

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

*You Must be Born Again!*

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## *The Gospel of Matthew*

### *The Great Tribulation – Part 2*

*April 19, 2020*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 24:15-31

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 24

*We must always be watching and be ready for Christ's return. We will know Him when He comes. We are not to be fearful or alarmed by the calamities that characterize this present world, nor try to read any of them as signs of Christ's return. We will know when He comes.*

We left off with that theme before the Easter season and now we return to it here in the Olivet Discourse. You will remember that chapters 25-25 are difficult, primarily because Jesus speaks not only of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Roman

armies, but also applies His words and some prophecies given in the Old Testament to His second and final coming at the end of the age.

In spite of the opposition of this evil world – (vss 3-14)

- False Christs
- Wars
- Famines
- Earthquakes
- Persecution of Christians
- Apostasy from the faith by many
- False prophets
- Lawlessness

...the gospel will be preached throughout the whole world, Christ's church will be built, and His elect will be preserved until He comes.

Let's pick up again now at verses 15-20:

Matthew 24:15-20 ESV "So when you

see **the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, (18) and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. (19) And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! (20) Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

Let's go way back to some 600 years before Christ and read the Scripture that Jesus is referring to here:

Daniel 9:24-27 ESV “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. (25) Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. (26) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall

be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. (27) And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. **And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”**

It is this one who makes desolate, who is an abomination of some kind, that Jesus is speaking of. A desecration of the temple. And it would appear that there is at least a 3-fold fulfillment of Daniel's words:

- When one successor of Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, sacrifice a pig on the altar,
- When the Romans came in 70AD and destroyed Jerusalem
- And a yet future desecrator who is actually the ultimate fulfillment of this abomination of desolation, the man of lawlessness, or the antichrist.

It seems that Christ's words in vs 15-20 apply in a pretty straightforward manner to the Jews at the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

But then is it not probable that Jesus' application of Daniel's prophecy makes a turn at verse 21 –

Matthew 24:21-28 ESV For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (22) And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

(23) Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (25) See, I have told you beforehand.

(26) So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. (27) For as the lightning

comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

(28) Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

We know more about the Antichrist, or man of lawlessness, from the Apostle Paul:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 ESV Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

(3) Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) **who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.**

(5) Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? (6) And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.

(7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (9) The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, (10) and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

(11) Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, (12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Notice particularly verse 4 and you will see clearly that this relates directly to

what Daniel and Jesus call the *abomination of desolation*.

**(4) who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.**

Many evangelical Christians over the decades have cited this verse and others to insist that the literal Jewish temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt, sacrifices re-instituted, and so on. After all, their argument goes, does Paul not say that the man of lawlessness will take his seat in the temple of God?

But in the church age, in these last days in which we live, in the New Covenant era, *what is the temple of God?* A Jewish building in Jerusalem? Of course not:

Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in

whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Therefore if we are watching some temple in Jerusalem, we are looking at the wrong place. The deceiver's man of lawlessness is a *deceiver*...so where obviously can he be expected to come? The church! The temple of God.

(9) The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, (10) and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

And this is why:

1. Luther and other reformers said that the Pope of Rome is the antichrist. And certainly he IS antichrist in the sense of being a counterfeit in a counterfeit church, claiming to represent Christ.

2. Jesus gives us repeated, repeated, repeated warnings about false prophets and false christs.

Matthew 24:23-25 ESV Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (25) See, I have told you beforehand.

Did you notice verse 22?

Matthew 24:21-22 ESV For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (22) And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

We often think of the great tribulation as being something God pours out on the world, and certainly His plagues and judgments are going to come as we see in Revelation. BUT here, what was the great tribulation in 70 AD? It was the Roman invasion and massacre.

So let me suggest that this great tribulation here that Jesus is speaking of is a great persecution of Christ's people by the man of lawlessness, but for the sake of the elect, Christ cuts it short and returns. (That still leaves some question regarding the meaning of Jesus' statement that if this tribulation were not cut short, "no human being would be saved.")

Verses 23-28 once again warn us about false Christs and not being deceived by them, something that apparently will be turned up in intensity as the return of Christ approaches – due to the energies of Satan.

Notice this very important point Paul warns us of back in the 2 Thessalonians passage:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 ESV The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, (10) and with all wicked **deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (11) Therefore God sends them a strong delusion**, so that they

may believe what is false, (12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This should be very very sobering. People who reject Christ and continue in their refusal to believe in Him, eventually reach a point when God is done with them. And more than that, when He actually actively prevents them from seeing and believing in Christ. This delusion which the Lord Himself sends upon them ensures that they will believe Satan's lies and be condemned.

This kind of judgment is happening now. You read about it back in the Old Testament even – remember the Lord's command to Isaiah to keep on preaching to a people who would not be saved, and Jesus' use of parables to keep His truth from those who would not have it.

Notice again what Paul told the Thessalonians:

(7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

Satan is already deceiving, and his favorite way of doing so is through sending many antichrists, many false christ, many false prophets, out into the world. God's blinding judgment of a "strong delusion" is upon many people even now. They would not believe, so they cannot believe.

And this, I hope, is very sobering to everyone listening to this. There IS a point of no return.

In contrast, as we are seeing in our study of 1 John (which you can follow in video format on our facebook page, our youtube channel, or our sermonaudio.com/crc site), something is true of EVERY real Christian, and here it is:

1 Thessalonians 4:9 ESV Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

1 John 2:20 ESV But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

1 John 2:27 ESV But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth and *every true Christian has the ability to discern Satan's deceptions*. He cannot take us down. People who do believe false teachers and deceptions...well, what is the obvious conclusion?

Finally, let's look at these two verses again:

Matthew 24:27-28 ESV For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (28) Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

These words of Jesus are meant to tell us – *don't worry. You will recognize me when I come. No one will need to tell you anymore than someone needs to tell you, "hey, did you see that lightning*

*that just lit up the whole sky in a brilliant blinding light like you've never seen before?"* That is how obvious it will be and it won't matter where you are on the planet at the time.

Now, the next picture of this is a bit more curious. Buzzards and dead bodies? What in the world?

Well, I have a friend who puts dead fish carcasses out on a garbage pile he has and in pretty short order, even though not a single one was anywhere to be seen, here come the turkey vultures to scarf it all up. He did some research and found out that these birds can detect an incredibly small part per million odor from a very long distance away. *No one needs to tell them. They don't need to pass the word. They know. They recognize it because they are equipped to do so.*

And so it is with you if you belong to Christ. His Spirit in you will lead you to Him when He comes. Only it won't be a corpse we find! It will be our resurrection and life and the new heavens and earth!