

STEPS TO THE CROSS

The Master Teacher Explains the Future

Matthew 24-25

INTRODUCTION: If you got a message from God that you had exactly six days to live, what would you do?

- Would you call me, your Lifechange Group teacher, or the most spiritual friend you have to enlist their help to be sure you are ready to go?
- Would you get out life insurance policies, records, make some notes and lists, take care of things at the bank to be sure things were ready for your loved ones still here?
- Are there things on your “I’m going to do that someday list” you would try to hurriedly accomplish:
 - a conversation needing to be held,
 - an apology to be delivered,
 - forgiveness to be granted,
 - love to be expressed?

I imagine that if we each made a list of what we would do if we received such a notice, there would be tremendous variation from person to person. But I dare say that all of our lists would have one thing in common. **Each of us would do what was most important to us.**

Now think of Jesus during the final week of His life on earth.

- On Sunday, He knew He was dying on Friday on the cross. He knew it was His last week. And for Jesus, this was not a surprising revelation. He had known this week was approaching.
- It makes sense for us to think that **the things Jesus did during this week are things that have a special significance and extreme importance.**

I think we have already seen evidence of this truth.

- On Palm Sunday, Jesus shined His light upon on Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus and all the people of Jerusalem, showing us for all time how He desires to shine in each and every life.

- On Monday Jesus burned with the righteous anger of God at selfishness where people put their own desires ahead of the glory of God. After that day, people would remember how the Lord values genuine and unadulterated worship,
 - worship in accord with the Word of God,
 - worship with God, and never ourselves, with God as the focus of exaltation and adoration.

This morning we look at Tuesday. Jesus spent this day teaching His disciples, teaching them important things, critical things, critical for them and for us! On this day...

I. JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE FUTURE. (Mt. 24:1-31)

If you have your own Bible with you, you might want to just open it and follow, because I am going to just walk you through Mt. 24, so we can see how clearly Jesus taught His disciples what was going to happen in the world after His death and resurrection. If you do not have your Bible with you, it's OK. The key verses that I will read will be on the screen.

A. The destruction of the temple

Mt. 24:1-2 NKJV 1 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

This is not a big deal to us, but it was a big deal to the disciples and every Jew. The temple was the heart of their religion.

B. The beginning of sorrows

Mt. 24:6-8 NKJV 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

But then Jesus said, "Thru it all..."

C. The spread of the gospel

Mt. 24:14 NKJV And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Folks, the preaching of the gospel would be the best thing that would happen in what would be a long history of trying times. But those that would believe the gospel would find hope, forgiveness, love, life, and meaning and purpose.

But then...

D. The tribulation

Mt. 24:21-22 NKJV 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Then Jesus gave the best news ever!

E. The return of Christ to the earth

Mt. 24:29-30 NKJV 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Folks, listen! This is real. The first two are complete. We are in the third right now, bordering on the fourth. The fourth only lasts seven years. The fifth happens in a day. This is no mere saying or song. Jesus is coming again!

But I know us Baptists! Some of you are saying, "Bro. Mike, preachers have been saying Jesus is coming again for centuries, and He still hasn't come. I believe He's coming again, but I suspect it is going to be a long, long time."

But listen, my friend. Maybe you do not know what else Jesus taught that Tuesday before He died.

II. JESUS TOLD US HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE SEASON OF HIS COMING.

A. Jesus told us about the sign of the fig tree.

Mt. 24:32-35 NKJV 32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

1. **Whenever the fig tree is used figuratively in the Bible, it always refers to Israel.** Look at these examples

In Jeremiah 24:2-8 the fig tree is Israel and the figs are the people of Israel.

Joel 1:6-7 NKJV For a nation has come up against My land, ...And ruined **My fig tree**; ...

Hosea 9:10 NKJV “I found Israel Like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers As the firstfruits on **the fig tree** in its first season. ...

In Lk.13:6ff, the barren fig tree is unfruitful Israel.

2. The fig tree has been budding since 1948 when Israel came out of a dormancy that lasted over 18 centuries!

- I am convinced, not only from this passage but others in the Bible as well, that **the sign of the fig tree means that the generation that sees the reestablishment and regathering of Israel in its land will see the second coming of Christ.**

3. That includes us!

Then Jesus gave us another way to recognize we are in the season of His return.

B. The days of Noah

Mt. 24:36-37 NKJV 36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

What were the days of Noah like? Let us read how the Bible describes them.

Genesis 6:5 NKJV Then the LORD saw that the **wickedness of man was great** in the earth, and *that every intent of the **thoughts of his heart was only evil** continually.*

How much more like that days of Noah can our world become until we pass it?

Then Jesus said there would be...

C. The taking of believers

Mt. 24:38-41 NKJV 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two *men* will be in the field: **one will be taken** and the other left. 41 Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: **one will be taken** and the other left.

This is what we call the rapture of the church, the snatching away of believers.

1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 NKJV 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall

be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Shout Glory! Hallelujah! Come Lord Jesus!

But my friend, while we are right to celebrate the soon coming of our Lord to take believers home to heaven with Him, we ought not forget...

D. The lost are left behind.

Mt. 24:39-41 NKJV ... so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

Now, let me ask you, "Why did Jesus lay all of this out for us so plainly? Did He just want to have the best educated disciples the world has ever known?"

- Well, He did want those who follow Him to grow in the truth revealed in God's Word. That is why Jesus prayed for us to be sanctified by the Word of God.
- But Jesus wanted more than that.
- He wanted to warn us.

III. JESUS WARNED US TO BE READY.

And He told us two specific ways to prepare.

A. **Be saved!** Jesus told two parables.

1. The parable of the faithful servant and evil servant (Mt. 24:45-51)

- a. The faithful servant did all His master told him to do. When the Master returned he made his servant the ruler over all the master's house.
- b. The evil servant thought, "The master is not coming any time soon." So he mistreated his fellow servants and lived the life of a reprobate.
 - When the master returned he cut him in two.
 - He cast the evil servant into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!

2. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1-13)

- a. **The wise virgins had oil in their lamps, and they went with the bridegroom to the wedding.**
 - Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. They represent the saved.

- The saved will go with Jesus to Heaven where they will be with the Bridegroom at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

b. The foolish virgins had no oil.

- They did not have the Holy Spirit.
- **The Lord said, “I do not know you.”**
- They were lost, and they were left!
- The lost will not go with Jesus the Bridegroom when He comes to take away believers to Heaven, and they will be left on earth to suffer the tribulation under the wicked rule of Antichrist.

Oh dear friend, the moment that the Savior shall appear in the sky could come at any time. And when He comes and saved people rise to meet Him in the air, it is going to be too late to fall on your knees and repent and pray the sinner’s prayer. You are going to be left! That is why Jesus says, get ready. Be saved!

Matthew 25:13 NKJV “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

But Jesus also told His disciples that day that to be ready when He returned they also needed to ...

B. Be working. (Mt. 25:14-30) Be working for the Master and for His Kingdom!

This passage is called the parable of the talents. We talked about it a few weeks ago when we talked about the relationship of grace and works. But here

- 1. The first two people in the parable picture the saved, and they use what they are given by the Master for Him.**
- 2. They are rewarded and the Master says, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things, and I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”**
- 3. The third man in the parable represents the lost.**
 - **He cares nothing about the Master or what He wants.**
 - **He does not use what the Master gave Him.**
 - **He pictures the lost man, and he is cast into outer darkness.**

CONCLUSION: Listen, 72 hours after Jesus taught these things to His disciples, He was hanging on the cross. He had a message for all mankind ready to burst out of His heart. He gathered the disciples and says, “Here is what will happen.

- The temple will be destroyed,
- sorrows will begin,
- and the gospel will spread.
- Then the tribulation will come,
- and afterward, I will return.

The world will be clueless that the time of tribulation and of My return is coming,
just as they were clueless in Noah's day.

But when you see Israel beginning to bud again after a long period of dormancy,
know that season of My return is at hand.

Suddenly I will come and take believers to heaven, but I will leave the lost.

Be ready. Get saved. Work for the sake of the Kingdom! **I am coming!**"

Folks, I don't know about you, but the more fervently I believe that Jesus' return is really, really close. The more convinced I am that the rapture of those who believe could happen at any moment,

- The more strength I have to resist temptation.
- The more energy I have to be working for the Kingdom.
- The more urgency I have to share the gospel.
- The more desire I have to make disciples in my Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

Have you put your trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior and been saved?

- If you have trusted in Christ, do you believe what Jesus taught His disciples three days before He died on the cross?
- Do you believe He is coming again? Soon?
- Do you believe the saved will be taken to Heaven and the lost left for the terrible tribulation?
- Do you believe the lost will be condemned to an eternity in hell?

If you do not believe this, would you ask the Lord to help you become a better student of His Word, that you may know the truth and the truth would set you free from the misconceptions of this world?

If you do believe these things as taught in the Scriptures, would you ask the Lord to use your faith

- To strengthen you against the temptations by the evil one that draw you astray.
- To energize you for work in the Kingdom of God, that our Lord may say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"
- To increase your sense of urgency in the sharing of the gospel.
- To grow your desire to help others follow Christ, folks here at home and folks far, far away.