

Christ's Warning Concerning The Destruction Of Jerusalem And The End Of The World.

Text: Matt 24:15-28

1) The Destruction Of Jerusalem

Suggested Hymns:

2) The End Of The World

500, 485, 497, 840, 509

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 24:15–28, ¹⁵ *“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand),* ¹⁶ *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

¹⁷ *Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!*

²⁰ *And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 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.*

²³ *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ²⁸ For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are some difficulties connected with the explanation of our Gospel. The main difficulty is that in some parts we do not know whether the Lord Jesus speaks of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, or of the end of the world.

In the beginning of our Gospel Christ refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, when He quotes Daniel's prophecy on the abomination of desolation in the holy place, while at the end of our Gospel He has in mind the end of all things, when He says, "²⁷ *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*"

The key to the correct solution is to be found in the context. In the passage preceding our Gospel the Lord Jesus discusses both subjects, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Then His disciples put to Him the question: "*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?*"¹

So the disciples combined the two things and desired to know when all will come to pass. And Jesus' answer, given in our Gospel, conforms to their question. He does not separate what they had combined. He does not draw a marked line of distinction between the two events. Neither does He tell them the exact time and date.

Since, however, they had also asked, "*what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?*" and since the signs and tribulations to precede both events are very much alike, He refers to them loosely, without discriminating between the two, and warns His disciples to be mindful of both, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

Now since our Gospel contains this warning concerning both events, let us consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *Christ's Warning Concerning The Destruction Of Jerusalem And The End Of The World*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. His Warning Concerning The Destruction Of Jerusalem.

Christ says at the beginning of our Gospel, "*Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place*" (whoever reads, let him understand)."

Here Christ refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and He tells His disciples to pay close attention to Daniel's prophecy on the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place.

That was the sign to precede the destruction of the city. If we look up and read the prophecy, we will understand that more plainly. We read in Daniel 9:26, ***And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.***²

The abomination of desolation which is spoken of by Daniel the prophet is the desecration of the temple. And what was to precede Jerusalem's destruction? It was the besieging of the city by a hostile army, as Christ also says Luke 21:20,²⁰ ***“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”***

Christ is saying, *‘Take warning, my dear disciples, Daniel predicted in plain words the coming of the people of the ruler to destroy the city and the sanctuary. When, therefore, you see the enemy surrounding the city, then know that this is the beginning of the abomination of desolation, and that Jerusalem shall be destroyed.’*

Christ's and Daniel's word came true. In the year sixty-six a Roman army, commanded by Gessius Floras, appeared before the walls of Jerusalem, and that was the beginning of the great tragedy which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christ adds, ***“¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.”***

Christ warns His disciples, and urges them to flee as soon as they see the armies approaching the city. Quickly they should make for the mountains outside of Judea and even leave behind them their best clothing and personal property. And to escape special hardships in their abrupt flight they should pray that their flight need not be made in the winter, in an unfavourable season, nor on the Sabbath, when the Jews would not let them travel.

The disciples heeded this warning. Scarcely had Gessius Floras started to surround the city, when all the Christians in Jerusalem, mindful of their Saviour's warning, fled into the mountains, east of the river Jordan, in the land of Peraea, and found refuge in a village named Pella, where they were unmolested and undisturbed during the horrible siege of Jerusalem.

Now was fulfilled the following words of our Saviour, *“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.”*

There is truly nothing so horrible on record as was the tribulation endured by the Jews immediately before the destruction of their city and temple. Gessius Florus took part only of the city, ransacked and pillaged the houses of the wealthy, and then departed.

Then followed a four years' war. The Roman legions devastated the country, besieged the cities and towns, and slew the inhabitants. From all parts of Judea the Jews fled into the Holy City, which they considered impregnable.

Finally, the Roman armies encircled Jerusalem, which was more than overcrowded with Jews. The siege lasted many months. And the terrors of that siege are too horrible to be told. The food soon gave out; there was a famine. There were riots in the city and many were killed.

A dreadful plague took the inhabitants away by the thousands. The dead bodies were thrown over the walls, and the surrounding trenches were filled with them, emitting a stench beyond description.

The Jews fought like heroes in defence of the city and temple, but the Romans finally scaled the walls. The Roman soldiers were infuriated on account of the Jews' stubborn resistance, and when they were in the city, their rage and fury could not be checked.

They slew with the edge of the sword whom they met. They burned and demolished everything, and in a short time the beautiful city was turned into a huge mass of smouldering ruins.

During this siege more than one million Jews perished by the sword of the Romans, by starvation, pest, feuds, and suicide; and the scenes of misery and distress are simply beyond description.

As Jesus says in our Gospel, it was great tribulation, such as was not seen since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be. There is not another event in the entire history of the world to be compared with the destruction of Jerusalem as to horrors and shocking occurrences.

And if God had not shortened those days, none of the besieged would have been saved. They would have perished to the last man. But the Romans made ninety-seven thousand prisoners, and the Lord God, doubtless, had elected some of these to believe in His beloved Son Jesus Christ and to be saved through faith in Him.

2. His Warning Concerning The End Of The World.

Having considered Christ's warning concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, let us now apply our attention to His warning concerning the end of the world.

As said before, Christ does not draw a marked line of distinction between the two events. We cannot tell where the warning concerning Jerusalem ends and where the warning concerning the end of the world begins.

Christ purposely, intentionally confounds, mixes up the two because of the similarity of the signs to precede them. What He says of the destruction of Jerusalem may, therefore, be applied also to the end of the world, as far as supported by other passages of Scripture.

Does not the divine Word say that before the end of the world also there shall be an abomination of desolation standing in the holy place? We can see that the papacy in the Christian Church is one of the signs of the approaching end.

We read in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, *¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

Is not the wickedness of the papacy clearly depicted here? And does not God tell us in His divine Word that unfaithfulness, godlessness, wickedness, and crime shall spread more and more upon this earth when the end is approaching?

We read in 2 Peter 3:3–4, ³ *knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,* ⁴ *and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”*

Should not the very existence of the papacy and the spreading of unfaithfulness and godlessness remind us of the approaching end of the world?

But the following words of our Lord refer to the end of the world. He says, ²³ *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*

There were false prophets also when Jerusalem was destroyed, men that said God would never deliver His holy city and temple into the hands of the heathen. He would save His sanctuary by a miracle.

There were also false Christs at that time, impostors, claiming to be the promised Messiah. But if we search the Scriptures, we find that the latter days, the days before the end, are the days of false prophets and false Christs.

The world is filled with false prophets who pervert the truth, as we read in 2 Timothy 4:3–4, ³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;* ⁴ *and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

False Christs are mentioned as one of the signs of the last time, as we read in 1 John 2:18–19, ¹⁸ *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*

Let us therefore be ever mindful of Christ's warning in our Gospel, ²⁵ *See, I have told you beforehand.* ²⁶ *"Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.*

In our country we have a wilderness of churches, and creeds, and sects, all of which say, *Lo, here is Christ, or there; each of them claims to possess the divine truth.*

The papists lead us into the desert, and say, *If you want to find Christ, if you want to make sure of getting to heaven, you must leave the world, enter a convent, and pass your days in praying and fasting.*

Others lead us into the secret chambers, and say, *If you want to find Christ and be sure of your soul's salvation, you must wrestle with God in prayer, and you must not rest, not cease praying until you feel joy in your own heart.*

Now in order not to be deceived, we must heed Christ's warning and not believe these impostors. For Christ is neither to be found in the desert nor in the secret chambers, but in His holy Word and sacraments.

Tribulation, also, shall precede the end. Some of the horrors of Jerusalem's siege shall be repeated. Christ says in Luke 21:26, ²⁶ *men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Still, the end will come very unexpectedly, and without any previous warning. Christ says in our text, ²⁷ *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

And in 2 Peter 3:10 we read, ¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

Now as the Christians fled into the mountains, when Jerusalem was to be destroyed, so must we, in these latter days, lift up our eyes to the hills from whence comes our help.³ We must flee to Jesus, who on Mount Calvary bled and died for our sins. We must not indulge in the world's sinful lusts, but look upon the evil world, its lusts and wickedness, as a rotting carcass, above which the eagles of divine judgement are soaring.

May the Lord grant us all, His grace that we observe the signs of the times, flee to the wounds of our beloved Saviour Jesus and find refuge there, and lead a godly and holy life, in order that we may be found in readiness, so that the Lord's day will not come upon us unaware, and thus be received into the kingdom of His glory. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 24:3

² See also Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:1

³ Psalm 121:1