



**ADVENT: WAITING WELL**  
**WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?**  
**MATTHEW 24:1-35**  
**11-29-20**

**All = bold sections – read together**

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

*Sung together = italics*

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

**Reflect**

Elisabeth Elliot: It is on God that we should wait, as a waiter waits--not for but on the customer--alert, watchful, attentive, with no agenda of his own, ready to do whatever is wanted. 'My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.' (Ps. 62:5 KJV)

**Welcome**

Good Morning! Welcome to Advent! Advent is a season of focusing intentionally on our waiting for Jesus to return again. What does it mean and look like to wait well for Jesus? It involves alertness, attentiveness, perseverance, hope, preparedness and more. For the next four Sundays we will draw our attention to the season of waiting, training ourselves to be better waiters as we seek to follow Jesus well today.

In anticipation we gather. With expectation we wait.

**We gather to watch for the coming of the good news into our world and into our lives.**

We wait to see the fullness of God's vision.

**O God, open our hearts and minds to you, that this year we may have room for the birth of Jesus.**

O God, as we marvel over all that you are doing, overwhelm us with so much wonder that words of praise spring forth from our lips!

**In this time of waiting, let true worship begin in our hearts.**

Let our praises rise up to the heavens! Let our celebrations spread new hope over a tired world! Let us gather together all our dreams and lives to worship our God!

**May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance!**

**Call to Worship – Psalm 31:9-24**

Read through these verses slowly and try to feel what the Psalmist felt and think what the Psalmist thought. We are in the season of Advent which is a season of waiting. Notice how this Psalm ends.

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**Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.**



Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

**For I hear the whispering of many— terror on every side!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.”**

My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!

**O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol. Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.**

Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues.

**Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. I had said in my alarm, “I am cut off from your sight.” But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.**

Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!

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Why does the Psalmist encourage the “saints” to be “strong” and to “let your heart take courage”? In what areas of your life might you need strength and courage today? How well do you wait?

**Song** – Behold Our God – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqrli3Lkf58>

*Who has held the oceans in His hands?  
Who has numbered every grain of sand?  
Kings and nations tremble at His voice  
All creation rises to rejoice*

*Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King, nothing can compare  
Come let us adore Him*

*Who has given counsel to the Lord?  
Who can question any of His Words?  
Who can teach the One who knows all things?  
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds?*

*Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King, nothing can compare  
Come let us adore Him*

*Who has felt the nails upon His hands  
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man?*



*God eternal humbled to the grave  
Jesus, Savior risen now to reign  
Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King, nothing can compare  
Come let us adore Him  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
You will reign forever (let Your glory fill the earth)  
Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King, nothing can compare  
Come let us adore  
Behold our God seated on His throne  
Come let us adore Him  
Behold our King, nothing can compare  
Come let us adore Him*

**Advent Candle** – Hope (Algeria)

What is hope? Modern culture tells us it is a “maybe,” a kind of unsure optimism. But in Scripture, hope is an indication of certainty. “Hope” means “a strong and confident expectation.” The Israelites were hoping for a savior, their messiah. God had promised a messiah and they believed it. They didn’t know when or who, but they were waiting.

**Zechariah was a Levite in the nation of Israel. He worked in the temple and was a God-fearing man. He and his wife, Elizabeth, were childless in a culture where children were considered to be a sign of God’s blessing. Zechariah had prayed and prayed to God, asking for a child, but God had not sent one. As Zechariah stood in the Holy of Holies that day, preparing to offer the sacrifices for the people, an angel appeared to him with a message from God:**

Fear not, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John. He will be a joy and delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord his God. He is never to take wine or fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go before the Lord to make ready a people.

**But when Zechariah heard Gabriel’s words, his first reaction was not hope. It was doubt. He asked the angel, “But how can this be? I am an old man!” The angel responded,**

I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.



**Elizabeth did become pregnant, and Zechariah found himself wholeheartedly living in hope, in confident expectation that God would give him a son and that the long-awaited Messiah was soon to follow.**

Today we too can live with Zechariah's hope. We can live with the certainty and the confident expectation that Christ not only came to this world as a baby so long ago, but he will return and everything that God has promised will come true. What hope!

Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name's sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don't share the same freedom that we do. The 17th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus is Algeria. Of the 43 million people in Egypt, 130 thousand are Christian.

Algeria has seen a rise in every persecution category over the last year, which is why its risen five spots on the 2020 World Watch List. The most visible example of persecution in 2019 was the seemingly systemic closure of Protestant churches. In some these cases, Christians were forcibly expelled by police in the middle of services. Pressure from family also remains high, particularly for Christians who were previously Muslim. Extremist Islamist groups continue to pressure the government to restrict Christian's freedom, as well.

Prayer Points: Pray with the believers who have had their churches shut down. Pray for the pastors, that they would feel God's presence, power and peace. Pray for Christians who convert from Islam, that they would be protected, bold and wise. Pray with believers who are rejected by their families for their faith. Pray that God would let them know they have a global family who stands with them through Prayer.

**Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!**

**Song** – Yet Not I But Christ In Me – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>

*What gift of grace is Jesus, my redeemer  
There is no more for heaven now to give  
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom  
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace  
To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus  
For my life is wholly bound to His  
Oh, how strange and divine, I can sing: All is mine!  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me  
The night is dark but I am not forsaken  
For by my side, the Savior He will stay  
I labor on in weakness and rejoicing  
For in my need, His power is displayed*



*To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me  
Through the deepest valley, He will lead  
Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me*

*No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven  
The future sure, the price it has been paid  
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon  
And He was raised to overthrow the grave*

*To this I hold, my sin has been defeated  
Jesus now and ever is my plea  
Oh, the chains are released, I can sing: I am free!  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me*

*With every breath, I long to follow Jesus  
For He has said that He will bring me home  
And day by day I know He will renew me  
Until I stand with joy before the throne*

*To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus  
All the glory evermore to Him  
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat:  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

*To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus  
All the glory evermore to Him  
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat:  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

*When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat:  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

**Song** – Ancient of Days -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJUtaW21qAM>

*Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall  
There is still one King reigning over all  
So I will not fear for this truth remains  
That my God is, the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul  
He is here with me, I am not alone*



*O His love is sure, and He knows my name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
Though I may not see what the future brings  
I will watch and wait for the Savior King  
Then my joy complete, standing face to face  
In the presence of the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days*

### **Centering Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer for our church, our city, our country, your family and friends.

### **Offering** – Deacon Fund

The “Deacon’s Fund” is an account handled by the deacons who seek to help others in the Spirit of Galatians 6:10, “As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” The purpose of the Deacon’s Fund is to provide financial aid to an individual or family who is in need on an urgent basis.

**We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.**

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

**Youth Celebration** – Take a moment to celebrate our youth – their presence and participation at CCRC. Think of a time or two when they helped shape your faith and how you might have helped shape theirs.

### **Scripture Reading** – Matthew 24:1-35

We are in the season of Advent – a season of waiting. For the Jews (and the world really) in the early first century, they were waiting for the Messiah; the one that would save Israel and through whom the whole world would be blessed. For everyone post resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, we look back and remember their waiting for the Messiah; but we also look forward to the return of the King in Jesus’ second coming. How do disciples of Jesus wait? What does Jesus have to say about his return and what are we to be characterized by and what we are to be doing? Advent is a season of waiting, yes. But it is also and more importantly a season of hope. Hope is a forward leaning trust in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – to do and be what they said they would do and be. It is a present active faith that is

grounded in the historical truths of Jesus of Nazareth, his present activity in individuals and churches through the Holy Spirit and his future work in consummating all things in him, to him and for him. Forever.

It is vitally important to recognize in this passage that the two questions the disciples ask (“When will these things be” and “What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age”) are predicated by



Jesus’ incredibly shocking statement that not one stone of the temple would be left standing on another. This statement was in response to the disciples marveling (in idolatrous ways?) at the magnificence of the temple. (Picture to left is where the temple would have stood. Now there is a Muslim Mosque there with a gold dome. Picture below is what the temple would have looked like in Jesus’ day). The temple was believed, much like the Titanic in her day, to be indestructible and the finest thing ever built. And, like the Titanic this would prove to be

erroneous. One last thing, it seems that the disciples conflated both the destruction of the temple and the return of the King into one event. Matthew 24-25 untangles this error. They are two distinct events. However, and this is the tricky/challenging part, there is some overlap between the two. Jesus’ response will leave the two partially tangled together. That is, some of the events that surround the destruction of the temple in 70 AD may be seen as a foreshadowing of the events that will accompany Jesus’ return. If this is true, it becomes impossible to cleanly separate out fully what has already taken place and what will take place. We will need some grace here and willingness to not fully know but trust the main message of these chapters: Jesus is coming again as the return of the King and we had better be awake and ready for it. Those who do so, do so to their eternal glory with the King. Those who do not, do not to their eternal peril apart from the King.



This morning we will navigate the historical prophetic words of Jesus of Nazareth to understand the “What?” of this text. Second, we will ask and answer the question, “So What?” to see the importance for us today. Third, we will ask and answer the question, “Now What?” to apply what we learned to our lives either in the way we think, feel, act and/or be. Because Jesus’ words are about the future (at least some of it) and the end times when he will come back again, it is perfectly fitting for an Advent series that focuses on waiting for Jesus’ second coming. The theme for this series is waiting well (it’s also the title of the series). Each week we will answer the “Now What?” with a particular practice that will train us to wait well and link it to the Advent Candle lighting theme (hope, peace, joy, love). This week, the practice of slowing will be introduced as a way to wait well and it will be linked with hope. In fact, the practice of slowing is the main practice for this entire series. The other three are “sub-practices” that help develop a slower paced life (the practices of sabbath keeping, participating and noticing). Finally, why is slowing so important for us today? Because we all suffer from “hurry sickness” to one degree or another. Hurry is embedded in our culture as normative and affects all of



us. However, hurry undermines our ability to love well, listen well or learn well. We simply cannot love, listen and learn well when we are in a hurried state of being (not just doing – which means you can be doing nothing and still be adversely affected by hurry sickness). Loving, listening and learning are vital, fundamental, essential to life and especially to the life of the disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. They are central to growing and being credible and coherent witnesses to Jesus and his kingdom here on earth. Thus, living a slowed life in Christ will be counter-cultural. We will stand out. We will be different. Living a slowed life in Christ is not about being lazy or slothful but being active about the right things in the right way at the right pace. Yes, there will be “busy” times for all. But for the disciples, these busy times will be handled differently (with hope, peace, love, joy) and will not characterize them. Disciples of Jesus will practice at slowing in order to love, listen and learn well as disciples of Jesus and as counter-cultural witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Gospel Message** – What Are You Waiting For?

“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” These words are from Dallas Willard, a well-known and respected theologian, teacher and disciple of Jesus who passed away in 2013. He wrote *The Divine Conspiracy* and *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. These words were directed at the time to another well-known and respected theologian, teacher, pastor and author John Ortberg who was seeking some spiritual direction for his life. However, I suspect they are valid for the vast majority of us today. We are a hurried people who suffer from “hurry sickness.” We have trouble waiting and double trouble waiting well. Right? While we may be forced to wait at times, we often will do that with crossed arms, furrowed brow, raised heartrate and blood pressure, anger and frustration seething and boiling right below the surface, ready to erupt. Don’t think that is you? Okay. Does it bother you when you get in line at the grocery store after carefully calculating how many people are in each line and how many items each has and how quick the cashier is and how old the buyer is? Does it bother you when you get trapped behind a slower moving vehicle on the road or highway and doubly so if they have a bumper sticker that says, “I may be slow but I’m ahead of you!” Do you eat at drive thru “restaurants” otherwise known as “fast food” places or worse, drive thru and eat it in the car on the way somewhere? Do you work while you are eating? Do you consistently multitask? Do you have races with your kids to see who can finish their meal the fastest, brush their teeth the fastest, get dressed for bed the fastest? Are you frequently thinking about the next thing you need to do? Do you wish there were more hours in the day to get everything done? Do you feel “guilty” if you are not doing anything? Do you always drive somewhere when you could easily walk? Do you have a hard time listening to someone for more than a few minutes? Do you buy things on credit because you cannot wait to buy it with cash? Do you microwave most of your food? Do you skip meals? When’s the last time you have driven more than 10 miles in the slow lane? Do you take the fastest route to where you need to go? Friends, the truth is, most if not all of us are affected by hurry sickness (an actual term used in the medical community nowadays) to one degree or another. We are conditioned to dislike waiting; to view it as an enemy to the productive and successful life. I wait for no one! No one is going to slow me down! Get out of my way! Move or get run over! If not said out loud, we often are saying it in our hearts. To wait well we need to slow down and make sure we are waiting for the right thing. That is, what is the hope of our waiting? With hurry sickness, it is to get to the next thing. For disciples of Jesus it is the return of the King, on his timing and in his manner.

Let’s answer the “What?” of this passage by walking through the text in three sections. The first





section will be verses 4-28. In verses 1-2, the disciples marvel at the temple with Jesus responding that it would be utterly destroyed. Now for us, this does not seem that big of a deal. But for the Jews it was. Jesus is working to disentangle the disciples from the temple and connect them with Him. Let us be clear. Since Jesus of Nazareth, the temple has no purpose. Its purpose was to signify the presence of God among them. Now that is fully and completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There will be no meaningful temple as a physical structure or building ever again (and yes, we are temples of the Holy Spirit now – but that is another sermon!). But they don't understand this yet. So, in verse 3 they ask, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answers them by saying the things I am mentioning now are NOT the signs of the end of the age and my second coming. They are only the beginning of the birth pains. What are these beginning birth pains? (1) False Christ's that they were to be aware of so that they would not be led astray like many who will. (2) There will be wars and rumors of wars. Jesus says not to be alarmed at this since these are not the signs of my second coming. (3) Nation against nation. (4) Famines and earthquakes. Again, these are common and will happen throughout the ages and are not specific to the second coming of Jesus.

This next section seems to follow the general, non-specific signs that happen from one generation to another. They serve to alert the disciples that something is coming. What is that something? It is the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that Jesus just mentioned and what is the context for this very discourse. So he says directly to the disciples in front of him 16 x's that that they will face certain things. That is, he talks like they would face the things he is about to address. He says that (5) you disciples listening to me right now (the eleven) will face tribulation and death, you will be hated because of me and many of my followers will fall away and betray one another (the "then" at the beginning of verse 9 is simply a conjunction that connects verse 8 and 9 together and can mean "at that time"). (6) False prophets will abound teaching false things and lead many away from the gospel of the kingdom of God in Jesus of Nazareth. (7) Lawlessness will increase and love will grow cold. (8) The gospel will be proclaimed to the inhabitable world and the one who perseveres through this will be saved. And then the end will come. Every one of these things can be shown to have happened prior to and at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD through the historical annals of Josephus and Tacitus who lived during this time and wrote about the events that took place – they were historians. The following is quoted directly and at length from Reformed theologian and pastor Sam Storms who documents the history of each of these events through Josephus, Tacitus and more:

1. *Religious impostors and Messianic pretenders* (v. 5)

See [Acts 5:36-37](#); [8:9-10](#); [13:6](#); [21:38](#). Josephus reports that during the reign of Nero deceivers and false prophets were arrested on a daily basis. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius refers to the prevalence of false messiahs in this period.

2. *Increased military conflict* (v. 6)

The period 33-70 a.d. witnessed countless military disturbances. An uprising in Caesarea took 20,000 Jewish lives; at Scythopolis 13,000 Jews were killed; in Alexandria 50,000 were slain; 10,000 were killed in Damascus. Josephus reports that when the Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem (40 a.d.), the Jews refused. As a result, they lived in a state of fearful anxiety over imminent war with Rome and were in such distress that they even neglected to till the land.

The *Annals of Tacitus*, which describes events from a.d. 14 to a.d. 68 describes the turmoil of this period with phrases such as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "commotions in Thrace,"



"insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain," and "the war in Armenia" (cf. DeMar, 62).

The "end" (v. 6) refers to the end or termination of Jewish national existence; the end of the city; the end of the temple.

### 3. *Political upheaval and turmoil* (v. 7a)

The incredible extent to which political and military revolution were in the air in Palestine alone during the first half of the first century has been documented at length by N. T. Wright in chp. 6 of his book, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

### 4. *Natural disasters* (v. 7b)

The famine described in [Acts 11:28](#) occurred in 44 a.d. It resulted in the disciples at Antioch mounting a huge relief effort to ease the burden of the Christians in Judea ([Acts 11:29](#)). Three other famines occurred during the reign of Claudius. The Roman historians Tacitus and Seutonius both mention the prevalence of famines in this period of history (in particular the widespread famine in Rome in a.d. 51).

Earthquakes were also common. See [Acts 16:26](#). There were recorded earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Apamea, Campania, and Rome. The cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae were devastated by a quake in 60 a.d. In 58 a.d. Seneca wrote:

"How often have the cities of Asia and Achaëa fallen with one fatal shock! How many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! How many in Macedonia! How often has Paphos become a ruin. News has often been brought to us of the demolition of whole cities at once."

(In [Luke 21:11](#) we read about "terrors and great signs from heaven," which when taken in the immediate context of famines and earthquakes probably refers to natural phenomena. In particular, we know that a comet appeared around 60 a.d. during Nero's reign, leading to public speculation that some change in the political scene was imminent. Then *Halley's Comet* appeared in 66 a.d. Not long after this, Nero committed suicide. Josephus wrote in *The War of the Jews* that "there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year" [6:5:3,742].)

(As v. 8 makes clear, none of these "sorrows" were meant at any time to mislead Christians into thinking that either his second coming was imminent or that God's judgments against Jerusalem were about to begin.)

### 5. *Persecution and Martyrdom* (vv. 9-10)

Mark's version reads as follows: "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them" (13:9). The reference to "courts/councils/synagogues" indicates that Jesus has in mind first-century fulfillment. After 70 a.d., when the Jewish religious and political systems ceased to exist, there were no councils or synagogues. We see fulfillment of this word in [Acts 4:1-18](#); [5:17-40](#) (synagogues); 12:1; 23:24; 24:27 (governors and kings). See also [Acts 8:1](#).

The reality of v. 10 is caused by the pressures and pains of v. 9 (cf. [1 Jn. 2:19](#); [2 Tim. 1:15](#) ["all those in Asia have turned away from me"]; 4:10 ["Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world"], 16 ["at my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me"]).

### 6. *False prophets* (v. 11)

One need only remember that much of what we read in Galatians, Colossians, 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude was written to counter the activity and influence of false prophets in the early church. See especially Paul's warning in [Acts 20:29-30](#); [Rom. 16:17-18](#); [2 Cor. 11:13](#); [Gal. 2:4](#); and Peter's in [2 Pt. 4:1](#); and John's in [1 John 4:1](#).



### 7. *Religious insurrection and indifference* (v. 12)

(Perseverance, according to v. 13, is the proof of eternal life. The "end" may mean, "right through, all the way, perhaps to the *end* of one's life".)

### 8. *Worldwide preaching of the gospel* (v. 14)

How could this possibly have occurred in the period 33-70 a.d.' It may at first seem strange, but "fundamental principles of interpretation lead us to bear in mind contextual clues: the time indicator ('this generation'), the audience (the disciples who ask about the temple), the specific concern (the destruction of the temple), and the harmony of the preceding signs with the first-century experience. All of these should dispose us to seek a first-century fulfillment of this verse" (Gentry, *The Great Tribulation*, 44). Note two important facts:

a. The words "whole world" (NASB) are a translation of the term *oikoumene*, which literally means an inhabited area, a standard term at that time for the Greek world, then for the Roman empire, and subsequently for the *then known world*. The same Greek word is used in [Luke 2:1](#) – "Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the *inhabited earth*" (*oikoumene*). In [Acts 11:28](#) we read that "one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the *world*, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar." Again, in [Acts 24:5](#), "For we have found this man (Paul) a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the *world*, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." As Gentry notes, "a surface reading of these texts suggests global events. Yet we know these 'world' events happen within the Roman empire of the first century" (44). The reference to the "nations" also indicates that the point is not that every geographical area on the globe must be covered but that all the nations, i.e., Gentiles, must be reached. Did this occur? This leads to the second point.

b. Writing before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., Paul says to the Colossians:

" . . . the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, *just as in all the world* also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth" (1:5b-6).

Again, Paul refers to the gospel, " . . . that you have heard, *which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven*, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister" (1:23).

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed *throughout the whole world*" ([Romans 1:8](#); cf. [10:18](#)).

Thus, prior to 70 a.d. the inhabited earth had indeed heard the gospel, precisely in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24.

Jesus has just disentangled the general signs preceding the soon to fall Jerusalem and the destruction of temple from the end times. He will now disentangle the actual fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple from the second bodily coming of Christ in verses 15-28. It is one sign. The event that will serve to disentangle the two is the "abomination of desolation" that Jesus takes from the prophet Daniel as prophetic and relevant to the destruction of the temple in their lifetime. "When will these things be?" Jesus now answers the disciple's question with the final and ultimate sign of the desecration and destruction of the temple. This happens in 70 AD. In Daniel, the abomination of desolation is mentioned four times and turns out to be fulfilled by Syrian king Antiochus who called himself, "Theos Epiphanes" which means, "manifest God." However, his enemies had another name for him, "Epimanes" which means "madman" or "the insane one". Sam Storms says, "In 168 b.c. Antiochus Epiphanes slaughtered 40,000 Jews and plundered the temple. He sacrificed a pig on the



altar of burnt offering, sprinkled broth from the unclean flesh all over the holy grounds as an act of deliberate defilement. He then erected an image of Zeus above the altar. It was a sacrilege of indescribable proportions indelibly imprinted on the minds of the Jews in Jesus' day." Jesus says a repeat of this was going to happen again to the temple and would be the ultimate and final sign of the fall of Jerusalem.

And it was through Titus and his Roman armies. Again, Sam Storms says:

While the city of Jerusalem was still burning the soldiers brought their legionary standards into the temple precincts and offered sacrifices there, declaring Titus to be victor. The idolatrous representations of Caesar and the Roman eagle on the standards would have constituted the worst imaginable blasphemy to the Jewish people. Identifying Titus and his armies with the A of D is most popular because it seems to parallel the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2nd century b.c. It is important to note that in [Luke 21:20](#) the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies was the signal that her desolation had drawn near. We read in Josephus: "the Romans upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings lying round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy" (Book 6, Ch. 6:1). Thus, although the A of D "involves the destruction of Jerusalem (beginning with its several encirclings by Cestius, Vespasian, Simon, and Titus), it culminates in this final abominable act within the temple itself" (Gentry, 50).

Thus, Jesus' predictions were realized by the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. In verses 16-21, Jesus gives his disciples a plan of escape from the coming great tribulation and destruction. When you see this happening, make sure you get out of there. And they did. Eusebius records that the Christians fled Jerusalem to the town of Pella in Perea. Not one Christian was killed in the Roman onslaught of Jerusalem – only the Jews. The Christians escaped the judgement of this dark time that was similar to the days of the flood with Noah (in fact, we will talk about this next week from the last half of chapter 24). They escape this apocalyptic sounding time because of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Again, the language may sound strange to our ears since we have been conditioned by culture (Hal Lindsey and the late Great Planet Earth, Tim La Haye and the Left Behind series and the all the movies – and pastors who don't do the work of carefully interpreting the words of Jesus within the larger framework of scripture. In other words, letting scripture interpret scripture.) As shown, the language, while seeming strange and end times like to us, were really about a specific event which that generation would live to see; an event of judgment by Jesus who is sitting at the right hand of the Father in power and glory over Israel for the unbelief, denial, rejection and killing of the Messiah – allow that to sink in. This is what prompts the words of the next section, vv. 29-31.

The language of the sun being darkened and the stars falling from heaven seem strange to our ears but to the Jew who knew their Old Testament, not at all. In the OT, this language was used multiple times to describe times of judgement by God. Isaiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Habakkuk and Joel all employ this kind of language to describe God's judgment on Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Israel and Judah. The judgment in this case was Jesus' coming in judgment against Israel. This judgment will result in the end of the Jewish era and will vindicate Jesus as the crucified, resurrected and ascended One. It will make the temple forever obsolete. Then, in verse 30 the disciples are told they would see a sign would appear of the Son of Man in the heaven (this is the literal reading of the verse – the actual reading of the verse, even in the ESV inexplicably moves the phrase "in the heaven" from the end of the sentence where it belongs to near



the beginning. This move changes the emphasis of Jesus' words from focusing of the sign of the Son of Man to the sky. This is important because what actually happens is that they do see the sign of the Son of Man in the Heavens (referring to his ascension to power and glory). Notice they will only see a sign. And that is what they did see in Jesus' coming in judgement (not bodily) over Israel by destroying Jerusalem and the temple through the Roman armies. Jesus spoke extensively about the coming judgement on Israel for their continuing and persistent unbelief in him. Chapter 23 is an entirely about the woes coming upon them and the judgment coming their way. This is the context of chapter 24. Verse 31 speaks of his messengers being sent out to gather the elect from the four winds. This is simply the disciples being witnesses to Jesus and proclaiming the gospel throughout the world during the time of the Gentiles (now that the time of the Jews is completely over). This is the expansion of God's Church to specifically go out to the gentiles around the world with the Good News of Jesus. And that is exactly what has been happening for the past 2,000 years!

The final section is vv. 32-35 and the lesson of the fig tree. Jesus is using a common image of the fig tree to cement in their minds the closeness of this judgement on Israel. The leaves of the fig tree come out later than most, almost to summer. So, just as you seen these signs, especially the signs of great tribulation coming, know that the judgment is imminent. Flee! Pray that it is not on the Sabbath or during winter because it will be even more difficult. Those in the countryside, Jewish families inside the walls of Jerusalem, working men, nursing moms and pregnant women are to flee immediately as destruction was imminent. Indeed, many if not all Christians had already fled based on this warning when previous armies had begun attacking the city four years prior (the city was under siege for four years by Rome before it fell and the temple was desecrated and destroyed in 70 AD.) Inexplicably, except by the providence of God, the army under Cestius retreated from the city for a short time that allowed the Christians to escape. The Jews stayed. And four years later over a million were horribly tortured, abused, persecuted and killed. The horrors are recorded by Josephus who summed it up this way: "It is impossible to give every instance of the iniquity of these men. I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: that neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world" (Book 5, Ch. 10:5). The remaining 100, 000 were sold into slavery. Jerusalem was emptied of every Jew. While horrible, it seems it could have been worse. But God cuts that time short. Whether this prevented the Roman armies to pursue and slaughter Jews in other cities or what we don't know for sure. Remember, Jesus is speaking to the disciples in front of him, not to a people 2000 years later. This jolting display of judgment on Israel has already happened. Yes, there will be another, even greater judgment coming when Jesus bodily returns and judges the entire world to either eternal life with him and to eternal death apart from him in hell. There is some overlap here. The point Jesus is making not to place your hopes in Jerusalem or the temple but on him. He was preparing them for fully disengaging with the temple and see him as The Temple. And, he wants them to wait well; to be ready, alert and expectant; to not be caught off guard.

This is the "So What?" Wait well. Be ready. Pay attention. Don't be focused on the wrong thing. What were the disciples (and Jews) waiting for? What are we waiting for? They were waiting for the rise of Israel to national power and defeat the Roman empire. What did they get instead? National Israel was judged and destroyed by the Roman empire! The complete opposite. They were very proud of the



Jewish heritage and racial identity. They were very nationalistic. This racial pride and nationalism can get in the way of waiting for the right thing – the return of our King, Jesus of Nazareth in glorious judgment over the nations and setting all things right forever. In our day, we too can get too caught up in racial pride, national idolatry. We can get all too busy striving to live the epitome of American success by living the American dream. We can pursue a certain lifestyle that is more about our comfort and security (earthly) than living as witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth and his kingdom on earth today. Maybe we need to slow down, reflect on our priorities, our goals, our purpose. This leads to the “Now What?”

Now What? We need to wait well to by focusing our attention and lives on Jesus of Nazareth. That is our hope for the future is squarely on Jesus and his return as the King of kings to judge the living and the dead and to set everything right for all eternity! But waiting well requires that we slow down so that we don't get distracted by other things. As mentioned at the beginning, we all suffer from hurry sickness to one degree or another. And because of this, we do not love, listen or learn as well as we can. This is important because as we will see in the next three weeks, waiting well is an active activity that is squarely focused on doing the will of God by being active participants in his unfolding drama today. Slow down. Take a breath. Re-focus on Jesus of Nazareth. Some of us might benefit from training ourselves to slow down in order to wait well. We can do things like intentionally choose to drive in the slow lane or picking the longest line at the grocery store (I know, crazy huh!) We can choose to not eat fast food. We can choose to eat and do nothing else but eat and converse with others. Take 30 minutes for lunch. We can walk or ride bikes to places instead of drive. We can marinate instead of microwave. We can say “no” to some good things to make more room in our day to live slower. Of course, we would need to make sure we said “no” to the right good things and not those things that are actually important to our daily living as disciples of Jesus. We can ask the question, “Is this making me a better lover of Jesus, better, listener of Jesus, better learner of Jesus? Or, “Is this making me more successful or rich or liked or secure or comfortable as the world defines these terms? There are so many things we can do to help us slow down so that we can listen to God and each other well; to learn from God and each other well; to love God and others well. What might you do to slow down?

May we be like the disciples of Jesus who believed him and refocused their time and energy to him and his kingdom. May we wait well by slowing our lives so that we might love, listen and learn. We will be talking more about this in the coming three weeks of Advent as we seek to place our hope on the return of our King, Jesus of Nazareth. May the future not frighten us. May media not distort our understanding of Scripture. May our hope be strong and courageous. May we remain moored to Jesus Christ and his gospel and not drift away into political, or social, or economical distractions that clutter our lives, hurry our lives, waste our lives as we stop loving, listening and learning well.

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

**We believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,**



**Was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven  
Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come to judge the living and the dead.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy catholic Church,  
The communion of saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting.**

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

**Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.**

**Song** – It Is Well With My Soul -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul  
It is well (it is well)  
With my soul (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well with my soul  
Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul  
It is well (it is well)  
With my soul (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well with my soul  
My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul  
It is well (it is well)  
With my soul (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well with my soul  
O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;*



*The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend:  
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

*It is well (it is well)  
With my soul (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

**Sending as Disciples of Jesus:**

What are you waiting for? May we enact our identity as disciples, image bearers today through the obedience of faith that is grounded and rooted in the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. May we wait for Jesus Christ, the all glorious One at all times – especially during the regular and normal routines of daily life.

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**Heavenly Father, strengthen us through your Holy Spirit to make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the second coming of Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord and Savior. We ask this so that when he does appear, he will find us active in love, serving you and others as his image bearers and not asleep in sin. So, may your kingdom come and your will be done in this place as it is in heaven. Amen.**