

Title: Jesus left the Temple
Text: Matthew 24.1-14
Theme: Getting ready for the coming of Christ
Series: Matthew #108
Prop Stmtnt: Getting ready for the coming of Christ means getting ready for perseverance in the midst of difficulty.

Cathi and I just returned from a tour of several cities in Europe. We were at the mercy of our tour director. We saw and heard what she wanted us to see and hear. I do not know if what she told us was completely true or if her interpretation of events was accurate, though I think so. To this day it is difficult as a German or Austrian to say, "This is what we did to Jewish people 70 years ago." The same thing happens to you. Whenever you watch the news, you are only being exposed to what the news director wants and in the way the director wants you to see it. Every story is calculated. Every camera angle, news clip, question asked, facial feature and word is carefully chosen to do more than presents facts. It is all done to communicate an image, an impression, a sense, a feeling. People in the media are on a mission. They want to convince you of their version of life. Can you trust them to tell you the truth? Germany is a classic example of what can happen to a nation when enough people believe what the government wants them to believe. It is chilling, but Germany is not alone in trying to control the flow of information to her people in order to secure a desired response.

You do the same thing. When someone takes a picture of you, or better yet, whenever you take a picture of yourself, what do you do? Think about that. You tend to smile, don't you? You also try to find a really cool background. You tend to take 5 or 6 pictures and then you pick the one that you want, right? Why? Why is it so important to us who supposedly are so interested in honesty and authenticity and reality, to work so hard at making sure that our reality looks really good? What are we doing? We are seeking to convince others that our version of life looks really good. We want to present ourselves in the best possible light, even if that means that we do not reveal the hard stuff. It's kind of hard to talk about the hard stuff, isn't it? If you are from Germany, how do you explain to people from other countries how you elected, endorsed and supported your government seeking to annihilate an entire race? If you are from Austria, how do you explain the fact that you watched as your own people confiscated billions of dollars of money, valuables and property from the Jews who were arrested and shipped out to concentration camps? If you are from Switzerland, how do you tell visitors that your people refused to allow the Jews to come across the border and escape from Germany because the Swiss did not want to get involved? It seems easier for us to post the pictures and only talk about things that make us look good. But, taking the easy road is not the same as the honest road. That is one of the reasons why we need and why we love God's Word so much. God tells us the whole story. Everything that we need is here, even when everything is not pretty. And this text is difficult. It is difficult to figure out exactly what Christ means, but as I will point out, that is intentional. But, what is plain to us is the message of judgment. Christ is pronouncing judgment with a broken heart. Jesus is pronouncing judgment on the temple, the city, the nation and the world. Everything that Jesus says in chapters 24-25 about the judgment of Israel and of the world comes from an honest and a broken heart.

Read Text:

I. **Setting the stage** (1-3)

Our text begins with these haunting words, “*Jesus left the temple.*” Jesus is not only walking away, but the removal of his presence is a sign of a colossal judgment that is about to take place. Every time God removes himself it means that he is withdrawing his grace and mercy. He is pulling back his hand of protection that has restrained the forces of evil and chaos. Our understanding and interpretation of our world is inherently skewed because sin has so fundamentally warped our perspective. We really do not understand how absolutely righteous God is. God is devastatingly righteous. God is overwhelmingly glorious and terrifyingly awesome in holiness. Our sin that we wink at, excuse, joke about, condone, tolerate and even champion and brag about is infinitely offensive to God. We brag about our pollution. God is offended. We look at the chaos and destruction in our world and we wonder why a good God allows this go on? Are you kidding me? The only reason why our entire world is not going up in flames is because God has restrained the consequences of our evil, giving us time to repent. But, when we interpret this restraint as something that we deserve, then we misinterpret the natural consequences of sin in this world as being unjust on the part of God. Christ leaves the temple. Christ is withdrawing his presence and his glory because he is not wanted. He is hated. He is rejected. He is despised and he finally gives to unrepentant people what they ask for.

Let me make some connections for you. When Israel was being formed as a nation at Mt. Sinai after leaving Egypt, God gave them the law (10 commandments) and God instructed them to build the Tabernacle. God ruled his people from the Tabernacle. God’s plan was to use Israel as an example of his rule for the world. Inside of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies. That Tabernacle lasted for hundreds of years before it was replaced by the Temple that Solomon built. When the Temple was dedicated, the glory of God visibly came down and moved into the Holy of Holies. God was with his people. But, Israel was not faithful to God and God was not going to stay with a people who did not want him. Ultimately, what happened? God withdrew his presence and judgment came. The OT prophet Ezekiel wrote about the glory of God (Shekinah) leaving Temple. God withdrew and the Babylonians came in and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.

What did in response to Israel’s rebellion (withdrawing his presence and turning them over to the consequences of their sin) is what he is going to do to the world. This same thing happens on a personal level (Romans 1), when a person repeatedly rebels against God and tells God to leave me alone. Eventually, God will do it. It happens on a national level as it did to Israel. It happens to churches (Revelation 2-3). And it will happen to the world. So, here is the big idea of Matthew 24-25. Jesus is using Israel as an example for the world. What was about to happen to Israel is going to happen to the world. But, what Jesus says is really difficult to believe, isn’t it? It was hard for the disciples to believe it.

After the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, it was eventually rebuilt and then Herod rebuilt it again so that in the time of Christ, the Temple was considered to be one of the wonders of the world. It was the most magnificent and stunning building in the entire

Middle East. The Temple courts were massive. Thousands upon thousands of people could gather there. The top of the Temple was covered with a pure white marble and the façade of the temple had so many gold plates that the reflection of the sun was blinding to the people below. It was an architectural wonder. When travelers would come over the crest of the Mount of Olives and look at the city of Jerusalem sitting on Mt. Zion just over the Kidron valley, the most prominent and eye-grabbing feature of the city was the Temple. The disciples are amazed and rightfully so. They are with Jesus, not realizing the significance of this moment. They are really impressed with the building, but Jesus is not, is he? Jesus has left the Temple and then he says something that is quite honestly, not only unthinkable, but basically unbelievable. And Jesus does not say it casually. He is very intense. *“Truly I say to you”* means, pay particular attention to what I am about to say. *“There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* I think (personal opinion) that the disciples are stunned speechless. They have no idea what to do with that. Life without the Temple was inconceivable for a Jew and besides, this building was so massive, it would take a force of colossal proportions to take it down. So, they wait, stunned perhaps, bewildered, maybe discussing amongst themselves as they make their way out of the city and up the Mount of Olives. Jesus sits down and now they dare to ask him about it. *“Privately”* Matthew says, they ask, *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”*

If you are going to understand Matthew 24-25, you have to understand this. The disciples are asking two related questions. 1) When will these things be? When will the Temple be destroyed and 2) What will be the sign of your coming, (which they interpret as the close of the age). The disciples, it seems, are assuming that the destruction of the Temple and the coming back of Christ are somehow all related together. They are trying to get this sorted out. Jesus responds to their question. What he says in these two chapters is directly related to these questions that the disciples ask in verse 3.

Now, I really need to point something out. It is very easy for us, like the disciples, to be impressed with buildings and assume that big, ornate, expensive and extravagant buildings mean something is deep, important and holy. We are tempted to believe that the more beautiful and ornate a church building is that the more special and holy the building is, and therefore, the more blessed (and better) the people are who walk into and worship in a building like that. Somehow being in the building means that we are closer to God and the better the building the better we are. It is easy to believe, but it is a lie! It is a lie because that line of thinking is all built upon self-righteousness. Look at what we have done or are doing for God. Look at our buildings, our paintings, our statues, our icons. In Europe, Cathi and I went in many impressive and ornate church buildings. The artwork, pipe organs, pulpits, architecture, marble, altars, windows, steeples and towers were incredible. But, they are not holy. They were built and they exist to advance a view of the gospel that denies the sufficiency of the death of Christ. Everything about the religious system of these churches is designed to say that Jesus is not enough. You must do more. You must try harder. You must pay for your sin and you never know when you have done enough. So, keep lighting candles, keep giving money, keep trying, keep hoping, keep sacrificing, keep trying, keep praying to saints, to Mary and maybe, just maybe someday maybe even after years in purgatory, maybe you will finally be good enough. Do you

realize that you will never, on your own be good enough and you can never do enough to make yourself good enough? The good news is this. Your salvation is not ultimately based on you. It is based on Christ and He is good enough! He really is. His death paid for your sin in full. There is nothing left for you to pay. His grace has planned it all, tis mine but to believe and recognize his work of love and Christ, receive! But that good news is offensive to people who are hell-bent on saving themselves. The Jews did not want Jesus to save them. They were good enough, on their own. So, Jesus leaves the Temple. This symbolizes the withdrawing of God's hand of restraint that held back the forces of destruction. And it came. The destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem is grievous to read about and weighty to grasp. Three weeks ago I told you of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. What I did not tell you about was how the Temple was destroyed.

Titus was the Roman general in charge of crushing the Jewish revolt. His father, Vespasian had started this military campaign, but was now the emperor of the Roman Empire. Titus knew that nothing short of complete and final victory was acceptable. For several months his army laid siege while the city descended into chaos and cannibalism. Titus and his army finally attacked and the battle for the city was in full force. Everyone knew of the staggering amount of gold that was in the Temple, and Titus had ordered that the Temple be spared, but in the streets, the Jews fought with an intensity that was astounding. They were crazed in their defense of their city and one Roman soldier in angry retaliation set fire to the curtains and window frames of a building on the outside of the Temple. It soon spread to the Temple itself. Titus ordered that the fires be extinguished, but thousands of Jews who fought and died made fire fighting impossible. And as the heat of the fire grew, the gold began to melt and it ran in-between the blocks of the Temple itself. The soldiers began to break apart the blocks of the Temple ruins in order to retrieve the gold that was inside. There was so much gold that was recovered from the Temple that the price of gold soon dropped all across the East. In the aftermath and ruins, not one stone of the Temple was left on another. And to this day, there is no Temple. For over 1,300 years the Dome of the Rock, a mosque sacred to the Muslims, has stood on the old Temple courts and commands the eye of the traveler who comes over the crest of the Mount of Olives.

I jumped ahead because I want you to feel the weight of what Jesus says here in answer to the disciples. Jesus knows what he is talking about and means what he says. He is worth your trust. So, the disciples want to know: 1)When is this going to happen and 2) What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age. Jesus addresses the second question first. The disciples want to know what are the signs of your coming and Jesus says, here are what the signs are NOT! After describing some things that are going to happen he says at the end of v.6 "but the end is not yet." And then in verse 8, he summarizes what he has just said, when he says, "All these are but the beginning of the birth pains." This is really important for us to understand. Notice this! The disciples are concerned about the signs and Jesus is concerned about their faithfulness. So, what he is saying in verses 4-8 is that global chaos is normal.

II. **Global chaos is normal – Press On.** (4-8)

Look at verse 4. This is a warning. "See that no one leads you astray." Jesus warns them about what is going to happen. Somehow, most TV preachers and evangelists seem to miss this text. But the point is clear. Bad things are going to be part of your world. You are going to face difficult times and those difficulties will provide for you many opportunities to give up or get distracted. Be on your guard and do not allow the bad things that happen to distract you from following Christ. Here are some of the things that are going to happen. There will be:

A. Deceivers and Antichrists (5)

There will be people who claim to be Jesus and people who will claim to be the Messiah. That has certainly been the case ever since Jesus uttered these words and the results have been tragic. Our own history has seen the likes of Jim Jones, Charles Manson and David Koresh. These and others have promised deliverance, heaven, nirvana and other forms of Utopia if their disciples will follow them without question. The results have been tragic.

B. Violence and Wars (6-1 a)

You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. But do not panic. Do not fret. Do not lose your nerve. Jesus says that violence and wars in and of themselves does not mean that the end has come. In fact, Jesus says that these must take place. You begin to see the point that Jesus is making. This world is not a safe place. We live in danger. The longer we will live the more grief we know. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. "Can't we all just get along?" Sadly, the answer is no, we cannot.

C. Climate change and Natural disasters (7b)

Jesus then talks ecological chaos. Famines, earthquakes speak of natural disasters. These are part of the groaning that this earth is doing. Now, how do people typically respond to famines and earthquakes? Do they not say, "If your God is so good and so powerful, then why does he allow these catastrophes to take place?" Whoa, hold the phone! What happened back in Genesis 4 when Cain killed Abel? God said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood ..." Do you see what is going on? This earth was not created for blood. Death and blood shedding was not part of the original creation. The earth is at the mercy of the people who live here. Our sin has polluted this world. Our blood is spilled on this earth and this earth reacts to blood in the same way that your body reacts to food poisoning. This earth is sickened with the sin and violence of the human race. Paul says in Romans 8, that this world groans, waiting for her redemption just as we groan in this world and await our own day of being with Christ.

Jesus says (v.8) all of these are but the beginning of the birth pains. These things are just the beginning. Do not be surprised by this. In fact, we should be, of all people, the most calm in the midst of this. It does not mean that we do not grieve. We do. It means that we do not panic. Wednesday night in a meeting with our ABF teachers, we talked about the fact that we should live our lives in such a way that they should generate the question of

"Why are you like this" to those who observe them. The people in your world have many opportunities and many reasons to panic. When, in the midst of the chaos, you don't panic, you are creating a moment for the question. "Why are you like this?" We are not at the end yet. This is just the beginning. But there is more.

3. Personal persecution is expected - Press On. (9-12)

Notice the shift from global to personal. What happens historically to Christians? We get blamed for the problems in this world. Jesus was blamed and was executed. What do you think is going to happen to his followers? That is what Jesus is saying here. Do not be surprised by persecution. Expect persecution and press on in the midst of it. Notice the various types that we can expect to face.

A. Tribulation and death (physical) (9a)

Most of the story of genuine Christianity is the story of persecution and martyrdom. Our flag is a cross. Our crowns are made of thorns. Our leader was humiliated and executed. We commemorate his death by re-enacting it every time we take communion and in every baptism. The death of Christ marks our faith and marks us. We follow a leader who was hated and crucified. What do you expect?

B. Resentment, betrayal and hatred (emotional) (9b-10)

Jesus said, "You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake." And that has been and is the case. We can expect to be treated as he was treated. That is hard to hear, isn't it? We so desperately want to be liked. We want to be respected. We want the world to know that we are not the problem. But, most will not see that. Hatred and resentment will result in betrayal and more hate. The persecution that we can expect to face is not only physical but is emotional. There is an enormous price to pay for following Christ.

And yet, how do we respond to this rejection? How does Jesus respond? Jesus is saying all of this with a broken heart. He is grieved over his own rejection and he finished the course. So must we.

C. Lying and apostasy (theological) (11)

Here I think that Jesus is referring now to false teachers and leaders from within the church who create division and conflict and teach heresy that ends up destroying people in the process. When we hear of people going off in a wrong direction and taking people with them, we are hurt. When this happens we are so tempted to quit because it is as if all the wind has just been taken from our sails.

D. Lawlessness and discouragement (cultural) (12)

Finally Jesus says that we can expect the lawlessness of our age to result in many professing believers being attracted to this, being affected by it and as a result their love for God, the gospel and the church to grow cold.

Now, how's that for a pre-game speech? It is like a football coach telling his players before they take the field, Guys, we are completely outmatched and outclassed in every position. We can expect to be humiliated, pummeled, mauled and annihilated on every play. We have EMS units from all three counties standing by and the Emergency Rooms of every hospital in the area on notice. Most of you will break at least an arm, or a leg, perhaps your neck and back and some of you will never walk again. Earlier this month we had a blood drive so we could at least address that need. Most of you will not be in the locker room for our next game, but will be in rehab, so enjoy the national anthem at the beginning; it will be the last one you will hear for a very long time. Alright, let's go!

But, that is not the whole story, is it? In fact, Jesus says that something else is going to happen.

4. Press on, it is worth it! (13-14)

He admonishes us to press on. He calls us to be faithful and to persevere. He tells us this because it is worth it. And he tells us this because even through all of the chaos and persecution that the church experiences, the gospel is going to get out. The gospel is going to go to the entire world. The more the world tries to stop it, the more it goes. The more the world tries to drown it out, the louder it gets. No one can stop the gospel. The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Even in the midst of all this chaos and persecution, God is working out his plan to reach people from every tribe, language and nation. And then the end will come.

And beginning in verse 15, Jesus now begins to directly answer their question about what kind of things will happen before the coming of Christ and the end of the age. But, that is for next week.

Do not be surprised by suffering. Do not be calloused (one extreme) nor be stunned into shock (extreme).

God is Sovereign. He predicted this.

Trust Him

Be Faithful

Endure

Christ will keep His Word and Christ will keep you.