



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: signs of the End Times

Week 12: Matthew chapters 23 and 24

Talking to the Kids

The Gospel of Matthew uses a speech from Jesus to help us thinking about the End Times. But there is caution here. Our faith life is not to focus on the End, but on the journey. Thinking about the end times can be scary, for any age, but especially for children. So this is an opportunity to talk about the journey.

We are to gather with God's people, in worship and fellowship.

We are to share in God's meal (Holy Communion).

We are to pray for one another. We are to help our neighbor in need, and serve others.

We are to give generously.

We are called to be faithful to God.

By focusing on these actions, we shift away from the end, and keep our attention where Matthew, the Gospel writer, is trying to keep it ... on the present time.

The end will take care of itself, and God is in charge, so do not worry. But today, Matthew is warning, pay attention to today.

- The Birth pangs listed in Matthew seem like a good place to start looking for the End Times. And let's define the End Times as beginning when Jesus returns. In theological terms, this is called the parousia, it is the moment when Jesus returns and this age of earth passes and the new age of God's Kingdom ruling in fullness begins..
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke have some agreed sources that talk about these Birth Pangs. For Matthew, though, these are not so much signs to follow as like a schedule, but things we will see happening along the way. Nothing immediate is happening just because these things are taking place.
- Part of what Matthew is doing is describing the events of the War that happened between 67 and 73 that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Part of what Matthew is doing is reminding his people that just because these things happen doesn't mean we drop everything. We keep on keeping on, being faithful.
- This unit in chapter 24 is divided into three parts, with the birth pangs only being part one. An era of tribulation is also included here. Matthew borrows much of this language from Mark's Gospel, but also makes it his own unit.
- During this tribulation period, persecutions and internal conflicts mark the church. But simultaneously the Church is part of a global mission, drawing all nations to God's Word.
- This period also includes an event called "the desolating sacrilege". This is a phrase that refers to an event in 167 BCE when Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the Temple, partly by sacrificing a pig on the altar (pigs were not kosher, and never to be used in sacrifices according to Jewish tradition). Antiochus IV even spread the blood of the pig over many icons and sacred items in the Temple.
- While Matthew does not define what this will be, the concept is understood, and some may think it refers to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, others still think this refers to something else in Matthew's future.
- This section ends with a third movement which is when the Son of Man returns. And this moment comes with cosmic signs, that are unmistakable. And the Son of Man will return not privately to some, but universally seen by all.
- Matthew wants the reader to know that when Jesus returns, the whole world will know it, there is no private sneak peak for some. This is not an event exclusive to just some, as others who claim the title messiah might be claiming. Everyone will see Jesus, everyone will know it has happened.
- But when this happens, no one knows. And to be clear, Jesus himself also says he does not know. But when it does happen, the judgement will occur, and Jesus has more to say on that judgement in the parables that follow.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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