

SESSION 2

KNOW WHAT'S COMING

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
EVEN IN THE DARKEST
TIMES, GOD HAS NOT
ABANDONED HIS
PEOPLE.

MATTHEW 24:15-22

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 those in Judea must flee to the mountains.

.....

¹⁷ A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house,

¹⁸ and a man in the field must not go back to get his coat.

¹⁹ Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days!

²⁰ Pray that your escape may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

.....

²¹ For at that time there will be great distress, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again.

²² Unless those days were cut short, no one would be saved. But those days will be cut short because of the elect.”

+
+
+

MEMORY VERSE

Mark 13: 31 - Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

KEYWORDS

Abomination of desolation (v. 15)—Refers to a desecration of the holy temple or altar in Jerusalem with pagan worship as predicted by the prophet Daniel.

Spoken by the prophet Daniel (v. 15)—Daniel prophesied about the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the second temple.

His prophecy is found in his book at the following: 9:27; 11:31; 12:11.

The elect (v. 22)—Literally, “the chosen.” Refers generally to those chosen by God for rendering special service to Him.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RETURN OF CHRIST?

I remember vividly one day as I was on my way to pick up my child from daycare, I got caught in some heavy traffic. I began to get terribly anxious because I knew the daycare was closing soon and I had to get to my child before he worried or worse, felt forgotten. Those minutes seemed like forever as I inched through the traffic to finally arrive at the daycare. I ran inside to find my child holding back tears. As I approached him, I embraced him so tightly. I wanted him to feel secure. In that moment, he let it all out in relief knowing that I was there to pick him up and that I had not forgotten him at all.

For any child, it is a horrible feeling when they don't know where their parents are. I was troubled to think he might have believed I had actually forgotten him.

In the same way, many of us have also felt moments that we are forgotten by God. As we continue our study of the end times and Jesus' return, we will see that God will never forsake us or abandon us.

The Desecration of the Temple

// Matthew 24:15-16

Jesus wanted His disciples—and us!—to know what is coming. The end is coming when God's temple is desecrated. Jesus cites Daniel in an explanation of the abomination of desolation. Jesus was now pointing to another future event. It is possible that Jesus was referring to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Jesus' words, "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains" (v. 16) also lends support to this view since Jews fled at the time of the Roman invasion in AD 70. (The more explicit wording in Luke 21:20-24 appears to support this view.)

It is also possible that Jesus' words are a reference to a future event involving the antichrist. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will occur when the antichrist does something very similar to what Antiochus Epiphanes did. Revelation 13:14 foretells the antichrist making an image that people are forced to worship. For one to turn the temple of God into a place of false worship is truly



THE POINT: EVEN IN THE DARKEST TIMES, GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE.

an “abomination.” Second Thessalonians 2:4 lends support to this view: “He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God’s temple, proclaiming that he himself is God.”

Together, Jesus is referring to the desecration and disrespect of the temple of God as being the marker of the end. The good news, Jesus cares that we know, that we are given the chance to flee. The word “flee” is related to the English word fugitive, a person who takes flight to escape danger. Jesus warns us that we might find refuge and protection in Him.

HOW DO YOU NORMALLY RESPOND TO WARNINGS FROM JESUS?

One thing is clear: Jesus wanted His disciples—and us!—to know what is coming. And when God’s temple is desecrated, we can know the end is coming.

The Distress Without Delay //

Matthew 24:17-20

Jesus stresses preparation in these verses. He points out that destruction will come so quickly that believers must waste no time in taking cover. This is why fleeing is so important. He shares a few scenarios that speak to leaving immediately, difficult travel, dealing with the weather.

- **Leaving Immediately**

Jesus explains the importance of leaving immediately by using the imagery of staying on the housetop and staying in the field. These two scenarios for leaving immediately paint a picture of how individuals can get so consumed with what they have on earth that they are not ready to depart when they see the signs. For the person on the housetop, do not enter the home. For the person in the field, do not go back to grab a cloak. In both cases, Jesus’ point was that times will become so difficult that people will not be able to go back even for what were perceived as the necessities of life.

HOW DOES THE SUDDEN NATURE OF JESUS’ COMING IMPACT THE WAY WE PREPARE NOW?



DIGGING DEEPER ABOMINATION?

The word “abomination” appears over 120 times in the Bible. In every case, it refers to something detestable. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) used the Greek word to refer to things such as unclean animals (Lev. 11:10-13), magic and divination, (Deut. 18:12), idols (Jer. 4:1), and all things abhorrent to God (Rev. 17:4-5; 21:27). The ultimate abomination, though, is “the abomination of desolation,” a horrible and devastating activity that is idolatrous at its core and an affront to the holiness of God. The phrase abomination of desolation was first used in the Book of Daniel. Daniel’s use of the word “abomination” referred to the desecration of the temple of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:27). Many scholars have noted that at least a partial fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in 176 BC.

Why do you think Jesus would use such bold language as “Abomination of Desolation”?

- **Difficult Travel**

Jesus' second example was "pregnant women and nursing mothers" (v. 19). This does not imply a "curse" on women who are with child; it simply describes the added difficulty of traveling and fleeing while pregnant or handling infant children. Jesus' words were simply highlighting how difficult it will be to move as quickly as necessary during the crises of the end times when one is with a child. Jesus has nothing against children or pregnant women! This was a vow of sympathy akin to language in Deuteronomy 28:53-56



- **Dealing with the Weather**

Jesus ends with another scenario that could be challenging, the weather. He knew that cold and harsh climates could make travel harder in any scenario. Jesus' antidote was prayer. He knew that the terror awaiting believers calls for a single-minded commitment to fleeing and praying for very specific and seemingly unimportant things such as the weather.

In the end Jesus used the normalcy and various experiences of their lives as ways to ensure that the people were prepared in every

circumstance with prayer as their strength. When the end comes we will have to get uncomfortable in places of comfort.

The Deliverance of the Elect // Matthew 24:21-22

Christ was describing a time when evil will reign with a great maliciousness. As the return of Christ draws nearer, all bonds of evil will be broken, restraints will be put aside, and lawlessness will flood the earth. God will move in judgment while terrible catastrophes will sweep the earth. Things will be so dark that the people will seek deliverance through death (Rev. 9:6). Hardships often lead people to look to God for help, but that will not be the case during this time of great tribulation. "The rest of the people, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands to stop worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, which cannot see, hear, or walk. And they did not repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts" (vv. 20-21).

As difficult as these portions of Scripture are to read, we must be deeply grateful for the mercy of God. Jesus said God is going to "cut short" (v. 22) the days of tribulation. Christ seemed to mean that, in His mercy, He will not allow the tribulation to continue forever.

God has predetermined that those days will fall short of full destruction. The suffering will be so great that if the Lord let the suffering continue, no one would survive. Otherwise, "no one would be saved" (v. 22). God's kindness is great, and He will interrupt the tribulation with His return (Matt. 24:29-31).

HOW HAS GOD'S MERCY IN THE PAST HELPED YOU TRUST HIM FOR THE FUTURE?

THE POINT: EVEN IN THE DARKEST TIMES, GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE.

The specific reason for God's mercy is "because of the elect" (v. 22). This is the first time the word "elect" appears in the New Testament. The elect are those who have placed their faith in Christ. This word emphasizes God's initiative in saving us. While believers make a genuine response of faith to the Lord, God is the one who draws us to believe. God's elect have a special relationship with God as His called-out children. The concept of election emphasizes that salvation is a work and gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

HOW DOES THIS PROPHECY DISPLAY GOD'S CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE?

God will always remember His people even when the trouble feels overwhelming. If you thought the Lord has abandoned you to suffer alone when difficult times come, fill your mind with the truth that He "will never leave you or abandon you" (Heb. 13:5). We may face hard times, but we do not face them alone. He is with us to strengthen us, encourage us, help us endure, and ultimately deliver us.

DID YOU KNOW?

Man on a housetop? My home has a slanted roof and there is no other access into the home except for the chimney. Reading this Scripture verse while looking at my home makes me afraid of the second coming! Do I need to jump two stories down? Jesus, please help! When Jesus told this story He was equating it to first-century homes which had outside stairways that led to the upstairs flat roof. These flat roofs were especially useful as places of social gathering during hot months.²⁸ It has been said humorously that one could walk across Jerusalem on the roofs of houses. To further protect the city, some people built their houses next to the walls of the city to be available to fight off any outside armies. Jesus, as He did consistently in Matthew 24, was using the experiences of the disciples to ensure they were prepared. In this case He used their homes.

What area of your life is similar to the housetop, which makes it easy to see enemies and relax?

LIVE IT

How should we live with the knowledge that God will never abandon us?

Living in the presence of God isn't something believers will only experience at some future date. Many of us have gone through painful moments when we felt abandoned by God. But God will never forsake us; God is with us even now—in joyous times and when life is hard or painful. How can you live as one not abandoned this week?

+ + +

- **Be reminded.** Write down a difficult moment in your past and ways you experienced God's presence. Keep this note close to you for the next time circumstances get tough.
- **Give it away.** Give to a ministry (time, money, physical items) at your church or in your community that helps people during times of distress—food pantries, homeless shelters, job loss ministries.
- **Reach out.** Second Corinthians 1:3 encourages us to comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. Invite someone who is suffering to join you for a meal or coffee.

DAILY READINGS

1. THE LIGHT OF HOPE // DANIEL 11:31

“His forces will rise up and desecrate the temple fortress. They will abolish the regular sacrifice and set up the abomination of desolation” (Dan. 11:31). Synonyms for abomination include evil, atrocity, and horror, while desolation is synonymous with destruction, woe, and gloom. It just sounds like double doom for all of humanity. Yet, despite what’s forthcoming, the light of hope pierces through the darkness. Know there is a merciful, sovereign God who presents us with the gift of His Son, Jesus and a choice. “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

Solidify your salvation today by believing with your whole heart and declaring, “Jesus is Lord!”

2. PLAYGROUND OF LIFE // PSALM 145:14

Life is like a child on a playground. First, the teeter-totter. Initially there is balance and then the ups and downs. Next, the swings. Initially, the child needs a push, and then is able to swing to greater heights. Then, the monkey bars. Coordination or strength may not be sufficient to maneuver through the bars, so a fall occurs. A consoling parent then picks the child up. Our heavenly Father is that playground parent who stays nearby to oversee and guide us through life’s “playground.”

When we go through the playground of life, our loving Father picks us up when we fall, comforts, and helps us continue on our way.

3. PRIVILEGED // 2 PETER 2:9

“Membership has its privileges” was the catchy slogan of American Express® in the nineties. People carrying the prestigious card were proud and seemed to take the slogan to heart. Some boasted about having the card while others flashed the green card to signify a certain status had been attained. Being a Christian and a child of the Most High God has its privileges as well. There will be tribulation.

Yet, because God is merciful, that time will be shortened to deliver the elect, those who belong to Him. “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 2:9). And God patiently delays so others will be saved.

Hallelujah! Membership in the body of Christ has made us recipients of God’s mercy.

4. SPOILER ALERT! // 1 JOHN 3:2-3

Have you ever watched a movie and thought you knew what would happen next and were surprised with the ending? Or, read a book where the plot and climax unfolded as predicted? Sometimes knowing the ending prematurely ruins the effect, while other times just knowing how the story ends brings relief. “Spoiler Alert.” God reveals to us in His Word how everything plays out. The good, bad, and ugly is all there not to scare us but to spiritually prepare us. Knowing what lies ahead we can be confident that God is with us and that with Him we win.

Thank you, Lord, for showing us things to come so that we may gird up our loins and remain steadfast in You.

5. DON’T BELIEVE THE HYPE! // MATTHEW 24:27

Imposters. Who and what are they? Simply stated, the definition of an imposter is one who pretends to be someone or something else in order to deceive others. The imposter tricks others into believing their scheme. The trickery is dubious and can render unwelcomed, unsuspected, and often down-right dangerous consequences. Such deceivers will surface with the intent to lead mankind astray. Some will claim to be the Messiah while others will claim they can show you the way to Him. As said in hip-hop culture, “Don’t believe the hype!” When Christ makes His glorious appearing, all will know.

“For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”



John 15: Remain in Christ

BY MARK CROSTON

I can remember walking into our kitchen one day, ready for a snack and craving some hot buttered popcorn. Reaching into the pantry I pulled out a pack of microwave popcorn. I got a napkin from the table and a cold drink from the refrigerator. I placed the bag of popcorn kernels into the microwave oven with the correct side up, closed the door, pushed the button, and then –nothing! I checked and rechecked the settings, I made sure the door was completely closed and again pushed the button and, you guessed it–nothing! I was so utterly disappointed as my desire for the hot buttered popcorn was heightened.

It was just then that my teenage daughter walked into the kitchen. I expressed to her my disappointment and told her the microwave

was broken. Then she told me something that rocked my world and changed my day. She said, “Dad, the microwave isn’t broken. It’s just unplugged!”

The microwave is unplugged!!! So simple and yet so vital. I had everything I needed, but I could not enjoy the hot buttered popcorn, because the microwave was unplugged.

This is what John 15 is talking about. It is a reminder to each of us that we cannot be fruitful in our spiritual lives if we are unplugged from the power source. “Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).

How many Christians try to live a fruitful life unplugged? A microwave cannot work if it is unplugged from the electrical socket. A vine cannot thrive if it is unplugged from the source of water and nourishment. A Christian will be neither fruitful, nor fulfilled trying to live unplugged from Jesus Christ. This is why He reminds us over and over here in John 15 to remain in Him.

- We must remain in Him to produce fruit. John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”
- We must remain in Him to have the privilege and authority to ask, and have our requests fulfilled. John 15:7, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.”
- We must remain in Him to remain in His love. John 15:9, “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love.”
- We must remain in Him as we keep His commands. John 15:10, “If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”
- We must remain in Him so our fruit will also remain and not spoil. John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.”

This is what I now know. The microwave still could not help me if it was plugged in for a moment and then the plug was removed again. It couldn’t just be plugged in to start the job and then unplugged. No, once I plugged in the microwave it had to remain plugged into the electrical source to have the power to fulfill its purpose, which on that day was to cook my hot buttered popcorn.

This is also true for us. We cannot just be plugged into Christ on our salvation day, or even just on each Sunday. Our ability to be powerful and fruitful is directly and inextricably tied to

our remaining in Him. So, to remain in Him read, memorize, and meditate on His Word every day; keep the prayer line open, talk to God like a friend that is right by your side all day; play music and sing songs that remind you of God’s way and God’s Word; and stay in contact with other Christian friends who are also trying to remain in Him.

Know that God’s love and life are the best.
Remain in Him!

Dr. Mark Croston serves as national director, Black Church Ministries for Lifeway and general editor for the YOU curriculum.