

FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

PART 2: IS THE PANDEMIC A SIGN OF THE END OF THE WORLD?

BEFORE THE LESSON

Let us be reminded of Pastor Eric Pickerill's main sermon points from last week that we live in two realities of the already and not yet. Also, that the main sign that the end is near is that the Gospel will go into all the world. And that we, Christ's followers are His hands and feet in this world, sharing His word. Our examination of Scripture today will include Matthew 24:15-44. 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. This week we will be focusing on the following questions and themes: What are the practical warnings that Jesus gives his disciples? How can we be people who listen to those warnings? Also, that Christians should be wary of speculation; rather, they are to be watchful and ready.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

Please do consider that people are going to have different opinions and interpretations of scripture as well as the times we are in. Be thoughtful and try to facilitate productive conversation over focusing on people's specific beliefs regarding the end times. Do have patience and listen to others' concerns and ideas.

STARTING THE LESSON

This is the second in a series of sermon-based lessons on finding clarity during such confusing times. This lesson will continue focusing on the question: Is the Pandemic a sign of the end of the world? We'll explore how Christians interpret Biblical prophecies. We will finish looking at Matthew 24, verses 15-44, where Jesus talks to his disciples about what to expect to happen in their generation and about how to respond and prepare for his return.

STARTER QUESTION(S)

- How have you found comfort in the Word this week?
- Alternatively, if you're comfortable sharing, how are you doing emotionally?

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit. We welcome you in this time together. Teach us that we might know you better. Guide our conversation that we might draw close to you and one another. Give us the gifts of patience and kindness towards one another. Amen.

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

MATTHEW 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[a] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 29 "Immediately after the distress of those days

"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

30 "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth[c] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.[d] 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[e] is near, right at the door. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,[f] but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. 42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

QUESTION 1

- In verses 15-29, Jesus is very clear with his disciples. He warns them of the coming destruction of the temple that indeed happened in A.D. 70. What a grace that Jesus foretold that atrocity and told them how to respond. What are some ways that we can establish rhythms where we can be people who listen to Jesus's Words and the Holy Spirit's guidance or warnings?

Answers may vary...some people may talk about establishing quiet times, or being in a Bible study, or praying simple breath prayers like "Come Holy Spirit" or "I am here" to stop and listen to the Lord, or perhaps establishing healthy friendships & community where we can feel known and seek understanding together.

QUESTION 2

- How do you think expecting hardship might affect your response when it does come (vs. 25)? What hope can be found in knowing that God "will never leave you nor forsake you"? (Deut. 31:6)

Answers will vary...some people may say that hardship has always blindsided them or that it's been difficult to not blame God for tragedy. If we do go through life, however, aware that this world is broken and sinful, perhaps we would respond to the trials with a little bit more open hands...especially knowing that the triune God is present and walking with us through it all.

QUESTION 3

- Any 'end times' conversation can stir up so many emotions and self-righteous attitudes, when the bottom line is '...concerning that day, only the Father knows.' Matt. 24:36. How is this truth comforting to you? How can we be followers of God who are prepared for Christ's return?

Answers will vary...some people may find hope in the fact that they don't have to have all the answers and that God's ways are higher than our ways. Perhaps it may remind people that we can rest in God's promises and remain faithful in uncertain times as this because God keeps his promises and Jesus will return to redeem this world...we only need to be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10).

We can be followers that are prepared by remaining faithful, listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and acting on his Word. By being his hands and feet in this world.

PRAYER MINISTRY

The **Five-Minute Retreat** is a wonderful tool to encounter Jesus and pull away with him for a short time. Then we are more able to come back to our community and the rest of our day with an experience of God we have found in that time.

Please find a comfortable position, feet on the ground, perhaps your palms up on your knees. Now, we will close our eyes and I will lead you with my voice. Take in a deep breath, maybe try counting to four as you breathe in and out. Create a slow rhythm of breathing to calm your body and mind. (Wait).

Internally, pray to God, say "God I am here." Maybe every time you inhale, or exhale say, "God I am here." Maybe your shoulders or face have tensed, become aware and soften. Maybe your mind is wandering, gently come back to the present and say again, "God I am here." Let's continue in this, and now let's add to the prayer, "God I am here, and you are with me." You don't need to say it over and over but every time your mind begins to wander from the present perhaps say it in your mind to bring you back. (Wait).

If you haven't already, turn your palms up. Now I believe God wants to give you something in this space. If you don't already know what it is, ask God to show you, in your imagination or in your body what it is. If you start to mentally wander, remind yourself again, "God you are with me." Lord we receive whatever it is you have to give us. Whether it is light or heavy, or it feels like a responsibility or a joy, we know you are the giver of good gifts. We receive the gift of being present with you here. (Wait).

Now to finish, take in a deep breath, roll your shoulders, and exhale. Amen.

Thank you, Lord, and thank you for letting me lead you in that. This is something you can do anytime you want to retreat into the safety of Jesus. The sabbath rest he always has for us.

Alternatively, consider slowly reading aloud this poem by Teresa of Avila, taking time to quietly ponder its meaning in your life.

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.