

Jesus Comes for You – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – Matthew 24:15-31

Matthew 24:15–31

¹⁵ “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. ²¹ 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.

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, 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.

Daniel 11:31–35

³¹ Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the **abomination that makes desolate**. ³² He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. ³³ And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. ³⁴ When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, ³⁵ and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.

Daniel 12:11–13

¹¹ And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the **abomination that makes desolate** is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. ¹² Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. ¹³ But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Do you have a disaster plan?

We've been getting more earthquakes in our region lately. We've also seen homes destroyed by fire and flooding.

Do you or your family have a plan, such as having a backup place to stay or extra food and water at home?

A few years ago, we kept getting fire alarms in our building (thankfully, all false). My wife and I put our passports, some cash, and other important items in a little box. Whenever an alarm went off, we took that box down with us, just in case it was a real fire.

In this passage, Jesus warns His disciples about coming disaster and how to prepare.

2. What is the most impressive entrance you've seen? What was the crowd's reaction?

Maybe your blood started pumping when the Canucks invited former captains to introduce Quinn Hughes (<https://youtu.be/JY0HNBq71EE>). Or you were struck with amazement as Michael Jackson came in with a bang (<https://youtu.be/tsrKlvm7Mys>) or Celine Dion capped an Olympic ceremony (<https://youtu.be/XMnoqKs4ZqQ>). John Cena is famous for surprising his fans (<https://youtu.be/XSWynMPmMpk>). Do you know the difference between a villain and a supervillain is presentation (<https://youtu.be/sBbN4Cizyrg>)?

In this week's passage, Jesus tells the disciples that He will make the biggest, unmissable entrance when He returns.

3. Is there any event or experience that everyone in your group has shared?

Almost everyone here felt the earthquake a few weeks ago (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/earthquake-rattles-b-c-1.7465598>). If your group was around in 2010, they may have all watched the Winter Olympics and sang I Believe (<https://youtu.be/9N2tLfGUPwU>) together with the rest of Canada. Did everyone in your group grow up in Canada, or are they immigrants?

In this week's passage, Jesus tells His disciples that everyone in the world will experience His return, and nobody will miss it.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. How do you deal with anxiety? How well does it work for you?

Pastor Ray listed a few common ways people respond. Which do you resonate with?

1. Energized to gather information and start looking for creative solutions.
2. Deny that things are changing and seek to avoid the conversation.
3. Overwhelmed by feelings of worry, fear, and anxiety. In more extreme cases, suffering from sudden panic attacks, enter depression, and/or suffer from persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

5. Why is learning biblical prophecies important?

We've been talking about end-times stuff, where Jesus talks about the future. Many people think it's pointless.

"Why bother if God's got it under control?" "There are no dates, so we have no idea when it will happen."

Others are daily haunted by prophecies. "Don't you see? This person or event is *obviously* the fulfillment of this prophecy! The time is near!" "How can I relax? Don't you know how bad things are going to get?"

Pastor Ray said biblical prophecy "provides a framework for understanding our historical moment, provides insight into the future, and offers guidance to know how to live amid all the changes." Jesus wants them "to focus on the perspective and character qualities that should guide them in the years ahead."

It's not about just knowing what will happen but being the kind of people God wants us to be to live through what will happen.

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

6. What's an abomination of desolation? Can I get one on Amazon?

I remember hearing this phrase a lot and had no idea what it was. Abomination is one of Hulk's enemies (<https://www.marvel.com/characters/abomination>). In many nerdy IPs, abominations are big, powerful monsters. I thought the Bible's abomination might be some superpowered person/ruler/demon who took over the temple.

Abomination is βδέλυγμα (bdel'-oog-mah, another fun to say word), meaning "someth. that is totally defiling, abomination, pollutant" (BDAG). Desolation is ἐρήμωσις (er-ay'-mo-sis), meaning "state of being made uninhabitable, devastation, destruction, depopulation" (BDAG). God's temple is supposed to be a holy, pure, special place just for worshipping God. Something will make the temple unholy, impure, and no longer a place to worship God, so it will be abandoned.

Around 600 years before Jesus said this, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem. He destroyed the temple, took away all the temple treasures, and kidnapped the people in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:10-15). The beautiful temple was made into rubble, and nobody was left to worship God.

Hundreds of years later, the Greek king Antiochus IV set up a pagan altar in the temple and sacrificed pigs (1 Maccabees 1:54). Around 40 AD, Caligula was angry that Jews didn't like him, so he tried to put a statue of himself in the temple (Antiquities 18.261).

There have been many attempts to destroy God's temple. Now, Jesus tells His disciples that history will repeat itself, but even worse.

Pastor Ray listed three views on these events.

The **Preterist view** believes this already happened when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Scholars believe Matthew wrote his gospel between 40 and 55 A.D, so the temple's destruction would be a future event to the earliest readers. One big problem is that the rest of the events haven't happened yet, especially Jesus' return.

The **Futurist view** believes that this hasn't happened yet but will happen right before Jesus' second coming. Many in this camp believe the temple needs to be rebuilt for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

The **Preterist-Futurist** view is a mix. Some things have happened already, like the destruction of Jerusalem. Some are going to happen in the future. Pastor Ray holds this view.

7. Which parts of this warning sound the scariest?

Urgency. Christians in Judea, hightail it out of there! Don't go downstairs to get your phone or wallet. Jump from rooftop to rooftop to get out of the city! Parkour! Pregnant and nursing moms are going to have a hard time fleeing because of their children. Pray that the weather will be good, because it will be tough to travel in winter.

Unlike Anything Before or After. They will experience tribulation, suffering (NET), distress (NIV), and anguish (NLT) worse than anything in history. It's so bad that if God didn't cut it short, everyone would be doomed!

Convincing False Christs. While people are suffering and feeling hopeless, liars and lunatics will sell false hope. They will be so convincing because they'll somehow perform miracles and supernatural wonders.

Mourning. The Greek word is κόπτω (kop-to), meaning "beat one's breast as an act of mourning" (BDAG). Imagine people so filled with regret that they beat their chests. They know they're doomed because they haven't responded to the Good News of Jesus, so judgment is upon them.

8. Which parts of this warning give you comfort?

Jesus Knows. Imagine if Jesus said, "End times? Your guess is as good as mine!" He is crystal clear about what will happen. There is no equivocation or maybe. Pastor Ray doesn't know what will happen in the future, so he points us to Jesus because Jesus knows.

Cut Short. God still cares about His people. It will be terrible, but He will limit it to protect His followers. He won't abandon us! He will protect us!

Everyone Will See. People will say this or that guy is Jesus. Come here or go there to check it out! Just as when lightning fills the sky, you don't need someone to point it out for you.



This is a photo I took on a mission trip in the New Mexico desert during a thunderstorm. Huérfino Mountain was about 16 kilometers from the mission site, but the lightning strikes were still so bright.

Jesus Will Return. Jesus didn't leave us to suffer and die on our own. He will come back to bring us to Him (John 14:1-4)! Notice, too, that Jesus will gather His people "from the four winds, from the end of heaven to the other". It's a poetic way of saying He will get *everyone* from *everywhere*. None of His followers will be left behind or missed.

9. How can we discern whether someone is speaking for Jesus or not?

Pastor Ray quotes Matthew 7:15-16a: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **You will recognize them by their fruits.**" He presents two questions to help us. I've added some pervasive examples.

What do they say about Jesus? Do their teachings about Jesus line up with the Bible?

What is the fruit of their lives? Do their lives and their followers' lives align with what the Bible teaches?

The Catholic Church believes that having mass (what we call the Lord's Supper) satisfies God's wrath by re-presenting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

And inasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is performed in the mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in a bloodless manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy synod teaches, that **this sacrifice is truly propitiatory, and that by means thereof this is effected**, that we obtain mercy, and find grace in convenient aid, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a true heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence. For the Lord, **appeased by the oblation thereof**, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sins. (Trent, XX.II)

According to them, Christ's sacrifice on the cross must be continually presented/offered to satisfy God's wrath against sin. The Bible teaches that Jesus' sacrifice was one and done (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:18). There is no need to sacrifice for sin, and by doing more, we show that Jesus' work wasn't enough! Check out Kevin DeYoung's article for more info (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/is-mass-idolatrous/>).

New Age/Thought teaching often uses Bible passages and terminology to justify a lifestyle or moral system they like. They reduce God from the King of the universe to a means to get what you want. Check out Melissa Dougherty's video on how New Age thinking has snuck into Christianity (<https://youtu.be/yVtJoUTQxnw>).

Christian Nationalists believe that Jesus backs a certain nation-state or ethnic group, as opposed to being the Savior of the world. They often devalue those they deem on the outside, talking derogatively about them. Instead of seeking to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), Christian Nationalists focus on their own.

(<https://youtu.be/5i-peYDE-k>)

Prosperity Gospel preachers usually present their fruit as how wealthy, prosperous, and happy they are, but is that the kind of fruit that Jesus teaches? There are exactly zero people who got rich after following Jesus. I'm not saying you can't get rich while being a Christian, but getting rich is not a guarantee, the norm, or even the goal. In fact, patience and perseverance amid suffering is an example Jesus sets and what we pursue (Romans 5:1-5).

Legalism is still alive and well. Many Christian leaders tell people they must be good rule-followers to be saved. You have to be good enough to follow Jesus, or else Jesus will reject you. Their followers often embody the negative fruit that Pastor Ray listed: “spiritual oppression, depression, broken relationships, and psychiatric disorders – the death of the soul.” They’re crushed.

We believe the law was good but never able to save us (Galatians 3:21). Yes, we want to follow the rules and live holy lives, but we also know we can’t with our own strength. The law points us to Jesus’ love because His love enables us to live right.

10. How are Jesus’ first and second coming different?

| First Coming | Second Coming |
|--|---|
| Limited: Relatively few people knew about it, like shepherds, wise men, and King Herod. | Worldwide: Everyone in the world will see it. |
| Lowly and Humble: Jesus was born to a blue-collar family from a podunk village and placed in a manger. | Powerful and Grand: Jesus will come down on the clouds “with power and great glory.” |
| Salvation: Jesus came to bring salvation and hope to the lost by dying on the cross (John 3:16-17). | Judgement: Those who haven’t believed in Jesus will mourn because they rejected Jesus’ salvation and are headed for judgment. |

11. Pastor Ray listed four things we can trust Jesus to do. Which provides comfort in your current situation? Why?

- (1) Sovereignly accomplish His purposes
- (2) Limit suffering for the sake of His disciples
- (3) Provide warning so that we will be prepared
- (4) Return to gather and save his disciples at His Second Coming

Perhaps you’re worried about daily crazy news. Politicians push laws and agendas that go against what we believe. Wars and rumors of wars are all around. Maybe you need to be comforted by knowing that Jesus will **sovereignly accomplish His purposes** and that nothing will stop Him. In fact, everything is part of His plan.

Are you worried about the suffering that Christians endure? It’s comforting that Jesus is fully aware and that **the suffering His disciples face is limited**. Our story doesn’t end in pain but in God’s comfort (Revelation 21:1-4).

You don’t know what the future holds, but you can **be prepared**. We can strengthen our relationship with Jesus now and beware of the dangers coming, like false teachers. There’s an expression: You don’t build a storm shelter in the middle of a tornado.

If you feel left behind by Jesus, know that He will **return to gather and save** us when He comes back. Even if we die before He returns, we’ll be resurrected to be with Him. Not even death can separate us from Him, and nobody will be overlooked!

1. Pastor Ray listed five ways to respond. Pick one or two to pursue this week. Why did you pick that response?

What concrete steps can you take?

- (1) Know that Jesus' return is certain. The end will come.
- (2) Study the Word of God.
- (3) Discern false christs and false prophets.
- (4) Pay attention and pray.
- (5) Get ready to worship Jesus with all tribes, languages, and peoples!!

(1) You can write Matthew 24:30-31 (or other Bible verses) on a post-it note and put it somewhere you regularly see it. Remind yourself of this truth whenever you feel depressed by the world around you.

(2) Begin a Bible reading plan. Our church has a one-year plan. You can pick up a paper copy of it from the Resource Centre. Last year, I went through the Bible Recap Plan, which has a daily video explaining the passage (<https://www.thebiblerecap.com/start>). In the past, I've led groups using the fantastic WordGo App made by Bible Study Fellowship (<https://wordgo.org/>). Pro tip: Don't do it alone! Team up with others in your Life Group, family, or friend circle.

(3) This will take Bible knowledge and discernment! If you're already doing (2), take a Discovery or WSBM course. I've been told we'll have a Biblical Worldview class in the spring. It's a perfect fit. Don't forget to assess yourself as well. Make sure you don't hold onto any false or erroneous beliefs.

(4) Something bugging you? Pray about it! Make a prayer list, start a prayer journal, or form a prayer group to help you stay on track. Take it all to Jesus.

(5) We are so blessed to have such a diverse church family. Go meet people outside of your group! Visit one of our many International Language Fellowships (<https://willingdon.org/ilm/fellowships>). Look up worship songs in different languages. Have you ever heard Psalm 23 through Altai throat singing (<https://youtu.be/5mjwk9A8E10>), in Tamil (<https://youtu.be/hqbD1sUOFXA>), with a mariachi band (<https://youtu.be/wloJ0mM8Geo>), in Polish (<https://youtu.be/mWhjSLcWcQc>), with interpretive dance (<https://youtu.be/QVOQpM-yjlc>), in Hebrew (<https://youtu.be/8ndYyR44wYw>), or as Gospel-jazz in Zulu (<https://youtu.be/AFqGR6KF0Gs>)? It's amazing how God's made such diversity in humanity that worships the same Lord.