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## *The Gospel of Matthew*

### *No One Knows – So be Ready*

*May 10, 2020*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 24:29-51

**Scripture Reading:** Joel 2

I want to make a few more comments on this last portion of Matthew 24 before we move on into the second part of the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 25. Once more then, I am going to read starting at verse 29, to the end of the chapter so that we have it fresh in our minds. Follow along as I read (I have highlighted the portions I want to examine):

Matthew 24:29-51 ESV “Immediately after the tribulation of those days **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.** (30) Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and

then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

(31) And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(32) “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. (33) So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

(34) **Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.** (35) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

(36) **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.**

(37) For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of

Man. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, (39) and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (40) Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. (41) Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. (42) Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

(43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. (44) Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

(45) “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (47) Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (48) **But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ (49) and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, (50) the master of**

that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know (51) and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### The Sun will be Darkened...

Remember then that Jesus, in answering the disciples question about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and Christ’s second coming, gives an answer that has these two events interwoven in it. And it is not always easy to discern which event He is speaking about. So it is here in verse 29:

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

What “tribulation of those days” is Jesus speaking about? 70 AD or the church age? Remember also that the era in which we live, the New Testament era from Jesus’ ascension until His second coming, is called the last age or the last hour. And we conclude that we are living not only in the church age, but in the great tribulation. Now. Its intensity, the powers of evil, will increase – but Jesus has already told the

disciples that this era is one of persecution and great difficulty for His people.

[NOTE: for more discussion of why we conclude that the church age is the great tribulation, see the sermon series on Revelation which is posted on our Sermon Audio site at [sermonaudio.com/crc](http://sermonaudio.com/crc)]

But what I wanted us to consider now is this matter of the signs in the heavens Jesus says are going to accompany His return:

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

This is going to be the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophet Joel announced:

Joel 2:28-32 ESV “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (30) “And I will

show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (32) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Now, this passage probably sounds familiar to you, not only because Jesus is quoting it in the Olivet Discourse, but also because it is a central passage in the book of Acts on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:16-20 ESV But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: (17) ““And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (19) And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; (20) the sun shall be

turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

Peter's words are a great commentary on Joel's prophecy. While some of it applied to the Lord's past judgment upon Israel, it is a prophecy that is actually describing the entire church age, up to the return of Christ.

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...”

Peter says this is what occurred on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to indwell Christ's people, Jew and Gentile. It inaugurated the church age, the last days. But then Peter (and Joel) jump to the end of the last days:

Acts 2 (19) And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; (20) the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

This kind of leap is characteristic of biblical prophecy. The pouring out of the Spirit 2000 years ago, and then a jump to the end of the age with these signs in the heavens at Christ's return.

Joel, in other words, was speaking of these New Covenant (Testament) days in which we live. The Spirit of Christ is in us – one and all. Every real Christian is a temple of the Lord. And this present world hates Christ's people.

John 15:18-20 ESV “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

The great tribulation you see.

But all of it is going to culminate in the return of Christ. He is coming to judge the world, and He is coming for US. For His people. For His elect. When He does, these signs in the heavens are going to occur:

Matthew 24:29-31 ESV “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the

heavens will be shaken. (30) Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Now, I am sure that many supposed Bible scholars strive to interpret these signs figuratively. Sometimes the Bible certainly does use figures of speech. We know that. But Jesus here is speaking literally. Let me show you why I conclude this:

Genesis 1:14 ESV And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,

There have been other times in history when the sun, moon, or stars functioned as visible, real signs – think of the star of Bethlehem for instance. Or the sun turning dark at the crucifixion. I don’t hold to the dogmas of false astrology or the Zodiac or horoscopes, but nevertheless you might say there is a true “astrology.” Things that are displayed in the heavens are used by

God not only as markers of the seasons (think about where our calendar comes from) but as *signs*. This does not mean that we are supposed to interpret every comet that goes by as a sign from God. *When He gives the sign, He always interprets the sign for us.*

And so it is here. Jesus tells us the heavenly sign and then tells us it is the sign that He is returning.

(29) “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man....

Now, I want us to think about this. It doesn’t seem real to us, does it? Be honest with yourself. This sounds like science fiction, like some fantasy. Why? Because we have never experienced it. All we have known is our lives in this present world, and even though there have been events like volcanos or the smoke of the Tillamook burn (forest fire) that blotted out the light of the sun for a time, or total eclipses, we have never experienced a real total “lights out” event.

Let me encourage you to do some serious thinking about how UN-natural, or SUPER-natural your life in this world really is. For example, we have just had a full moon. If you look at the night sky on a clear night, and look for instance at the moon, and really think about that globe hanging there in the sky, you necessarily will start to wonder.

There is the moon. It is real – we have traveled there and men have stood on it. It is up there and it shines (reflects) brightly. It is perfectly orderly so that we can create our calendars from it. And what I am trying to say, perhaps not very clearly, is that as you consider even just the moon, you realize that *we here on this earth and this earth itself, are not everything*. Things exist, real things, that are beyond us, that are greater than us, that are beyond what we experience as nature and are therefore *super-nature*. The boundaries of our lives and experience here do not encompass all that is. We only know in part – we don't know all knowledge. And I suppose what I am trying to say is that the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars – should serve as reminders to us of this.

So that when the Lord tells us that when He comes again, the heavenly lights are going to go out, His Word is not science

fiction. It is real. The events are going to be real. Utter darkness will come upon this world just as it came upon Egypt as judgment. The wicked will be cast into what He calls “the outer darkness.” They did not want His light and life, so they shall not have it. But then for His elect, for His people, His Light will explode in brilliance.

### This Generation will not Pass Away

Now, what did Jesus mean by this?

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| (34) Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. |
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No doubt there have been supposed theologians and bible scholars who claim that verses like this demonstrate that the disciples were duped, that Jesus' promise did not come true, that His purposes were just a dream and it all ended with His death on the cross. After all, they would point out, He said that the disciples' generation would not end before all He has been speaking of took place. It didn't, as they claim. So Christianity is an interesting field of study, but don't be so naïve as to think Jesus' promises were literally real! He was just a man – a very good man – but in the end a failure.

Such people are fools. They do not know the Lord and He does not know them.

The Bible views *the parts as the whole*. In regard to God's redemptive plan for example – let's say, the New Testament era – when that era was inaugurated at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit, all was accomplished. Look, for instance at Peter's words again from Acts 2 –

Acts 2:16-21 ESV But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: (17) “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (19) And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; (20) the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. (21) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Understand? We have no record that on that day of Pentecost when the Spirit came upon all Christ's people, there were also these signs in the heavens. *And yet Peter speaks as if they had all occurred.* Why? Because actually, they were as good as accomplished. The Last Days had begun and the whole of all the events hang together. Peter didn't stop at verse 18. He went on to verse 19-20 which describe the signs in the heavens.

And this is why Jesus could say to the disciples:

*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*

God's timetable is set. The clock is running. The disciples would see it begun as they entered the New Testament era and one Day a generation of Christ's people will see the finality of it when the Sun and moon go dark and the stars will fall...and more.

And therefore, we must be watching, and we must be ready. We are not to be deceived by the many false christs who have come and who will come. We aren't to be deluded by some supposed “bible teacher” who claims to have some secret insight only discovered by him. When Christ comes, we will see

Him and know Him. He has purposely left the date of His return *unknown*.

May that not be the end of anyone listening today.

(36) “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

The right way for us to watch for Him is not to try and predict the day and hour, but to be diligent about obeying Him and living for Him every moment, with the realization that He is near, He is right at the door, and that today could be the day that great trumpet sounds:

(45) “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (47) Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (48) But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ (49) and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, (50) the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know (51) and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.