of their faith, as the exact timing of the end is known only to God. The sermon serves as a reminder to be prepared and alert for the Lord's return.

Transcript

XXIV. 1. Mark 13:1; Luke 21:5.

Verse 2. There shall not be left one stone upon another - This was most punctually fulfilled; for after the temple was burnt, Titus, the Roman general, ordered the very foundations of it to be dug up; after which the ground on which it stood was ploughed up by Turnus Rufus. Chapter Overview

3. As he sat on the mount of Olives - Whence they had a full view of the temple. When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? - The disciples inquire confusedly, 1. Concerning the time of the destruction of the temple; 2. Concerning the signs of Christ's coming, and of the end of the world, as if they imagined these two were the same thing. Our Lord answers distinctly concerning, 1. The destruction of the temple and city, with the signs preceding, verse 4, &c, 15, &c.

Matthew 24:4,15. 2. His own coming, and the end of the world, with the signs thereof, verse 29-31.

Matthew 24:29-31. 3. The time of the destruction of the temple, verse 32, &c.

Matthew 24:32. 4. The time of the end of the world, verse 36.

Matthew 24:36.

Verse 4. Take heed that no man deceive you - The caution is more particularly designed for the succeeding Christians, whom the apostles then represented. The first sign of my coming is, the rise of false prophets. But it is highly probable, many of these things refer to more important events, which are yet to come.

Verse 5. Many shall come in my name - First, false Christs, next, false prophets, Matthew 24:11. At length, both together, Matthew 24:24. And indeed never did so many impostors appear in the world as a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem; undoubtedly because that was the time wherein the Jews in general expected the Messiah.

Verse 6. Wars - Near: Rumours of wars - At a distance. All these things must come to pass - As a foundation for lasting tranquillity. But the end - Concerning which ye inquire, is not yet - So far from it, that this is but the beginning sorrows.

Verse 9. Then shall they deliver you up to affliction - As if ye were the cause of all these evils. And ye shall be hated of all nations - Even of those who tolerate all other sects and parties; but in no nation will the children of the devil tolerate the children of God. Matthew 10:17.

Verse 10. Then shall many be offended - So as utterly to make shipwreck of faith and a pure conscience. But hold ye fast faith, Matthew 24:11. in spite of false prophets: love, even when iniquity and offences abound, Matthew 24:12. And hope, unto the end, Matthew 24:13. He that does so, shall be snatched out of the burning. The love of many will wax cold - The generality of those who love God will (like the Church at Ephesus, Revelation 2:4,) leave their first love.

Verse 13. Matthew 10:22; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17.

Verse 14. This Gospel shall be preached in all the world - Not universally: this is not done yet: but in general through the several parts of the world, and not only in Judea And this was done by St. Paul and the other apostles, before Jerusalem was destroyed. And then shall the end come - Of the city and temple. Josephus's History of the Jewish War is the best commentary on this chapter. it is a wonderful instance of God's providence, that he, an eye witness, and one who lived and died a Jew, should, especially in so extraordinary a manner, be preserved, to transmit to us a collection of important facts, which so exactly illustrate this glorious prophecy, in almost every circumstance. Mark 13:10.

Verse 15. When ye see the abomination of desolation - Daniel's term is, The abomination that maketh desolate, Daniel 11:31; that is, the standards of the desolating legions, on which they bear the abominable images of their idols: Standing in the holy place - Not only the temple and the mountain on which it stood, but the whole city of Jerusalem, and several furlongs of land round about it, were accounted holy; particularly the mount on which our Lord now sat, and on which the Romans afterward planted their ensigns. He that readeth let him understand -Whoever reads that prophecy of Daniel, let him deeply consider it. Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20; Daniel 9:27.

Verse 16. Then let them who are in Judea flee to the mountains - So the Christians did, and were preserved. It is remarkable that after the Romans under Cestus Gallus made their first advances toward Jerusalem, they suddenly withdrew again, in a most unexpected and indeed impolitic manner. This the Christians took as a signal to retire, which they did, some to Pella, and others to Mount Libanus.

Verse 17. Let not him that is on the house top come down to take any thing out of his house - It may be remembered that their stairs used to be on the outside of their houses.

Verse 19. Wo to them that are with child, and to them that give suck -Because they cannot so readily make their escape.

Verse 20. Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter - They did so; and their flight was in the spring. Neither on the Sabbath -Being on many accounts inconvenient; beside that many would have scrupled to travel far on that day. For the Jews thought it unlawful to walk above two thousand paces (two miles) on the Sabbath day.

Verse 21. Then shall be great tribulation - Have not many things spoken in the chapter, as well as in Mark 13:14 &c., Luke 21:21 &c. a farther and much more extensive meaning than has been yet fulfilled?

Verse 22. And unless those days were shortened - By the taking of Jerusalem sooner than could be expected: No flesh would be saved - The whole nation would be destroyed. But for the elect's sake - That is, for the sake of the Christians.

Verse 23. Mark 13:21; Luke 17:23.

Verse 24. They would deceive, if possible, the very elect - But it is not possible that God should suffer the body of Christians to be thus deceived.

Verse 27. For as the lightning goeth forth - For the next coming of Christ will he as quick as lightning; so that there will not be time for any such previous warning.

Verse 28. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together - Our Lord gives this, as a farther reason, why they should not hearken to any pretended deliverer. As if he had said, Expect not any deliverer of the Jewish nation; for it is devoted to destruction. It is already before God a dead carcass, which the Roman eagles will soon devour. Luke 17:37.

Verse 29. Immediately after the tribulation of those days - Here our Lord begins to speak of his last coming. But he speaks not so much in the language of man as of God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, one moment. Many of the primitive Christians not observing this, thought he would come immediately, in the common sense of the word: a mistake which St. Paul labours to remove, in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. The powers of the heavens - Probably the influences of the heavenly bodies. Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25.

Verse 30. Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven - It seems a little before he himself descends. The sun, moon, and stars being extinguished, (probably not those of our system only,) the sign of the Son of man (perhaps the cross) will appear in the glory of the Lord.

Verse 31. They shall gather together his elect - That is, all that have endured to the end in the faith which worketh by love.

Verse 32. Learn a parable - Our Lord having spoke of the signs preceding the two grand events, concerning which the apostles had inquired, begins here to speak of the time of them. And to the question proposed, Matthew 24:3, concerning the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, he answers Matthew 24:34. Concerning the time of the end of the world, he answers Matthew 24:36. Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29.

Verse 34. This generation of men now living shall not pass till all these things be done - The expression implies, that great part of that generation would be passed away, but not the whole. Just so it was. For the city and temple were destroyed thirty-nine or forty years after.

Verse 36. But of that day - The day of judgment; Knoweth no man - Not while our Lord was on earth. Yet it might be afterward revealed to St. John consistently with this.

Verse 37. Luke 17:26.

Verse 40. One is taken - Into God's immediate protection: and one is left - To share the common calamities. Our Lord speaks as having the whole transaction present before his eyes.

Verse 41. Two women shall be grinding - Which was then a common employment of women.

Verse 42. Ye know not what hour your Lord cometh - Either to require your soul of you, or to avenge himself of this nation. Mark 13:33; Luke 12:35; .

Verse 45. Who then is the faithful and wise servant - Which of you aspires after this character? Wise - Every moment retaining the clearest conviction, that all he now has is only intrusted to him as a steward: Faithful - Thinking, speaking, and acting continually, in a manner suitable to that conviction.

Verse 48. But if that evil servant - Now evil, having put away faith and a good conscience.

Verse 51. And allot him his portion with the hypocrites - The worst of sinners, as upright and sincere as he was once. If ministers are the persons here primarily intended, there is a peculiar propriety in the expression. For no hypocrisy can be baser, than to call ourselves ministers of Christ, while we are the slaves of avarice, ambition, or sensuality. Wherever such are found, may God reform them by his grace, or disarm them of that power and influence, which they continually abuse to his dishonour, and to their own aggravated damnation!

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