

FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

PART 1: IS THE PANDEMIC A SIGN OF THE END OF THE WORLD?

BEFORE THE LESSON

Our examination of Scripture today will include Matthew 24: 1-14. It would be useful to read this Scripture reference ahead of time so you as a leader can more deeply discuss the themes of this lesson. We will be focusing on the question of whether the pandemic is a sign of the end of the world or not. A lot of Christians are talking about the end of the world. This is an important topic to discuss and seek the Lord in.

You may also want to review <https://vineyardcolumbus.org/beyond-the-building> in light of how we are moving forward with the impacts of the pandemic. It's important to acknowledge the grief, frustration, and confusion.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

Get comfortable with silence. Letting people have 30-60 seconds to consider the question before answering is sometimes helpful. You don't have to fill every silence. Let the Holy Spirit move in silences.

Additionally, be aware that many in your group are likely still processing the decision not to regather in person for weekend services likely through the end of 2020.

STARTING THE LESSON

This is the first in a series of sermon-based lessons on finding clarity during such confusing times. This lesson will focus on the question: Is the Pandemic a sign of the end of the world? This is definitely a weighty topic and is something that a lot of Christians are discussing today. We will look at a place in Scripture (Matthew 24:1-14) where Jesus talks to his disciples about the signs of the end times.

STARTER QUESTION

- If you're comfortable sharing, what is one thing that you are grateful for that would not have been possible had this pandemic not happened?

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, please come and be present with us. Open our eyes to see and our ears to hear what you want to teach us. Holy Spirit, guide our conversation that we might draw close to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

MATTHEW 24:1- Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." 3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains. 9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

- Some of the challenges with making sense of prophecies, as Eric mentioned, are the different ways to interpret signs. The disciples were preoccupied with buildings. What are you tempted to be preoccupied with?

Answers may vary. Some examples may be tempted to information by means of amounts on the internet, preoccupation about the future, anxiety about the present, etc.

QUESTION 2

- Jesus warns his disciples against deception. Without going into specific deceptions, why do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to know this?

Jesus wanted them to be able to distinguish the 'already' and the 'not yet' signs. There is danger in being led astray (v.4-5)

QUESTION 3

- Life is a mixture of good and bad. How is the only 'already' sign in verse 14 hopeful?

We are good news to a hurting world. We get to push good into the world by preaching and demonstrating the gospel of the kingdom. Natural disasters, wars, famine, disease and the like have always been a part of human history. They take place, but not with a specific connection to the end.

QUESTION 4

- Eric spoke about us being signs. Jesus extends the disciples' horizons so that could see the Kingdom more clearly. What has God revealed to you over the past six months?

Answers will vary. Some points from the passage:

- *The disciples later realized that that the end of the temple (and with it of the special status of Judaism) is not necessarily the end of all things.*
- *Jesus urged the disciples to think about how their view of the end impacted their experience of God in the present.*
- *The end cannot come until the good news has reached the entire world. We don't decide when the end must come.*

PRAYER MINISTRY

The world is a mix of good things and bad things. Depending on the group, this may be a time to lament things lost (in-person education, a job, relationships, etc.). It may also be a time to give thanks for the things God has preserved, gifted, or sustained.

- Lament over things lost
 - Invite the group into a prayer time to share what makes them frustrated, angry or sad about the current state of the world. Have everyone put their hands out in front of them palms up. Once many have shared, lead a time of silence (30 seconds or a minute). Then have everyone turn their palms down and lay the frustrations, irritants, or causes of anger/sadness at the feet of Jesus. He is with us as we feel emotions.
- Gratitude Exercise
 - With many things disrupted, it can be helpful to express our thankfulness to God. We can bring our whole being into giving thanks. First, have everyone enter into a comfortable posture (feet on the ground, rest your hands on your knees or at your side. Have members close their eyes, pay attention to their breathing in rhythm, and invite them to think of three things they are thankful for in this moment. Why are you thankful for these things? Be aware of your body; what energy is at work in the midst of thankfulness. Perhaps your mouth curling into a smile, maybe peace, a laugh, may a tear. Finally, invite the group to share what their body wanted to express during this time. Turn these expressions towards God, the one who gives all good things.