

Title: Times are changing  
Text: Matthew 24.15-28  
Theme: The destruction of Jerusalem and the world  
Series: Matthew # 109  
Prop Stmtnt: The world hates Jesus because He is Sovereign

One of the sights Cathi and I visited in Europe is called the Eagles Nest. This was the retreat center that Hitler used that was high atop a mountain in southern Germany. The day we went up there, it was snowing on top of the mountain. This is the tunnel (pic) that was carved into the mountain so Hitler could ride in a car all the way to the elevator (pic) that was also carved into the mountain (all brass inside) that would take him and his entourage to the top of the mountain. In one of the meeting rooms was a large fireplace (Italian marble) that Mussolini had given to Hitler for the retreat center. (pic) Cathi and I also visited Salzburg, Austria, which is the home of the Von Trapp family featured in the story, The Sound of Music. We were able to see some of the actual sights of the Von Trapp family as well as some of the sights that were used in the movie. But, as you might expect, there were several things in the movie that were not exactly true to real life. Hollywood likes to take liberties with facts in order to make the story a bit more dramatic. For example, toward the end of the movie, the Von Trapp family is shown hiding in a cemetery and then escaping from the Nazis to the Alps in order to cross into Switzerland. The only problem is that Salzburg is nowhere close to Switzerland. If the Von Trapp family climbed the Alps near Salzburg and headed toward Switzerland, they would run right into the Eagle's Nest, in southern Germany. That was not exactly where they wanted to go. It was a good story line, but bad geography. God does not need Hollywood to make his story more dramatic. The story that he gives us is the real deal, and it is dramatic enough and more fascinating than you can imagine.

But that is a problem. Our world doesn't seem to mind a baby Jesus in a manger who is lowly, meek and mild who came to help some people feel better. But our world hates the Jesus who rules from the throne. But, the animosity of our world to Jesus is deeper than that. Imagine meeting someone who looks right through you. This person, in an instant knows everything you've thought, every motive, every act, every plan, every email that you sent, every server that you've destroyed... Unless you were convinced that this person loved you and would not use this information for your harm, you would be afraid, intimidated, threatened and even resentful of him, wouldn't you? That is why this text is such a double-edged sword. To those who love Christ and are convinced of his love, this text is an amazing promise of hope, even in the midst of the worst adversity. To those who reject the authority of Christ, it is full of fear.

Read Text:

This text is apocalyptic. That is, it is dealing with prophecy. Jesus is telling his disciples and us about the future. My aim in preaching this text is the same aim of Jesus in speaking these words. I want to convince you to trust in Jesus without reservation. I want you to see and accept that Jesus knows the future and that Jesus is Sovereign. Everything that he predicts is true and is guaranteed to occur. Therefore, whatever Jesus says about

the future and about how you think and live right now is worthy of your faith-driven obedience. If you really believe Jesus then your sex life, work ethic, the way you respect your husband and love your wife, your language, your finances, your values, will all reflect it. So, while this text is about the future, it is also about right now.

When you read prophecy remember that God tells us things about the future for a purpose. For example, He gives warnings about what is going to happen for the purpose of calling people to repent. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh he preached that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown. God gave that warning so that the people would repent. Well, the people repented, so God delayed the judgment and Jonah was angry because God did not do what God said he was going to do. But Jonah failed to understand what God had already said about prophetic warnings. Another point to remember is that God gives us enough information about the future to know that He has it all figured out and that we have every reason to trust him completely. However, God does not give us every detail. If He did, we would act like a smarty-pants because we can predict everything perfectly. No one predicted the first coming of Christ perfectly. I doubt that anyone has all of the end time details perfectly figured out as well. I do not mind discussing the various views of the end times. In fact, I rather enjoy it. What I do not do is fight about it nor argue about the particulars. I am most concerned that your heart is ready for the coming of Christ and that you are prepared for his return. Being ready for his return means that you live on your tiptoes and not only ready for Christ but ready for a time of persecution. Let's review:

Go back to verse 3. Jesus told the disciples that the Temple is going to be destroyed. That was unbelievable. So, they wait until they are on the Mount of Olives and at a safe distance from the Temple when they privately ask Jesus these questions: 1) When will these things be? And 2) What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? Jesus did not answer their question immediately. In fact he tells them what the signs are not. He tells them what they can expect as being a sad, but regular part of life such as: people who try to lead you astray, wars and rumors of wars. But do not panic. The end is not yet. Expect these things. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, famines, earthquakes are all just the beginning of birth pains. These do not mean that the end is here, yet. You will face persecution and martyrdom. You will be treated as refugees. Professing believers will fall away and betray one another, while false prophets will arise, but again, do not panic. This is not end, yet. In fact, during this time, the gospel will be going forth throughout the world. Then (v.15) he answers their questions starting with, when is the Temple going to be destroyed. Basically Jesus says when you see the abomination of desolation, you'd better get out of Dodge. Panic!

#### I. **What is the Abomination of Desolation?** (15)

Jesus said that this was spoken of by Daniel. Fact is, Daniel referred to this three different times: 9.27, 11.31, and 12.11. The reference in Daniel 9.27 and 12.11 seems to me to refer to an event that happens in the middle of the tribulation period. The reference in Daniel 11.31 appears to refer to an event that happened in Jerusalem when Israel was ruled by a Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes (IV) around 167 B.C. Some think that

all three references refer to the same event in 167 B.C. I am not convinced of that, but I do believe that the reference in 11.31 does. So, let's start with that. In Daniel 10 and 11, Daniel receives a vision about what is going to happen to the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians and more. The predictions are amazing in detail and are fulfilled. Here is the big picture. Babylon, which conquered Judah, was itself conquered by the Medes and the Persians. This kingdom was conquered by the Greeks who were led by Alexander the Great. Alexander died before his heir could take control, so his kingdom was divided up amongst four of his generals (2 in the north and 2 in the south). The two in the south (Ptolemy dynasty) centered in Egypt and the other (Seleucid dynasty) was centered in Syria. Daniel's prophecies focused on these two because in between them was Israel. He calls the Ptolemy dynasty, the king and kingdom of the south because it is south of Israel, and the Seleucid dynasty the king and kingdom of the north because they always come from the north. And every time these kingdoms fought against the other, Israel was caught in the middle. Daniel prophesied that one of the kings from the north (Seleucid) would profane the temple, would stop the regular burnt offering and would set up the abomination of desolation (the abomination that makes desolate). In 167 B.C. Antiochus, IV Epiphanes, invaded Jerusalem in a fit, slaughtered thousands of people including many priests and sacrificed a pig on the altar. This obviously desecrated the temple and rendered it unclean until it could be properly cleansed. That act was so offensive, that it helped ignite a revolt known as the Maccabean revolt that set the stage for the invasion of the Romans, which was all taking place when Christ was born. Many of the Jews wanted to take their land back, like they did with the Maccabees and were successful in doing that, at least for about 4 years in A.D.66.

Jesus tells his disciples, "*when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place*" which leads me to believe that what Daniel was talking about that happened in 167 B.C. was a preview of another time of great sacrilege to the Jewish people. Obviously, what happened in 167 B.C. had already taken place and now Jesus is saying that something like this is going to happen again. This would be consistent with the nature of biblical prophecy. Over and over God, through his prophets, predicts immediate events or initial events that are previews of greater events. For example, the burning of the Temple and the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. was a preview of the overthrow of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 A.D. God repeatedly warned Judah about the invasion of the Babylonians, but this was not the biggest problem or the ultimate issue. For example, Jeremiah prophesies that Judah will be in Babylon for 70 years and will then be allowed to return home. However, there were three different times that people were taken captive: 606 B.C., 596/595 B.C. and the big one in 586 B.C. I think that this event is a perfect example of how we should understand the respond to prophecy. Daniel is considering Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 year of captivity. He does not know when the clock started ticking. So, he prays about it. He is confessing to God his sin and the sin of his nation because (according to v.19) he does not want God to delay. He is praying that God will start the clock from the first deportation. Again, Daniel knows the prophecy, but he does not respond to the prophecy with complacency. He responds with faith, humility, awe, repentance, hope and prayer! However, God does not answer his prayer like Daniel imagines. In essence God tells Daniel that the 70 years of captivity point to something

even greater. In fact, it is 70 times 7. Oh, yeah, Judah gets to return to the land in 70 years, but God's plan is bigger than that. And this is when God tells Daniel one of the most incredible prophecies in the Bible that refers to the first coming of Christ as well as predicting the abomination of desolation. So, again, what do we learn from this?

- God tells us some things about the future (prophecies).
  - o He does not tell us everything.
- These prophecies have immediate and greater fulfillments.
  - o The immediate fulfillments point to and preview the greater ones.
- The immediate fulfillments are proofs to believe in the greater fulfillments.

I believe that is exactly what is going on here. Jesus is telling his disciples about the impending destruction of the Temple, and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But this is a preview of an even greater destruction that is yet to come. Not everyone believes the same way about this. Some believe this prediction of Christ was only in reference to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. I believe it goes beyond that. Look at this phrase that Matthew puts in "(let the reader understand)." Matthew is saying that there is a lot that is going on here. This is the same kind of language that is used several times in Daniel 9 before he is given his amazing prophecy. I take it to mean, "Daniel, you really need to pay attention to this. You are about to hear some amazing things that deal with things that are so much bigger than what you are thinking right now and you need God's help in grasping this." I think the same thing is going on here. The disciples asked, "*When will these things be?*" They were referring to the destruction of the Temple. Jesus is now about to answer them, but the answer itself is a prophecy of something that is much bigger than what they are thinking. Matthew does not want us to miss this. So he says, "*let the reader understand.*" We need God's help to understand what is going on, and its significance. This is really big stuff. That is why I believe that what Jesus is saying here is not only about Jerusalem and was fulfilled in A.D. 70 but that there is more to come and it will involve more than Jerusalem; it will involve the entire world.

So, what is the abomination of desolation? It is an event that takes place in the Temple of Jerusalem calculated to be as offensive and humiliating to the Jews as possible. It is a symbol of her complete and utter defeat as well as a statement of defiance to her God. So, I take what Jesus says her to be a warning of the highest order. When you see what happened before (Antiochus Epiphanes, 167 B.C.) happening again, run for your life! When will the very stones of the temple be torn asunder? When you see the enemies of the Jews invading the Temple again and desecrating it. Titus did just that in A.D.70.

## II. **This is a time of great distress.** (16-20)

Jesus now warns them of the dire nature of this event and says that your discomfort in running away immediately when you see this happening (without all the necessary provisions) is much less than the trouble you will face if you delay. He explains: If you are in the country, run for the mountains and not to the city. If you are on a rooftop (relaxing, entertaining), run and find another way of escape. If you are in your field (working), don't run back into the city to get your coat. No matter what you are doing,

run and do not look back. Fleeing for your life with an infant, or being pregnant makes the flight all the more difficult and makes getting captured, all the more horrible. Fleeing in the winter, particularly if you are not prepared means that you will be exposed to the harsh conditions and if you have to flee on the Sabbath means that other cities will not be open, stores will not be open, little places of refuge along the way will not be open. You will be even more vulnerable.

In A.D.66, the Jews successfully revolted against Rome for a time. Vespasian was sent to crush the rebellion but at the last minute went back to Rome because of the crisis there. This gave the citizens of Jerusalem a false assurance. They were God's people. They had the Temple. Nothing was going to happen to them. Obviously, Jesus is telling his disciples something radically different. The scene is eerily reminiscent of Noah. The people just assumed that life would keep on going as it always had. But for the Jews, their own history was a testimony against them. Life does not keep going along the same way. You cannot live in rebellion to God and assume that nothing is going to happen. In A.D.70, the Roman army approached Jerusalem again. This time, there was no reprieve. This time the city was overflowing with out-of-towners who were there for the Passover. The army surrounded the city and would not let anyone in or anyone out. The siege dragged on for months. Those who saw what was happening and listened to the words of Christ, as many of the Christians did, were able to escape with their lives. Those who paid no attention to Christ, faced a horrifying ordeal. But, Jesus says that there is more.

### III. There is coming a time of global distress. (21-22)

Some believe that this is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. I think that the language here is speaking of something that is greater than that. "For then" is most naturally interpreted as referring to the time that Jesus just spoke about, however the rest of what he says makes it pretty clear that he is now thinking of something that is much greater than just Jerusalem. In fact, v.22 says that if those days had not been cut short no human being would be saved (rescued). There are basically three ways you can take this: 1) Jesus is talking about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in A.D.70 and is emphasizing how serious it is. 2) Jesus is talking about a time of general tribulation that is inaugurated by the destruction of the Temple and continues on until the return of Christ. 3) Jesus sees the destruction of Jerusalem as a preview of the great tribulation that will come upon the earth and seamlessly moves from the one event to the other since the destruction of Jerusalem is a preview of what is going to happen to the entire world. I take the third view because I think it makes the most sense with this text and others.

For example, I believe that what Antiochus IV, Epiphanes does in 167 B.C. is a preview of not only what Titus will do, but he and Titus are a preview what the Antichrist will do. That is why I believe that Jesus points back to Antiochus and says that what is about to happen to Jerusalem (Titus) is not only like that event in 167 B.C. but is itself a preview of an even greater event. This is consistent with Daniel 12.1 which says that "*there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.*" That sounds very similar to these words of Jesus in v.21.

This much is clear. The world is not going to stay the same. The end result is glory for believers, but the immediate path is suffering. The language of v.22 is strong. One of the comforts of v.22 is that Jesus speaks of his oversight of the elect. The elect is a name for those who are followers of Christ. They are elected by God (Romans 8, Ephesians 1). Christ says that the judgment and tribulation of these days will be cut short for their sake. If you believe that Jesus is speaking about the great tribulation that comes on the earth, this verse seems at face value to have the elect in the middle of it, doesn't it? Now, it is possible that there is a rapture of the believers before the tribulation and that this is a reference to the people who become believers during the tribulation. But, again, we can see how the Bible is a bit vague on some of the details. If you believe in the rapture of the church before the tribulation, that is fine. However, believing it does not make it true. Keep in mind that a very good argument can be made for other positions. I say that, for the same reason why Jesus gave this warning. I do not want you to be surprised. I do not want you to be smug. Now, Jesus begins to spell out some of the consequences of this.

This is difficult to really absorb. Here we are thinking about the Lions, grocery shopping, Senior Pictures, b-day's, shower presents, getting the nursery decorated, applying to college, drivers ed, golf, bills, fantasy football getting the car fixed, etc. We cannot imagine things changing and are tempted to deny it when we are hit in the face with it. It is coming!

#### IV. **There is coming a time of great deception.** (23-26)

What is the consistent thread of these deceivers? They pretend to have secret information no one else knows about. Jesus is giving a warning. Do not believe it! This actually happened in Jerusalem. During the siege, a false prophet began to tell the people that the Messiah was going to come and appear in the Temple at the last minute and rescue all the people who gathered there. And because desperate people will do desperate things during desperate times, thousands (6) of people believed this man and they gathered in the Temple area waiting for their deliverance. Jesus said to run for your life, but when you do not believe the real Jesus, you will fall for just about anything and tragically these people did. When the Temple caught fire, they were blocked in and all burned to death. People who refuse to believe the plain truth about God are so vulnerable to believe in the "hidden secrets" about Him.

Now, again, I believe that what Jesus warned about would happen to Jerusalem is something that will happen on a global scale. Paul writes about this in 2 Thessalonians 2 in an effort to reassure the believers in that church that they had not missed the coming of Christ. Paul says that Christ will not return and gather us to himself until the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed (whom he calls the son of destruction). This man "exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God (another abomination of desolation?), proclaiming himself to be God." Paul writes this because (3a) he does not want them to be deceived in anyway. Plenty of other people will be deceived (basically the entire world), but he does not want them to be deceived. I believe that Paul is echoing the words of Christ. His point is clear. The coming of Christ is not a secret event that takes place in the shadows. Do not

be deceived by anything or anyone who claims to be Jesus, claims to know secrets about the future, claims, even through signs and wonders to be supernatural. Jesus says that some of the signs and wonders that are performed by these imposters are so good that if it were possible (meaning that it is not possible) they would deceive the elect (v.24). Again, that sounds a lot like Revelation 13 that speaks of the rise of the Beast (Antichrist) and the rise of a second beast (False Prophet). This False Prophet is able to perform such signs and wonders that he is able to convince most of the world to follow the beast and punishes those who do not. (v.25) Jesus tells us this beforehand. Do not be fooled. Be ready. This will happen. Be on your guard. These are the signs of his coming and the end of the age. Speaking of which, when Christ returns, it will not be a secret.

V. **The Coming of Christ will not be a secret!** (27-28)

Lightning is impossible to miss. It lights up the entire sky. Again, everyone knows where the corpse is. When you see vultures circling in the sky, you know something on the ground is dead. You can't miss it. In the same way, the coming of Christ will be impossible to miss. When Christ returns, the false prophet, the Antichrist and everyone like him will be exposed as the imposters for who they are.

Let's say that your parents die and leave you an inheritance of \$10,000.00. Ten thousand is not much, but it is better than nothing. And let's say that you are close to retirement and you have not saved anything for your retirement. You need this \$10,000.00 to make you a great deal of money. You have a cousin. He is very successful. In fact, he works for a brokerage company and has for years been encouraging you to save your money and invest it. He has helped hundreds of clients do very well. He is honest. He is savvy and he is well connected. Your cousin calls you up and he knows your situation. He tells you that he knows a small company that is going to do great things. He knows the owners. He knows the managers. He knows the product. He knows the supply chain. He knows the distributors. He has studied the business plan. He knows the market. He knows without a doubt that if you invested your \$10,000 into this company that you can expect to get back \$500,000.00. And then he says that if for some reason it does not work, he will reimburse you \$15,000.00. Everything you know about your cousin leads you to conclude that this is a great and needful investment. Why wouldn't you do this? But, on the day before you send him the check, you get an email from someone that you have never heard of in Belarus who claims to have discovered oil on their property and if you will send them \$10,000 to help them get it out, that they promise you that you can make a lot of money from this deal. If you told anyone about your options, they should hit you in the head with a 2x4 for even thinking that there was a choice to be made. Do you know why Jesus tells us the future? He tells us so that we will invest our lives and souls with him. If you do, the payoff is eternal. If you don't there is "maybe". You will lose everything. And yet, some of you wait, don't you? You hold back. Why? Do you honestly think that you can hold out until the last minute and when you see things unraveling that you can jump on board then? You are a fool to believe that. If you refuse to entrust your life to Christ now, there is nothing to think that you will then. If you refuse to entrust your life to Christ it is because you are already being deceived. Perhaps today, you know it. Tomorrow you may not.