

The Beginning of Sorrows (Part 1)

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Date: 18 January 2017

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] In a sense, we're still kind of introducing this very, as I've already prayed and have said, this very key passage in the Gospels, in the Bible, key because of its substance.

Of course, all of the Bible is important according to its substance. It's kind of difficult to say that one part of it would be more significant than another.

You know, God's Word always speaks, and it speaks to us when we need it, and it informs us and helps us understand God's plan.

And I guess that's what makes, I think, this passage very key. It points us to some part of, a big part of what God has planned in eternity past that He will do.

And so this passage is, you know, Matthew 24, 25 would be considered apocalyptic.

[1:22] I mentioned that word last Sunday morning, apocalyptic, just simply means unveiling. And so it is always that, those parts of the Bible that are pointing to kind of the consummation of things, the unveiling, the revealing of future things.

And so that's what we have here, Matthew 24 and 25. And we typically refer to this as the Olivet Discourse. I mentioned that last week as well.

And just to kind of review, the reason, of course, that it is called that, called the Olivet Discourse, is because of where it took place, where this discourse took place, this discourse of Jesus.

Jesus is the speaker here, of course, and the disciples are the learners. And so where did it take place? Well, verse 3 tells us, now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, so we don't have to guess about it, although we may be a little bit unclear geographically exactly where that might be.

I don't think we should be now. We talked about this last week, even provided a little map for you. Don't have the map reproduced on your notes tonight, but you might be able to remember and visualize the Mount of Olives.

[2:46] Mark, by the way, and I did kind of put this in your notes, I think, in parentheses. Mark 13 is a parallel passage in the gospel, parallel passage to this same discourse, though it's much, much shorter.

But in Mark 13, verse 3, he tells us that this place was opposite the temple. All right, so that gives us a clue as to the geography or where this took place in relation to the temple and therefore to the city of Jerusalem.

And so this took place near the end of Jesus' Passion Week, that very last week of his life. And Jesus, remember, had been teaching nearly every day through the week, the first part of the week, teaching in the temple.

We talked about that last week. And now he has departed, departed the temple for the last time.

And the wording, the particular words that are used there in verse 1 of Matthew 24, clue us into that, that he's not coming back.

He's finished with that, and he's departing not to return. That is, until he returns in glory. Of course, it'll be a different temple then.

[4:16] But he's not returning to the temple that existed there. And you know that in just a few decades after this time, that temple will be completely destroyed.

So he's not going to be returning to that temple. And so he's departed from the temple. He led his disciples out of the temple and then on out of the city through the eastern gate, which would have been very close to the gate of the temple, the doors of the temple, down the temple mount, because it was elevated quite high.

There, down from the temple mount, across the Kidron Valley, be a small little brook that ran through there. They'd cross over the Kidron, Brook Kidron, and then up the sides of Mount Olivet, the Mount of Olives.

And the account doesn't tell us exactly where they stopped, but somewhere along there they stopped. And then verse 3 goes on to tell us that the disciples came to him privately. Well, you might think, if you're just reading Matthew's account, well, privately, they were alone with Jesus anyway. How could you be more private than that? Well, Mark kind of clues us in a little bit here that it was actually Peter, James, John, and Andrew who came to Jesus.

[5:41] So, kind of the representatives of, you know, kind of considered the upper echelon of the disciples, the apostles. They came to him privately and asked this question, these questions of him. And so, what did they ask him? Tell us, when will these things be? All right? And you really have to go back in the passage to remind yourself about what these things are that they were referring to. Jesus made a comment about the temple being destroyed, not one stone being left upon another. And even before that, he'd made other statements about things that would be coming in the future. And so, that's very much on the disciples' minds, you know. And so, they ask the question, when will these things be? And if you remember, last week, I mentioned that that question, the way that question is framed, it tells us that their thinking was, basically, when in the next few hours and days will these things be?

The things that Jesus had been talking about. So, they're expecting an immediate fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. They're convinced that Jesus is the Messiah.

[7:01] They're convinced of that. And so, connect that with their eschatology, their understanding of the way things are going to unfold and how quickly they will unfold.

And of course, they're wanting to know when in the next few hours is it going to happen, or days, and perhaps months. You know, but still, immediate. They expected it to be fulfilled in their lifetime. And so, they ask Jesus, tell us when will these things be? And the second, kind of second part of the question, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

All right, so, good questions, right? In fact, those are the same questions many are asking today. They're still today. We're asking those same questions. So, we have perhaps those who are asking the question, you know, have different ideas about, about, you know, how things will unfold in the end times.

[8:07] Very few of us would be thinking like the apostles were thinking in their day, though, in a sense, many today are thinking very similarly to the way the apostles were thinking.

The apostles were thinking, it's going to happen in our lifetime. It's going to happen any moment. And you'd be hard-pressed to find too many Christians that don't feel that way now, that these things are going to be happening just, you know, within our lifetime. And that's not just wishful thinking on our part. I mean, we do hope, you know, that Jesus comes before we die, you know, partly because we don't really want to die. So, we'd kind of prefer him to come first and just take us out of here. So, part of it is hopeful in that sense, but part of it is that we just have some sense of, you know, the times in which we live, and we have just enough, perhaps most Christians have just enough Bible knowledge to be able to connect some things the Bible has said about the end times and connect that with some of the things that are happening.

And so, we just naturally come, you know, come to those conclusions that it's just going to be any moment. So, we're still asking the same questions the disciples asked Jesus.

[9:29] And, in large part, for the same reason. For the same reasons. But, let's not fail to notice that Jesus answered those questions.

Yeah, sometimes we forget that. They ask the question, same question people ask you today, but somehow we forget that Jesus did answer their question. And so, we need to focus on Jesus' answer. A lot of times, rather than focusing on the answer Jesus gives, we go to the bookstore to look for some book on end times to find out the answer to the question rather than just looking at the Bible.

Now, I say that, and I have to admit that, you know, Jesus may not have answered to everyone's satisfaction. All right? I mean, it's not very detailed. We do hope and wish that his answers had been more specific, you know, more detailed. I mean, you know, let's name some names and dates especially.

[10:34] That would be wonderful. If he could have just given us a little bit more to go on here. And, regrettably, I guess regrettably would be the right word, the somewhat vagueness, the

vagueness of Jesus' answer to these questions in response to a question.

It's led to a whole lot of speculation, hasn't it? Speculation in our day. And to a number of competing theologies in the field of eschatology.

And I've named a few of them there. You know, there are all kinds of ways to identify them or label them. And I chose this way. And so maybe I can explain a little bit about some of them.

By the way, most of these views, in fact, really all of these views, we did study a long time ago. I'm not sure how long ago it's been now when I did that kind of end-time study.

And we talked about some of the various views of eschatology, the views of end times. And so we've talked about some of these. Maybe you'll remember it. But just to name a few of them, there is the, and I start with the one that I believe in, and it's what I've called here the futurist view.

[11:55] The futurist view, typically called the dispensational view. Dispensational premillennialism is the two big long words that go with that.

And basically the view is that all of Matthew 24 awaits a future literal fulfillment. So you can look at what Jesus says here in chapter 24, 25, and this position says that this is all future.

And it will be literally fulfilled. All right. And it's still future for us today. So this is the futurist view.

It's the one that I hold and the way I'm going to teach it. I said that to someone after Sunday morning when I was sharing or in my sermon talking about the Antichrist, some of which we studied right here in this room out of Daniel chapter 7.

and, you know, and I mentioned to someone I was talking to that there are other views of that. But I just preach it the way I believe it.

[13:06] So you just have to get it that way. The opposite extreme, actually, is the second one there. And we talked a little bit about this many moons ago.

The preterist view. Preter, I think, is how you pronounce the Latin. It means past. So this view, then, is that all of Matthew 24 was fulfilled within the first century of the church.

And for the majority of the preterists, especially those who are called the full preterists, it was all fulfilled by 70 A.D. So just, you know, some 30, 40 years after Jesus spoke these words is the view. And so that's kind of the opposite view. So you have the futurist view. This is all future. And all that Jesus says here will be literally fulfilled.

So he's not being symbolic, you know. These are actual events that are going to take place at a certain time on God's schedule.

[14:17] Take place just before Jesus comes back again. And it's future. And what he says here is to be taken literally. And then on the opposite side is the preterist.

Preterist. And that is, yeah, these things did happen literally, but they've already happened. happened before the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 A.D. There is a, you know, there are, by the way, a lot of variations of this view.

And there was a, and still exists today, I think it goes by other names, but a very famous theologian, C.H. Dodd. You probably never heard of him.

But among theologians, and especially liberal theologians, he's very famous, and he put forth the idea of what was called realized eschatology.

That means it's all happened already. Everything the Bible says, in fact, his view was that all Bible prophecy is already fulfilled.

[15:26] It's already been fulfilled. Every bit of it. So none of it's future. It's all past. It's all done. So pretty strange. And then the last one would be, and I've called it here, covenantist.

And there are a lot of those who, especially those who hold to reform theology, who have this eschatology.

Postmillennialism is kind of included, would be another way to describe that. And basically, that all of Matthew 24 has and is being fulfilled in the church age.

Because in their view, their covenant view, the church is just simply the new Israel. All right? And so there's the covenantist view.

All right, so you basically could kind of boil it down to three thoughts, although this is, you know, a gross oversimplification, but three kind of views that those prophecies or revelations that Jesus gives us in Matthew 24, 25, they are either all, they were all fulfilled by 70 AD, that would be one view, which would include the destruction of the temple, or they are being fulfilled gradually and over a space of time, over and over again throughout the church age.

[17:11] Or it's all future. Everything he says is future. Something even future for us today. Those are really the three basic positions that you can take.

Anything outside of that would probably be heretical. All right? So, and we don't need to spend more time on that. Now, there are two main reasons, and really there are more, but I think these two main reasons, if I might kind of see the other side's point of view, all right, there are two main reasons why many interpreters argue that the events Jesus details here in Matthew 24 have either in total or in part been fulfilled.

The two main reasons are these. Number one, nearly all the signs Jesus gives that he describes here, these events he describes, nearly all of these have occurred in, to some degree, prior to 70 AD.

You know, one commentator wrote this, he said, all of the preliminary events, he's talking about those events that Jesus says will take place before the end, before the coming of the Lord, all of the preliminary events in fact occurred before AD 70, though most, if not all, have re-occurred many times since then as well.

All right, now we haven't read the passage, but you will remember that Jesus then goes into these signs and what are they? What are they? They will be false prophets, false messiahs, and there have been, haven't they?

[18:52] I mean, all throughout the age of the church, from the very beginning, even prior to Jesus coming. False messiahs, wars, rumors of wars, you'd be hard pressed to find any time in history where we haven't had wars or rumors of wars.

Persecution of God's people, never been in time, in fact, more now probably than ever before. Famines, had those, haven't we?

Earthquakes, certainly. We have all time here in Oklahoma, don't we? And lawbreakers, or lawlessness, yeah, just ask Tom, there's lawlessness aplenty all around, even in this, you know, pretty peaceful town, Bartlesville.

I mean, since I've been here, some of the most heinous things have happened here in our community. The spread of the gospel to the known world, there are those who would argue that that has happened a couple of times in history, though I would disagree.

But some point, by the way, to Romans 10, 18, where Paul says, but I say, have they not heard? Yes, indeed. Their sound has gone out, and then he quotes Psalm 19, verse 4, their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

[20:13] And some point to that and say, well, Paul believed in his day, the gospel had truly spread to all of the civilized world, all the known world of the day.

All right, so, you know, you can pretty much look at each one of these, and there are six of them, these signs that Jesus says will come before the end.

And you can say, well, all six of those things have happened many times over, all throughout history. And so, as I read some of the opposing view, my view, this is something they come back to quite often.

They say, well, you know, how can you say that these are things that are in the future when they're happening right now, happening in our day? So, we can understand, I think, why some argue that Matthew 24 is perhaps future for the disciples, but it's passed for us today.

And then there's another reason that I might just mention, and I'm mentioning these not because I'm wavering on my view or my understanding, but so that we can just see from the passage where some of the opposing views get what they believe.

[21:36] And it's the statement that Jesus makes in verse 34. I mean, nearly everyone that I've consulted always goes there. Verse 34, where it says, Jesus said, assured, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

All what things? The things he said will take place before the end. That's the answer to the disciples' questions. You know, what's a sign of your coming in the end of the age?

And so Jesus gives those things and then he says in verse 34, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. And it's understandable that many would take this as a reference to the generation of the apostles.

You know, he's talking about this generation. And so that's what those theologians will say. Did he not say this generation? Whose generation? The apostles' generation.

This is how they take that passage. Now, when we get to verse 34, which is going to come later, hopefully before Jesus comes again, though I wouldn't tell him, hold on, let me get through this before you come.

[22:52] But we'll talk about that and I think a pretty good answer for what he meant by that. All right, so, again, the question becomes, as you approach this passage, these two chapters, are these signs given by Jesus, are they all past events fulfilled within the generation of the apostles or at the very most the first century of the church?

That's one question. Or, are these signs given by Jesus simply indicative of this age, this whole age or the age of the church?

So, fulfillment, fulfillment, fulfillment of these signs are spread out over the age of the church, the history of the church. Or, as I believe, are these signs given by Jesus pointing to a time in the future, don't know how far out in the future, certainly closer than it was when Jesus first said these words.

But a time out in the future will take place just before his second coming, which will mark the end of this present age, this present age that has been going on now for over 2,000 years.

years. And these signs point to events that will take place that will occur in intensity, even though we can argue that these things Jesus speaks of have happened and are happening and will continue to happen.

[24:40] But was Jesus talking about the same kind of events that are somewhat common to history? Is he talking about an intensification of these things and a rapid succession of these events that will take place just before the fulfillment, by the way, of verses 29 and 30?

And I don't think I put that in your notes, but you can look at your Bible. Here's what Jesus said immediately after the tribulation of those days. the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven 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 and he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they will gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other that's no way has that happened yet you can't say well all of these prophecies, all these things that Jesus is predicting will happen they've already happened I mean you'd be hard pressed those who believe this is all historical, it's all past be hard pressed to reconcile this portion of Matthew 24 with their view and by the way, it really does

I should have added a third thing that is difficult for interpreters and has led some to go one way or the other in their view and it is the being able to identify the elect the word appears a number of times in the discourse and so who's he talking about when he talks about the elect?

is he talking about the elect saints, the church? is he talking about Israel? and so we'll talk about that as we go along alright so really this is still kind of introduction and before we actually get into these signs and so getting back to the question of the disciples kind of a two-fold or two-part question when will these things be?

again referring to those things which will occur at the end or at the coming of the Lord coming to his power, his rightful place is what they're asking and then the second part of it what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

[27:21] and Jesus answers the second question first I think that's why often times you know you're watching the news or you're watching some press conference and a reporter will ask a couple of questions and you know almost invariably whoever it is answering will say well let me answer the second question first I've often thought it's because that's the only one they could remember and then they never get to the first question but this is what Jesus does now he does get to the first question later in the chapter and we'll see that but he answers the second question first which again is what will be the sign of the end?

that's what they ask the sign of the end of the age and we might call this actually the end time of the end time you might remember that I said Sunday morning we were looking at at first John and though John is not talking about what Jesus is talking about here okay he doesn't get into any of this John actually as we're going to learn Sunday morning is talking about things that are happening right now in the church and that is there are antichrists in the church they're antichrists in the church and we've got to deal with them but John does say remember that it is the last hour and we talked I talked about that Sunday morning 1st John 2:18 the last hour or the last time we could even say the end times that would be a good way to identify it

John is living when he wrote that John was living in the end times just like we are living in the end times we've got to got to understand that that you know the end times is a period of time between the two comings of Christ alright so John's talking about that he's talking about this is where we live this is the present evil age that we're living in right now and Matthew 24 is all about what will take place just before and at the end of the end ok that's what we need to understand here so Jesus unlike John I'm talking about the whole thing what's called the last days they the present evil age he Jesus is talking about the end of the end John's talking about the whole thing Jesus is talking about the end of the end alright and so everything in this revelation of Jesus again according to my view all of it is future it's future future of course for the disciples but also future still future for us today and we might further say that the disciples none of them experienced any of the signs

Jesus reveals here in Matthew 24 they didn't experience any of it they didn't see any of it even John who lived to be older than any other apostles he never saw any of this happen he didn't see it so they didn't experience any of these events these signs that Jesus is talking about predicting here in Matthew 24 in these first several verses they didn't experience any of it it's all future for that but I go a step further and neither will any of us experience these signs you say well we've experienced wars and famines and earthquakes and yeah again we experienced those things because they have occurred throughout the history of the world but Jesus is talking about something a little different specific things are going to take place just before the coming of the Lord and we're not going to see any of those in fact no member of Christ's blood bought church will be here when these signs these events take place we won't be here where will we be we'll be with the Lord we'll be with the Lord these signs will occur during the tribulation be inaugurated by the revealing of the antichrist and these signs will take place leading up to the most intense most dramatic of the signs and that is you know the whole universe being rocked and then he will come he will come and we won't be here for that because we'll have been raptured before all of this that is if you understand scripture the way I understand it because there are many different views on this as well but I think it's clear from scripture a literal rapture of the church before the tribulation and 1st Thessalonians 5 1 to 11 and let me just read it concerning the times and the seasons

[32:58] I mean that's what the disciples were asking about right so I guess they were still asking those questions God's people were and so Paul's addressing that brethren you have no need that I should write to you you should know these things for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord that's the coming of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night it's it's I wouldn't say unexpected but we don't know the time it's it's in a sense a surprise that's a thief in the night I mean you don't know when a thief is going to well maybe not you wouldn't do it that way maybe some might all right for when they say peace and safety then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman and they shall not escape but you brethren are not in darkness so he's talking about people in darkness and now he's talking about believers who are not in darkness so that this day should overtake you as you are all sons of the light sons of the day we're not of the night or of darkness therefore let us not sleep as others do but let us watch and be sober for those who sleep sleep at night and those who get up get drunk or drunk at night but let us who are of the day be sober putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the tribulation is not for us but to obtain salvation through our

Lord Jesus Christ who died for us that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him therefore comfort each other edify one another just as you also are doing alright so as we're going to see there are six signs that will occur before the end that is just before the second coming of Christ and Jesus calls them in verse eight the beginning of sorrows the beginning of sorrows that's the way it's translated in the new king james and it's translated in the king james that way because it's translated that way in the king james the beginning of sorrows but the word the Greek word and all you have to do is look at about any other modern translation and you'll understand it it basically means the pain preceding childbirth that's the what the word means now in the king james beginning of sorrows that that exactly in our minds jive with a soon to be mother going through the birth pangs of childbirth but that's what the word is referring to and nearly every translation brings that out new

American standard translates it this way but all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs birth pangs and this is by the way one of the many reasons why I believe Jesus is referring to a series of events in the future that will precede the second coming rather than what again many others believe to be past events that took place in the first century or again as others believe

ongoing events that have taken place all throughout the church age because neither of those views fit the analogy the analogy of birth pangs and we've got some mothers here in the room and I think you fully understand this birth pangs or labor pains they do not occur at conception I mean I don't know there are some pains at conception

I mean I don't know that personally but I know with every one of our children my wife was as sick as anybody could be you know! morning sick this and all that kind of that you know a little early sometimes but birth pangs aren't typically experienced throughout the pregnancy so what am I saying Jesus used this analogy birth pangs

I mean these signs will be birth pangs to announce the end just like a woman's birth pangs announce the birth it's coming and so these metaphorical birth pangs in Jesus revelation they don't occur near the beginning of the church like 70 AD I mean that would be almost right close to the beginning of the church so that wouldn't fit the right analogy nor you know are these things going to be indicative of the history throughout throughout the history of the church you see the analogy wouldn't fit and remember what Paul said in first Thessalonians chapter five he uses the same analogy and I'll read it again for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night so the thief doesn't come just gradually over time he comes at a point in time for when they say peace and safety then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains so he uses the same analogy just like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and of course as every mother knows and I feel totally inadequate to even speak on this never been a mother never never been pregnant you know that but I think every mother knows that birth pains do not begin until shortly before delivery and they continue usually typically there are of course always exceptions to every rule but they continue these birth pains continue to intensify until the baby is born

[40:02] I remember my wife and when she gave birth to our first son Matthew and you know she had some intense labor and you know hard hard contractions and I had I was already prepared and trained you know to help her through this natural childbirth so you been yeah right I was really prepared but I had the tennis ball you know what I'm talking about and rubbing her back you know when and I'd watch that fetal monitor and you could see when the contractions are coming and and I could see Sherry and I would start rubbing her back with that tennis ball and did that for I think 26 hours intense and it became more and more intense though in her case the baby just wasn't going to come Matthew was delivered by c-section but so I think we understand the concept and therefore the analogy so Jesus could not be talking about things that happened at the beginning or things that are just going to reoccur over and over again throughout a long period of time he's talking about something that will be intense albeit some of the same things that have happened over the centuries but at this time they will be much more intense and they will be much more aggressive and happen more rapidly just before

Jesus comes so that I think pretty clear from his analogy so next time we'll actually look at these birth pangs and even though we're not going to be here to see them happen we need to know these things so let's have a word prayer Thank you.