

Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Daphne buzzed around the kitchen. It seemed like she was trying to prepare every dish that her son, Xavier, liked. "When he tastes his momma's cooking, my baby won't be going anywhere," she said.

"Your 'baby' is twenty-eight years old, and he enlisted in the Air Force," said Robert. "He must report for duty, Daphne. I think it will be good for him. It's what he wants to do."

"How can you say 'it will be good for him?'" Daphne asked, setting the pot of brisket on top of the stove. "What if he's sent to war? What if he's kidnapped? What if he gets killed? We can talk him out of it. Don't they have people who change their minds after they've enlisted?"

"Sweetheart," Robert said, rising from the bar stool and coming to his wife. "It's going to be all right. Xavier loves God, and he believes this is a path God has for him. We need to support him."

"But I can't watch over him and take care of him where he's going," Daphne said into her husband's chest.

"Honey, you can't guarantee Xavier's safety and well-being, even while he's here," Robert replied, tightening his grip around his wife. "Listen, God is the one in control. God will take care of our son wherever he is. We're going to trust the Lord, yes?"

Robert felt Daphne relax in his arms and nod her head.

1. In what areas are you currently struggling to relinquish control?

2. How do you respond when you feel the need to control the situation?

3. What are some appropriate ways to relinquish control to God, especially for things we cannot control?

Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Matthew 24:1–3 KJV

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Matthew 24:1–3 NIV

¹ Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

In verse 1, Jesus leaves the temple en route to the Mount of Olives, similar to when the glory of the Lord left Jerusalem and “stopped above the mountain east of it” in Ezekiel 11:23. Coupled with Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:38, this signals the end to God’s purposes for the temple. Perhaps startled by this, or simply taken with the beauty of the temple complex, the disciples point out the buildings to Jesus as they are walking away. But Jesus informs them that the temple will be destroyed completely (v. 2). This was shocking to the disciples, who grew up with the temple as an essential part of their religious life. How could God permit the destruction of His temple?

After arriving at the Mount of Olives, the disciples go to Jesus with a twofold question. First, they want to know when the temple will be destroyed. Second, they want to know what will be the sign of Jesus’ coming at the end of the age (v. 3). These questions are linked in the disciples’

minds, since the destruction of the temple might feel like a precursor to the end of the world for any first-century Jew. In verses 4–14, however, Jesus will temper expectations of a link between His imminent return and what will happen in the days leading up to the temple's destruction. From the context of millennia later, it is clear that the destruction of the temple doesn't mean the imminent end of the world. But as a good leader to His followers, Jesus prepares the disciples for a changing world, and—in the following passage—warns them to flee Jerusalem when destruction is near (Matt. 24:15–25).

4. *Why might the destruction of the temple be difficult for Jesus' disciples to accept?*

5. *How might the redemptive work of Jesus negate the need for a temple?*

Jesus Invites His Disciples to Stand Firm

Matthew 24:4–13 KJV

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill

Matthew 24:4–13 NIV

⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains."

⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and

you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Jesus warns His disciples to watch out for false messiahs, who will deceive many people (v. 4). He says that these false messiahs "will come in my name" (v. 5). This could mean they will claim to be Jesus or might fraudulently attach Jesus' authority to their actions. It most likely denotes people who claim—or whose followers claim—to fulfill a messianic role. Hence their false statement, "I am the Messiah" (v. 5). In the first century, several would-be messiahs did arrive on the scene—Jewish nationalistic political figures or insurrectionists. Such people typically garnered a large following, until they were killed and their movement was stifled.

Jesus tells the disciples that conflict, war, and natural disasters are going to come. However, these are not indicators of the imminent end of the age (vv. 6–7). Instead, they will be a normal part of history until the renewal of all things. Jesus' disciples will have to live faithfully through such troubles, which are "the beginning of birth pains" (v. 8). As a "beginning," they cannot be used as signs to calculate the Lord's coming. Yet the image of birth

pains suggests that the hardships and sufferings that the disciples endure will eventually lead to something new and wonderful. God will work through them to give birth to His new world.

Starting in verse 9, Jesus explains what a changing world means for His disciples. They will face persecution and death, not just in Israel but among the nations. Within this situational context, many will turn away from their faith, betraying and hating each other (v. 10).

Jesus again says that many people will be deceived, this time by false prophets presumably teaching what is contrary to the gospel of the kingdom (vv. 11, 14). Wickedness will increase, resulting in a cooling off of people's love. Jesus does not specify whether He means love for God or others, but likely both are in view, since love for God and love for others are connected in Scripture (Matt. 22:37–40). The proper response to all of this is to stand firm—to endure in faithfulness, despite the troubles and changes of the world (v. 13). The person who keeps the faith will be saved.

Verse 14 serves as the conclusion to this passage, revealing the task for Jesus' disciples, both before and after the temple is destroyed. Jesus tells the disciples that the gospel will be preached to the whole world, "and then the end will come" (v. 14). While this verse lays out a kind of chronology, with an end coming after the news of Christ's kingdom reaches the nations, it does not offer a timeframe for the Lord's coming, once the gospel-spreading task is complete. Instead, what God requires is endurance in the midst of the uncertainties that come from a changing and turbulent world.

6. *What do you think makes people susceptible to the deception of false messiahs?*

7. *How does Jesus want His followers to respond to trouble or persecution?*

8. *How does this passage or other passages discourage attempts to calculate the Lord's coming?*

Change Can Be an Opportunity

In many western countries, secularization is on the rise. Fewer and fewer people are attending churches. In many ways, God is not welcome in public spaces.

If we went back in time to visit the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, he might say to us, *What an opportunity!* In nineteenth-century Denmark, the established Christian church meant that being a Christian felt as easy as being born in the right place and time. Kierkegaard described his role as making Christianity more difficult, more costly, and more exceptional. He thought that Christianity needed to stand out from culture, or it would cease to have any meaning for the individual. Being faithful to Christ cannot be as simple as being a good citizen.

Where I live, we do not have that same problem anymore! Just the choice to attend church on Sunday makes my family stand out as “very religious” (or so I recently heard from a neighbor). With every change in the values of our culture, we are met with a fresh opportunity to say, *Look at what the disciples of Christ shall do!* When the foster system is full of children who need a stable home and loving caregivers, followers of Jesus can step forward. When marriage is devalued and treated as old-fashioned, Christians can quietly stand in fidelity to their spouses. When people treat their elderly parents as burdensome and quaint, Christians can welcome the wisdom of elders in the faith.

In the turbulence of a world that chases after many false kings, Christians have opportunities to be quiet beacons of hope. Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

9. *How does our culture challenge us to walk faithfully with God?*

10. *What are some opportunities to grow from these challenges?*

11. *How should followers of Jesus stand out?*

Faithfulness to the End

Through Jesus' words in this lesson, each of us has been invited to endure in the faith, no matter what comes. Faithfulness can mean honoring our commitments, abstaining from what is wrong, and demonstrating excessive concern for one another—with no expectation of anything in return.

► Choose one to answer, in light of today's lesson:

What commitment does God ask you to honor?

What behavior does God ask you to avoid?

What kindness does God invite you to show?

KEY VERSE

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.
—Matthew 24:2 KJV

"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."
—Matthew 24:2 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 28 through August 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Ezekiel 47—The River of Life.

Tues. 2 Corinthians 6:1–18—A Holy Temple.

Wed. Matthew 16:13–20—Christ Will Build His Church.

Thurs. Psalm 24—Seeking God's Face.

Fri. Psalm 63—Behold God's Glory in the Sanctuary.

Sat. 1 Corinthians 3:1–9—God Grows Us.

Sun. 1 Corinthians 3:10–23—Building on a Sure Foundation.