

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Warnings of Coming Peril

Scripture: Matthew 24:16-28

Code: 2370

One of the great joys in our time of worship together is to study God's Word. How can we worship God unless we know who He is? How can we worship Him fully unless we worship Him in truth? And that truth comes to us through His Word. Let's open our Bibles to the 24th chapter of Matthew's gospel. Matthew chapter 24. It is with excitement that we come to this passage this morning as we continue our look at this great sermon on the second coming preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is known as the Olivet Discourse. And on the one hand, as I say, while it's a greatly exciting experience to come back to this passage, I must also apologize to those of you who haven't been with us because you're going to have a few things missing as we approach the sermon from the vantage point we do so today because we've already moved into the sermon and find ourselves really in verse 16 of Matthew 24, picking up where we left off last time.

But just a few things by way of introduction may sort of help us to find ourselves a little bit. I don't think there's any more intriguing, any more fascinating subject than the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know of no biblical subject which can create the same amount of curiosity that this subject can create. And really, there are few things in Scripture that are as highly motivating to the believer and to the unbeliever as the sense of reality regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul said: "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." In other words, realizing that Christ will come in judgment and bring a terrorizing holocaust upon the earth, we present the gospel so that men may escape that. Also, Paul said that we labor whether present or absent that we may be in a sense accepted by Him. So we who are believers serve the Lord knowing that someday He'll come to reward us, and we want to be found faithful.

So the second coming of Jesus Christ, both from the standpoint of warning an unbeliever of the judgment to come and of encouraging a believer with the reward to come, is a highly motivating subject. And there's no place in the Scripture where it's presented more wonderfully than right here in Matthew 24 and 25 by the Lord Himself. Now, remember, this is one sermon given by our Lord on the Mount of Olives to His disciples. He has previous to this sermon spent His last day speaking to the crowds of Israel and He has pronounced judgment on Israel. Told them their house is left desolate. They have rejected Him and He has rejected them. At the end of that time, He left the temple, went to the Mount of Olives, and there He preaches a sermon to His disciples. It is a sermon in answer to questions that they ask. Notice them in verse 3 of this chapter. "Tell us, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?"

From what Jesus has been saying, the disciples feel that the kingdom is very near. They don't realize that it is yet thousands of years away because they don't understand that there are really two comings of Christ. He comes the first time in humiliation to die, there's a long period of time, and He comes the second time in glory to reign. But they don't see those two comings, they see it as one. And so as He has come, as He has preached and taught and healed, as He has now cleansed the temple, they believe He is readying things for His kingdom. In fact, we find them in chapter 24 at the height of their expectation for the kingdom to come. And then He makes a prophecy to them in chapter 24 verse 2. Speaking of the temple which they're now looking down on from the Mount of Olives, He says: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." He predicts the total destruction of the temple to the point where one stone is not left on top of another. Now, this is a massive structure – just a massive structure made out of huge stones weighing tons. Yet Jesus predicts its total destruction.

Now, when He says that, this raises their curiosity and anticipation even more because it probably makes them realize that this is all going to be the judgment on what is, to establish what God would have. Christ, having cleansed the inside earlier in the week, threw out the moneychangers and the sellers and buyers, and now He's going to knock the whole thing down and we're going to have the kingdom temple and the kingdom worship and it's all going to come. So they're at a moment of great expectation. And they ask this question: "When is it going to happen and what is the sign that we look for to indicate Your presence in kingdom glory and the end of man's age?" So they think that is imminent. And then Jesus answers them, beginning in verse 4, with a sermon about His second coming. Now, some people have tried to say that this is a sermon about the destruction of Jerusalem, that this whole sermon was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the temple was destroyed. For many reasons that is impossible, as we've tried to point out in our previous message.

But just one other thought that I'd like to give you. People say, "Well, why does He describe and predict in verse 2 the destruction of the temple if that's not His subject? Why in verse 2 does He say that all these stones are going to be thrown down so that no two are left stacked up? And then why would He move from there thousands of years later to the second coming? Why talk about the destruction of the temple?" I'll tell you why. It's very simple. A prophet could only be believed to be a true prophet if his prophecies always what? Came true. Now, how can Jesus be believed when predicting His second coming when everybody who's hearing the prediction is going to be dead long before it happens? In other words, it's very easy to predict something. I could predict all kinds of things way off in the future, things that wouldn't occur or couldn't be verified or proven right or wrong until all of us were dead. How could I be known as a prophet if there was no way to verify it?

Typically, the prophet of the Word of God assigned by God to give a far-future prophecy gave also a near prophecy to establish his credentials. In other words, if he proves to be accurate in the historically verified prophecy, we can believe him for the one that's so far in the future that we can't

see it. And the reason Jesus mentions the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 2 as prophecy is not to introduce the whole sermon on that same destruction, but to give you a historical point in which to verify that He speaks the truth. And so He said there shall not one stone be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.

Now, what you have to understand is that the temple built by Herod was massive, I mean absolutely massive. And we've described it in some detail. Let me just add a couple other terms that might help you in your full description – in a full-description understanding. The temple was built from 20 to 10 B.C. There were 10,000 stone cutters and setters working on it for that ten years, and that was just the main building. There were also 1,000 priests who were trained as stone cutters and carpenters because only a priest could build a sacred place. So you had 10,000 just workers and a thousand priests building the sacred parts of the temple and that was just the main part of the temple. The building then went on from 10 B.C. to 64 A.D. So you're looking at an 84-year building project before it finally reached completion in 64 A.D. and was then totally destroyed in 70 A.D. So 80 years is undone in a matter of months.

And you say, "Well, did the prophecy that all the stones would be thrown down come to pass?" Yes, not one stone was left upon another and the Romans literally tore it down to the very ground. Now, that's been historically verified. History doesn't argue that at all. That happened in 70 A.D., exactly the way Jesus said it would. It seemed to be ridiculous as a prophecy, it seemed to be impossible as a prophecy, and it seemed that it could never come true. And that's what makes it such a good credential. Jesus predicts something that really could never have been anticipated, never have been foreseen. No one ever dreamed they would – that anyone could come along as powerful as that to tear that thing down or who would want to tear such a magnificent edifice to the ground, but that is exactly what happened. And I told you about the fury and the passion of the Roman soldiers being so great that the Roman general himself, standing in the middle of the temple, screaming for them to stop burning it down, couldn't even get them to obey his own orders. They were so possessed, I believe, by Satan's forces that they tore that thing to the ground trying to remove all remnants of the worship of God, but in fact fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus, giving Him credentials as one who speaks and speaks the truth.

Now, when we know that Jesus can be verified in the past in a near prophecy, we can believe Him for a far prophecy, right? And therein lies the reason for the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 2 as an establishment of His credentials as a truthful prophet.

Now, they think this is going to – the disciples do – this is all part of the end. And so they ask: "What is the sign that it's all going to come to an end?" And that's their question in verse 3 and that triggers the sermon that goes from 24 verse 4 right through chapter 25.

Now, by the way, this act of Jesus in using a near prophecy to give credentials to Himself so that He would be believed for a far prophecy is something that Daniel did, Isaiah did, Zechariah did. It's typical of prophets to do that very thing.

So they posed the question then: What is the sign of Your coming, Your presence, Your kingdom, Your glory, the end of man's day? And the Lord responds by giving them a series of signs from verse 4 through 14, which He calls in verse 8 "the beginning of birth pains. "The beginning of birth pains." As we said, birth pains are right at the very end, and they give birth. They are that which causes birth to occur in a woman. And so there will be certain things happening at the very end of man's age which will result in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. So verse 4 to 14 gives these general things that are going to happen and they will be the beginning of the end, just prior to the coming of Christ.

But Jesus goes one step further in verse 15 and says there's one single event that kicks the whole thing off. "When you shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place, whoever reads, let him understand." Now, when you see the abomination of desolation, you know that's the trigger that kicks the whole thing off. Verse 21 says: "For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

So when you see that one event, that's the trigger. That's the signal that starts the birth pains. And last week we went into detail into verse 15 and discussed the abomination of desolation. What it is is the antichrist coming in to the temple which will be rebuilt in the end time; the Jews will be worshiping there. He comes in as their protector. He comes in as their ally. He comes in as the one who defends them against the threat of Russia and Arab aggression. He comes in to sort of be their savior, as it were. Daniel 9 says they sign a treaty with him. He's the leader of a revived Roman Empire, a western European confederacy.

That is exactly what Daniel predicts, that they will all come together and out of them will rise this one great leader who will be the protector of Israel in the middle of – protection of a seven-year period, he violates his treaty with them, he desecrates their worship in the holy place, he sets up an idol, an image of himself, according to 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13, he demands the whole world to worship him, and that is the trigger that breaks loose the whole holocaust of the end time. So verse 15 describes that as the abomination of desolation. Abomination meaning a detestable thing; desolation meaning that ruins. A detestable act of idolatry that ruins, that brings sacrilege in the temple of God.

Now, when that happens, all the things from verse 4 to 14 will break loose. Pseudo-saviors will come, wars, rumors of wars, nations against nations, kingdom against kingdom, famines, earthquakes, and people delivered in persecution to be killed and hated. And there will be betrayals and false prophets and deceivers and sin will run rampant, iniquity will abound – it says in verse 12 – the love of many will grow cold, and all of that is going to be triggered by the abomination of desolation at the midpoint

of the seven years. Satan's counterfeit king becomes king of the world and he is a demon-possessed, hell-inspired, Christ-hating, God-defying, Christian-killing, Jew-despising man of sin who takes over the reins of rulership in the world. And Satan pulls out all the stops to try to destroy all Christians, all Jews, the nation of Israel, and stop Jesus Christ from establishing His kingdom.

By the way, I believe at this point in time, the church has already been raptured, so we're not going to be there. We're looking forward to that time when the Lord takes us out and then brings that judgment on the earth and we return at the end of the time with Him from heaven when He establishes His kingdom. And that subject we'll cover more in later studies.

So the Lord has given us a clear picture of His Coming. He says here are the birth pains, here are the kind of things that are happening, and here's the trigger that starts it all.

Now, as we come to verse 16 to 28, He warns us. And He warns all the readers who will read this, who will know this in the time that it happens. And He warns about four things: severe calamity, subtle confusion, spiritual collapse, and a second coming. And these are really something to see.

Verse 15 says: "When," it starts with "when": "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation" – then jump to verse 16 – "then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains." Now, what is the response when this happens? When this happens, flee. Flee. The Greek word is *pheug* from which we get the word "fugitive." Run; get out because as long as you stay in Jerusalem, you're going to be vulnerable to death. You're going to be vulnerable to persecution, especially if you're a Jew because the antichrist wants to stamp out Israel. Satan has wanted to do that all through history because if he can eliminate Israel, he can thwart the whole plan of God, which is fulfilled ultimately in bringing Israel to salvation and to their kingdom. Satan has tried to wipe out the Jew throughout history. And when antichrist takes over in Jerusalem, sets up his throne right there in Jerusalem, the Jews that are left there are going to be very vulnerable, and so He says in that day you better run. You better run.

And not only that, if there happen to be any who are believing people who refuse to worship the antichrist, who are Christians, you better run, too, if you're in Judea. Judea is the area in which Jerusalem is the main city – southern part of Palestine. Any of you who are believers, you better run also because he'll want to wipe you out. Revelation 13, he says he wants to make war with the saints. And we know in Revelation 12 that he wants to wipe out Israel. So the general command here to run is to anybody who refuses to bow to the antichrist image, be they Jews who refuse to do it or be they Christians who refuse to do it, you better run.

And so we believe that when this happens, there will be a sort of an exodus out of the land, out of the city of Jerusalem, for protection. Not everybody's going to make it. Go back to Zechariah for a minute, next-to-the-last book in the Old Testament, next to the last chapter in the book. Verse 8 of chapter 13.

“And it will come to pass” – Zechariah looks at the same time period here – “It will come to pass that in all the land, says the Lord, two parts in it shall be cut off and die.” Not all the Jews are going to make it. The antichrist is going to move against them, and two out of three are going to die. There’s going to be a terrible slaughter. The holocaust on the Jews of the future is going to be as great or, obviously, from verse 21, far greater than anything in the past. Two out of three are going to die. Verse 9 says: “A third part will be spared and refined and kept by God.” So Zechariah tells us that when the Jews flee, not all of them are going to make it, not all of them are going to survive.

Go to Revelation chapter 6. And keep in mind now, we’re talking about a time like this time and people like our people, and this is not some kind of a space fantasy; this is here-and-now kind of thing, and when this political ruler out of the revived Europe takes over and says he’s God and makes this image and pulls all of these kinds of things and starts to slaughter the earth and starts right there at Jerusalem, people are going to have to run for their lives. This will be a real holocaust. And the Jews, many of them are going to perish, as I just read. Two out of three are going to die. And many others as well. In Revelation 6, we find in verse 9 that when the fifth seal is opened, and this is a seal that describes that same time period known as the Tribulation, “Under the altar are the souls of those that were slain for the Word of God and the testimony which they held.” Here are believers. Here are Christians, Gentiles or Jews, whatever, out of the Tribulation time who have been martyred for their faith.

They didn’t escape, either. They got martyred. They lost their lives. And they’re sort of pictured here, crying, “How long, O Lord” – verse 10 – “How long until You avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” How long until You stop this carnage where antichrist is massacring the saints? “And white robes were given to every one of them and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season.” The Tribulation isn’t over yet. It’s just getting started. “And your fellow servants and your brethren have to be killed.” That’s part of fulfillment. There will be martyrdom. So Zechariah seems to see Jews being killed, and Revelation seems to see saints who have believed in Christ being killed. Not all are going to escape. The ones who don’t, the point I’m making, they’re going to pay with their lives. That’s why He says, “Run fast because your life is at stake.”

In Revelation chapter 11, it talks about 7,000 people dying in the city of Jerusalem through an earthquake. In chapter 12 verse 11, it says there are martyrs who loved not their lives unto the death. In other words, while some are betraying Christ, and some are denying Him rather than die, there are some who don’t love their lives that much, they’re willing to die for the testimony of Christ and they will. In chapter 13 verse 7, it says he makes war with the saints and overcomes them. That again indicates martyrdom. Chapter 17 verse 6 pictures the false religious system drunk with the blood of the martyrs.

So all of those passages show us that when this thing happens, the abomination of desolation is set up, the antichrist becomes the ruler of the world, he’s energized by Satan, he’s assisted by demonic

forces and by men and women all over the world, he moves against Israel and they have to run for their lives and only a third of them are going to make it. He moves against the believers all through that period of time and they have to run for their lives and not all of them are going to make it, either. But for those who do flee, there will be some supernatural help.

And particularly is this – indication in Revelation 12 regarding Israel. It's a most fascinating passage. In Revelation 12, you have some imagery here. There's a woman and there's a child. And the woman is Israel and the child is Christ. And it describes the fact that out of the nation Israel, Christ was brought forth. And then there is a dragon in this picture and the dragon is Satan and the dragon persecutes the woman, of course, and wants to kill the child. But there's a great champion for the cause of God to protect the woman and child and it's none other than Michael – verse 7 – and Michael fights the demons and Michael prevails in verse 8. And Michael is the victor.

And then we go a little further in the chapter to verse 14, and it says – well, go back to verse 6 first, let's look at verse 6 first, this'll tie the two together better. "And the woman" – that is Israel, here we are in the Tribulation time, when Satan is doing all he can to destroy Israel and, of course, Christ's kingdom – the woman fled to the wilderness." Here's Israel running for the protection. "And she has a place prepared by God that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days," 1260 days or 42 months or three and a half years, that's always the time period of this Great Tribulation. That's not ever violated, it's always three-and-a-half-year period because in the middle of the seven-year covenant Daniel talks about, the antichrist makes the seven-year pact, he breaks it, and for three and a half years, 42 months, 1260 days, you have this holocaust. So Israel flees and for the 1260 days is protected by God in a place prepared by God.

Now, it's a good place to flee, Israel is, cause there are caves every place – every place and all around that land. Down into Edom and over in Moab and everywhere. Many places to hide in the desolate wilderness of that area.

Now verse 14: "And to this woman who is persecuted" – verse 13 shows Satan persecuting the woman, she's running now. "And the woman is given two wings of a great eagle." I kind of think it's Michael. Michael, the protector of God's people. And I think it's supernatural that this great champion of the people of God, this great protector of Israel, is going to fly into the wilderness carrying the people and there they will be nourished a time, that's one; times, that's two; half a time, that's a half. One plus two plus a half is three and a half. There we are with the same time period. So for three and half years, supernaturally, Michael and his angels are going to deliver the people who are able to escape into a place of safety and a place of protection. That certainly refers to Israel and may well refer also to believing Gentiles and others who escape the massacre of the antichrist.

Now, we can go back to Matthew 24. So what our Lord says is: "Look, when you see that event, run as fast as you can run. Get out of there." In fact, verse 16 says: "Get in the mountains, flee into the

mountains where you can hide.” And then verse 17 gets descriptive: “Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house.” If you happen to be on that housetop – in those days the housetop was where the patio was, there was an outside staircase going up, you still see some like that in Israel even today and people would be on the housetop. If you happen to be caught up there, don’t even go inside to get your belongings, get down the stairs and out of town because when that thing happens, as it says in Revelation, devastation will come and death like a flood. It’s going to come like a flash flood, like a fire across the land. Get out, don’t even go in the house to get your belongings, and don’t take anything out. Jump off the roof and run as fast as you can. This is how terrible a time is coming. And any delay means death.

And so the Lord expects and urges normal retreat for safety. The Lord doesn’t have them stay there and face the bullets; He just says get out of there. He’s not advocating a martyr complex. Run. Verse 18 says: “Neither let him who is in the field return back to take his garment.” “Garment” refers to the outer cloak, and if you’re out there working in the field and you’ve laid your cloak on the cart a quarter of a mile away and you’re out in the field doing something and the word comes that it’s happened, don’t go back to the cart to get anything, get out. Just run because Satan has taken over. The forces of hell are in place and the holocaust is coming. Get out of there.

And then verse 19: “And woe unto those” – literally the Greek says “women having something in the stomach,” those who are pregnant, and to those, literally it says “the ones nursing.” “Woe to the pregnant women and the nursing mothers.” You say, “Why?” Well, some commentators say because it’s so hard to run when you’re pregnant, it’s so hard to run when you’ve got a little nursing baby in your arms, and there’s no question that that’s true. But I think there’s something more than that in this. And as I studied the Bible to try to see exactly what the Savior was saying here, I was drawn to the 13th chapter of Hosea and a time when Hosea looks at the end and talks about the salvation of Israel and the bringing back of Israel and how God will bring judgment on those who have judged Israel wrongly. And in verse 16, just the last part of the verse, it says this – and this is sort of interesting: “Samaria shall become desolate for she hath rebelled against her God.”

Now, when God comes to bring His judgment against His rebellious people, when God comes to tie up all the loose ends of the iniquity of Ephraim, when God comes to restore, first He must purge. And it says in verse 16: “They shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces.” That’s why He warns those with little babies. I believe when antichrist comes, this is an indication that there’s going to be the devastation of infants. You see it here prophesied in Hosea 13:16, you see it fulfilled even when Christ was born. When Satan tried to stop the birth of Christ what did he do? Massacred all the babies. When Satan wanted to kill the prophet of God like Christ, who was Moses, what did he do? Massacred all the babies, trying to get to Moses. And it won’t be any different in that period of time, either. The antichrist, I think, is going to bring upon the world such a hellish kind of activity that it will encompass infants being smashed to pieces and pregnant women, women with child, will be ripped open. And that, I believe, is primarily why the Lord warns in that regard that the kind of things

that are going to happen in that day are almost inexplicable to us, almost unbelievable to us.

But that's because we don't understand the nature of the holocaust when Satan has total control of the world, the church is removed, the restrainer has taken back His restraining power, all sin runs rampant, all hell breaks loose, and that's what happens, and so the Lord says in that day you better run and you better run fast. And, oh, how sad for those who have little babies which will be dashed to pieces and those who are pregnant who face the possibility of being ripped open. Unbelievable.

And then verse 20. He says: "Pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day." And this is just to stress the urgency. Pray that it isn't in winter, it might be cold, it might be raining, and it might even be snowing because there are parts of Israel where there is snow. And so you have to pray that it's not going to be in a time when you cannot travel swiftly nor on the Sabbath day. Pray that it isn't on the Sabbath, particularly if you have to run or drive through certain sections of Jerusalem because if it happens to be the sections where the radical legalistic Jews live, they'll stone you if you do that because they hold to the Sabbath law of 2,000 cubits being a maximum Sabbath-day journey, and if you even today tried to go through those areas, they'd stone you. We drove through them, not on the Sabbath. We walked around that area. And that is another indication that our Lord is saying just hope it isn't at a time when you are hindered from your journey. Just hope it isn't a time when you're going to have to face some difficulty in getting out of town. Just hope you're not physically in a situation where you have an infant or you're pregnant. Just hope that you can run as fast as you can run and don't have to go back to get anything. Get out because the holocaust is so inconceivable.

Why? Verse 21: "For then shall be great tribulation." Great, great trouble, pressure. "Such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time nor ever shall be." The worst time the world's ever known. There's nothing like it. You can pile up all the holocausts of human history and they will not match this one. Just get out. The Lord says go. And many are going to die from all that's described in verses 4 to 14 because when that abomination of desolation takes place, then come the wars and the rumors of wars, then comes the worldwide breakdown, the famines, the earthquakes, the pestilences that Luke talks about and the betrayals and the persecutions and the hatred and the whole thing begins to break loose. And that, by the way, is described for us in Revelation 6 through 19 in detail. First of all, the seals are opened, then the trumpets are blown and the bowls are poured out, they're all images of escalating, heightening, increasing, intensifying acts of judgment on the earth.

And that period, by the way, lasts for three and a half years, as we've been saying all along, and that expression is very clearly given to us, not only in the book of Revelation but even by the prophet Daniel, who leaves us with no questions at all as to the length of time. Because it says in Daniel 7:25 that this antichrist who comes will be for a time, times, and a dividing of a time. Again, a time is one, times is two, and a dividing of a time is a half – three and a half years. That's always the standard timeframe in which this great ruler wreaks havoc across the face of the earth. And we saw in Daniel

12 last time some other indications of that same timeframe. And in Revelation 11:2, it tells us about the same three-and-a-half-year kind of concept. Also in Revelation 13:5.

Now, how severe is it? Verse 21: "Such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." You know, in a way it's kind of sad to say this, but the proper message to give to Israel today is that things are not going to get better, they're going to get infinitely worse. They're going to get so bad that Zechariah's prophecy is going to be fulfilled. There's going to come a desecration and abomination, there's going to come a holocaust in Jerusalem that's going to take the lives of two out of every three of you. There's going to come a devastating thing – unlike anything you've ever dreamed of in the future. When, as Hosea says, it may well be that your pregnant women are ripped open and your nursing mother's children are dashed to pieces. Incredible to think about.

Now, may I say to you, please, none of this could ever relate to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The only reason the Lord even gave that was as a point of credential, and to try to make this whole thing fulfill that is silly. But the people who want to do that very often also want to make the whole book of Revelation relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, which it cannot do, either unless you're just utterly dishonest with the Scripture.

Now, the worst time in the history of the world and in verse 22 is most fascinating. "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved, but for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened." Now, it's interesting to think about what this means. What do you mean, "shortened"? Well, He says three and a half years, 42 months, 1260 days. Every time the Bible speaks of it, it speaks of it like that, a time, times, and half a time. And no place does it say it will be shorter than that. It's always that same time. So the word, then, for shortened – which is an interesting word, *ekolobthsan*, could mean it's stopped instantly. It immediately ends. It quickly stops. Unless it was just terminated fast, even the elect would be devastated.

But I think there's a better explanation for the word. It doesn't say "except that day," which would embrace the whole period as sort of a day of judgment, and the Bible would use that singular a lot in doing that, that day of judgment, that day of punishment. But it says "those days." Those days. And if you take it as it is, those 24-hour days, except those 24-hour days should be shortened, I believe that when the abomination of desolation occurs and people start running for their lives, Jews and believers, trying to get away from the holocaust of antichrist, that God supernaturally by His mercy and grace is going to alter the length of daylight in order to give them the protection of darkness. You say, "Well, where do you get that?" Look at Revelation chapter 6.

Revelation chapter 6 verse 12, and here the sixth seal again unfolds during this period of time and there was a great earthquake and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, even as fig trees casting her untimely figs. Verse 14: "Heaven departed as a scroll, it rolled together, and every mountain and island moved out of their

places.” Now, I think what you have here is an alteration of the heavenly bodies. And when the sun becomes black, it gets dark. In fact, if the sun is black, the moon is out also. And if the stars all go out, it’s dark. Chapter 8 verse 12, the first set of judgments we just saw is the seals. The second is the trumpets. But watch what happens in the trumpet judgments in chapter 8 verse 12. “A fourth angel sounded and a third part of the sun was smitten, third part of the moon, third part of the stars, third part of them darkened and the day shown not for the third part of it.” Daylight will be reduced by a third.

Now, go to chapter 16 verse 10. In 16:10, it says: “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and his kingdom was full of darkness and they gnawed their tongues for pain.” And I believe what’s happening is gradually just less and less daylight until ultimately at the end of the tribulation period, it’s total darkness, and the antichrist’s hosts are moving around in absolute darkness. And, of course, that becomes a protection for the elect. And now go back to Matthew 24 and you see – I think if we interpret it that way, at least it’s viable. I can’t be dogmatic about it, but it seems to make sense to me. “Except those days themselves should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.” It’s only the protection of night and daylight being shut off that saves people. “But for the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.” For the sake of God preserving His chosen people.

Now, you can relate the word “elect” to Israel: “Mine elect” as they are called in the Old Testament. Israel, Mine elect. God affirms that He elected that nation. And so it is that He protects His people. He keeps His remnant. He spares one third so that He can redeem them and bring them the kingdom. Not all the Jews can die. So I can see in the “elect” there, the elect nation Israel as even we see it in Romans 9 to 11 where Paul talks about Israel as the elect nation, not redeemed Israel, but Israel as a nation. And I can also see in the word “elect” the redeemed believers from all nations. But for the sake of preserving His elect nation and the sake of preserving His elect redeemed people, He shortens the day so that the antichrist cannot massacre both Jews and believers for the elect’s sake.

I love that. That’s the first time in the New Testament the word “elect” is used. And now we are introduced to a new concept about those who belong to God. We belong to Him because He chose us. Elect means to choose or to call out. He chose us. He chose Israel, He chose us. If Israel was His elect nation, we don’t argue that. You know, even people who want to deny the doctrine of election in reference to salvation don’t deny the doctrine of election in reference to Israel. They don’t say, “Well, one day God went out and said, ‘Who would like to raise their hand to be My nation? Who?’ And all the Jews said, ‘We would.’” No. There’s no question at all about God electing Israel. And if Israel is God’s elect, then why should we be disturbed that the church is also God’s elect?

So He says, “I am going to take care of My elect.” And want to know something? He takes care of His elect. Nobody would survive to go in the kingdom. There wouldn’t be any redeemed Jews to go in the kingdom, there wouldn’t be any redeemed Gentiles to go in the kingdom if He didn’t change the days so that they could be safe. Listen, you know what this says to me? When God chooses someone for

Himself, He will keep that person for Himself, and He will fulfill His promise if He has to restructure the entire universe. Does that make you feel secure? Does me. The Lord will literally reorganize the entire body of the universe to protect His own – marvelous.

So for the elect's sake, He just changes everything and squashes daylight down into a small time period and ultimately altogether blots it out so that they can be safe. Now, total darkness couldn't last very long because nothing could grow. That's why it happens at the very end. And I'll tell you something else: You cut into daylight even a third and it's going to affect the growing cycle, right? And that's why you're going to have famines all over the earth and that's going to contribute even to more hatred and more anger and more warfare and more of everything else. But that's for the sake of protecting the elect. So wonderful. The Lord goes to these extremes to protect His own, even changing all the function of the universe for the elect's sake. Boy, what a comforting thought.

So He says, "Look, if you're alive then and you see the abomination, run as fast as you can." Because number one, severe calamity is coming. Number two – and watch this, this is very easy to see – subtle confusion. Now, here's what happens. All these people run, and the ones that don't die, they're all hiding out here. They're all hiding somewhere. And they're being cared for by the Lord. And maybe they're fed with manna from heaven, I don't know. I don't know how the Lord's going to take care of them, but they're out there. Israel and redeemed folks and they're hiding. And you know what they're waiting for? They can read Matthew and they're going to be reading it in those days. They're going to say, "That's it, we saw it, we saw it. Now, let's see. We've run – we've run – we're out in the mountains, we're hiding, it's coming, the Lord is coming."

And they are very vulnerable, you see. People in great, great desperation are extremely vulnerable. And some false prophet could come running over and say, "He's here, He's here, He's over in the desert. He's down by the sea. We've got Him hidden in a secret chamber in Jerusalem. Come on, come on." They'd be very vulnerable.

So verse 23 says watch out for subtle confusion. Not only severe calamity but subtle confusion. "If any man says unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there" – what? – "don't believe it." Don't believe it. It's a deception. They're trying to trip you. Trying to trap you. Trying to catch you. They want to capture you and kill you. They want to slaughter you. He wants to wipe out the Jews, does the dragon Satan. He wants to wipe out the redeemed, does that old enemy of God. And he's going to use every means. He's going to use his deception and he's going to say, "Oh, Christ has arrived, He's right over here. Oh, He's right over there. Come on, He's here, you're missing out." Don't believe it. For there shall arise false Christs, those who claim to be the Messiah, and false prophets, those who point to the one who claims to be the Messiah, his emissaries. "Oh, He's over here, here He is, come see Him," and they're going to show great signs and wonders, according to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. They're going to do Satanic miracles, counterfeit miracles, they're going to demonstrate devilish power. It's going to be wondrous to see marvelous things that are so clever they might even deceive the very

elect, it says in verse 24.

If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. You want to know something? It isn't what? It isn't possible. That's why He says that; otherwise, He'd say that shall deceive the very elect. He says, no, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. You can't deceive the very elect. The truly elect who truly know Christ could never be deceived about who He was. When Sun Myung Moon says, "I am Christ," I say, "No, you're not. In fact, you're not even in the right time period. Wait until the Tribulation, then come and say that. And we won't believe you then, either." When somebody says, "I am Christ, here is Christ, there is Christ," the Mormon Jesus, the Jehovah's Witnesses' Christ, this Christ, that Christ, you will never deceive one who really knows Christ. John 10 says: "My sheep hear My voice, they know Me and I know them." And if somebody defects to another Christ, they never knew the true Christ because once you know the true Christ you can't be fooled.

So the elect are protected. They cannot be deceived and they cannot be destroyed because the sovereignty of God protects them by reorganizing the universe, and they cannot be deceived because they have in them the knowledge of the true Christ. But they're going to be shot at, the false Christs are going to come and they're going to say, here these people are, they're desperate, waiting for the Messiah, the world is falling apart, the calendar is changing, the stars are falling out of heaven, wars all over the place, slaughter, massacre, rivers turning to blood, the sea turning to blood, the whole holocaust of Revelation 6 to 19 is going on around them, and it's just a devastating time in the world, all the plagues are breaking loose, earthquakes, famines, the whole deal, and they're going to be hidden away, holding on for the coming of Jesus Christ. They would be so vulnerable to a bunch of false prophets saying "He's over here, He's over there. Come and see Him. We've got Him, He's here."

So if you hear it, don't believe it. Because all these deceivers are going to come, verse 25, "Behold, I told you before." He did. In verse 5 and in verse 11, He said: "False Christs, false prophets, false Messiahs, I told you before." And He also told them long before. He told them clear back in Matthew chapter 7, Matthew 15, Matthew 16, Matthew 23. He's been telling them all along, "Watch out for these deceivers. Don't be fooled. Don't look for some secret Messiah." Watch this, verse 26: "If they'll say unto you, 'Pssst – over here, He's in the desert. No, He's in the secret chamber. We've got Him hidden in a secret chamber.' Believe it not. Don't go there. Don't go near that place. You're being deceived." Really? Then how do we know when He gets here? Verse 27 – so great: "For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines to the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

Isn't that great? I mean it's going to be like lightning going right across the sky from the east to the west, just shocking everybody. His coming will be sudden, public, visible, universal, and glorious. And the whole world is going to see it. Look at Revelation 1:7. It says this: "Behold, He cometh with clouds" – now watch, Revelation 1:7 – "and every eye shall" – what? – "see Him." Isn't that great?

They're not going to say: "Oh, did He come? I missed it. When? Did He – really?" That'll not happen. And nobody is going to go and say: "Pssst, He's here, it was just very quiet." Don't believe it. Read Revelation 19. He comes blasting out of heaven riding on a white horse, followed by all the white-robed saints and angels of heaven's glory, coming to earth with a sword in His hand, a blood-spattered garment to bring judgment on the world and to destroy all the armies who've set against Him in battle. I mean this is going to be a coming that everybody sees.

So when you see the sign, run fast. Because of severe calamity, subtle confusion, and one more: sinful corruption, verse 28 – sinful corruption. Get out because of what's going to happen. The world's going to get so corrupt, so wretched, and so rotten. "For wherever the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together." Now, that's sort of a little proverb. You see a carcass, you'll see vultures. And Israel and Palestine, they have vultures. They're indigenous to the area. The Greek word is *aetos*. It means a vulture. Sometimes it's used – they're called eagles, but the word basically has to do with a vulture. And what's going to happen here is simply like that analogy. Where you find a carcass, you have a vulture going in and tearing into that carcass. And that's exactly what the picture is. Christ is going to come as it were a vulture to a dead carcass. The world is going to be so corrupt, so sinfully corrupt, that it lies there as a wretched, sinful, corrupt, decaying carcass to which the Lord will come in judgment to tear and rip and shred that carcass to pieces. Very vivid picture.

Now, what it's saying is – implied in that – is the world is going to become dead and corrupt. So you ought to run because of severe calamity. You ought to run and be careful because of subtle confusion. And you ought to run and be somewhere with the secure people because of sinful corruption. The world is going to decay and decay and decay. It's going to be more wretched than ever. Go back to verse 12. The iniquity shall abound. The iniquity shall abound. The church is gone. The restraining Holy Spirit has pulled back His power. All hell breaks loose. Sin reaches rampant conditions. And it becomes so wretched and so corrupt that it is like the filthy, corrupt, decaying carcass of an animal, and as a vulture descends and swoops, as it were, to carry off that carcass, so God comes to destroy what is left of that sinful corruption. God swoops down, as it were, in final judgment. And that's exactly what is in the mind of Paul as he writes in 2 Thessalonians that "God is going to come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So why hang around the evil, wretched system that's only going to get worse and worse? Some people are going to hang around, and it says because the iniquity abounds, verse 12, the love of many is going to grow cold. They say they love Christ but they'll abandon Christ in favor of sin because they hung around. Run. Don't hang around to be corrupted by that sin and to be ultimately judged by the coming of Jesus Christ. That vile, wretched, evil world will be brought to judgment. So the scene is very vivid.

What's the sign of Your coming? Here are the birth pains. What triggers them? The abomination of desolation. What should they do who are alive when it happens? Run. Why? Because severe calamity comes, subtle confusion, and sinful corruption. Get out. And one more thing will happen immediately. Verse 29: "Immediately" – we'll stop at that point, and you come back next week. Find out what it is. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord, we thank You for our study in the Word this morning. Great and rich and exciting to think about, the coming of Christ. At the same time, Lord, we know that it's tragic for those that know not the Savior. Oh, God, we pray that each person here will look into his or her heart, be sure they know Jesus Christ, have His salvation and forgiveness, so that they can be a part of the redeemed to enter into glory, not those that are left in this world to suffer judgment.

Help us, Lord, too, to see these things coming to pass and to persuade men, to call them to the Savior who alone can save them from the wrath to come. We thank You for the promise that we shall be kept from the hour that shall try the earth, that we shall be saved from the wrath to come, that we shall go to be with Jesus Christ, we shall be engaging in the time of rewards for faithful service and the marriage supper of the Lamb while the earth is going through this, and we shall return with Him at the end in His glorious kingdom.

Father, help us to be faithful in the days we have to warn the world and to live in the light of your coming, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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