

“When will this Happen?”

(Matthew 24)

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I. Introduction

A. Judgment Day billboards

1. May 21...oops October 21?
2. What was that all about?
 - a. I was embarrassed
 1. A public joke
 2. Even among Christians
 - a. “That was awkward”
 - b. What was it that he (Harold Kamping) was even talking about?
 1. Was it the return of Jesus?
 2. Was it that thing called the “Rapture”
 - c. Didn’t God say we wouldn’t know when?
3. What went through your mind as the hour approached?
 - a. Were you getting ready...just in case?

B. The Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11...and Matthew 6

1. Jesus said to pray for his kingdom to come
 - a. And his will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven
2. The Kingdom is here...sort of...and yet the best is yet to come
3. Next Sunday

a. Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors

b. Scary

4. But first...the return of Christ

C. We all want to know what the future holds

1. Trying to guess the housing market

a. From “how high will it go” to “when will it hit the bottom?”

2. The disciples of Jesus sure wanted to know the future

a. They repeatedly asked, “*When will these things happen?*”

b. They were asking about a special kingdom on earth

3. Let me attempt to answer the question of “when?”

4. Jesus actually answers the question in Matthew 24 and Luke 21

5. A special approach this morning using Matthew 24

a. Source of so much confusion

D. Keys to understanding Matthew 24

1. The source of much confusion

2. Called the “Olivet Discourse”

a. The talk on the Mount of Olives

3. It is Jesus’ answer to “when the end will come”

4. Talking about Israel...not the church

5. Talking about His glorious Second Coming...not the Rapture

6. The “saints” of the church age appear in heaven during the book of Revelation after chapter 4

7. Has to mesh with the rest of Scripture

E. The importance of Daniel

1. How God will finish his business with Israel in Daniel 9
2. A seven-year period called the “time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) Sorrow”
 - a. The “gap” in Daniel 9
3. When they will “mourn for the one they pierced” (Zechariah 12:10)
4. The mystery of the church
 - a. The mystery of its birth on the Day of Pentecost
 - b. The mystery of its departure at the Rapture (I Thessalonians 4)

II. Text

A. Matthew 24:1 *(1) Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.*

A couple of days before Jesus was to be crucified

1. The disciples didn’t understand he was about to die
2. They were still waiting for him to set up the kingdom
3. Jesus had just preached his last public sermon
 - a. Had warned of severe judgment to come
 - b. His closing comments in Matthew 23:38-39

(38) Look, your house is left to you desolate. (39) For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

4. The disciples were commenting on the majesty of the temple in Jerusalem
5. Then he drops another bomb

Matthew 24:2 *(2) “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

B. The Temple will be torn down?

1. Couldn’t believe their ears

- a. The splendor of the Temple
 - b. Quarried stones as large as 40 x 12 x 12
 - 1. 100 tons
 - c. Many covered with gold
 - d. Gleaming white marble
- 2. The temple was torn down in 70 A.D.
 - a. The Roman siege
 - b. Walls burst from the heat
 - c. Filled the valleys with the rubble

C. Yet the temple will be rebuilt

- 1. Matthew 24:15 “the Antichrist standing in the holy place”
- 2. Have to rebuild the temple to have a holy place

D. The Jews are preparing to rebuild the temple

- 1. Today at the Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock
- 2. When the Jews attempt to start building
 - a. Now that’ll be an event
- 3. Will lead to tremendous political upheaval in the Middle East

Matthew 24:3 (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?”*

E. The setting on the Mount of Olives

- 1. Out the eastern gate
- 2. Across the Kidron Valley
- 3. Past the Garden of Gethsemane
- 4. Up the hill called the Mount of Olives

5. Looking back across the valley to Jerusalem and the Temple

F. They were still expecting Jesus to set up the kingdom right then

1. They didn't know Jesus would be crucified in a couple of days.
2. Wanted to know when he was going to do it
3. Their question after his resurrection

a. Acts 1:6

(6) So when they met together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Matthew 24:4-8 *(4) Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, 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.*

G. We are going through "birth pains"

1. Don't be fooled by false messiahs
2. And things will get increasingly worse

H. A time of tribulation is coming

1. Will last for seven years (Daniel 9)
2. Many believe vs. 4-8 refer to the first half of the tribulation
3. Others believe these are the days just prior to the start of the tribulation

I. None of his sermon appears to relate to "the church"

1. Appears to be after of the "rapture" of the church
2. Focus is on Judgment and the Jews
3. "The Second Coming" to set up the kingdom on earth

Matthew 24:9-11 *(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.*

J. “Then” may refer to the start of the second half of the tribulation

1. Or the start of the first half
2. Revelation 5-18 seems to describe this time of persecution in detail
 - a. The betrayal of Israel by the Antichrist
 - b. The Abomination of Desolation
 - c. Bowls of wrath, etc.

Matthew 24:12-14 *(12) Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, (13) but he 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.*

K. Only the true believers will stand firm until the end

1. Saved from physical death

L. The gospel will be preached to the whole world

1. Details in Revelation

Matthew 24:15-16 *(15) So when you see standing in the holy place “The abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—(16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

Some believe this is the start of the second half of the tribulation

M. The Abomination of Desolation

1. The first was by Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria around 168 B.C.
2. Made the altar of the temple a shrine to Zeus
 - a. Sacrificed a pig on it.

N. This speaks of a future disgrace

1. By the Antichrist
2. Signal that the worst is about to happen
3. Flee to the mountains

- a. The caves around the Dead Sea
- b. Petra

Matthew 24:17-20 (17) *Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. (18) Let no one in the field go back to get his 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.*

O. Flee with great haste

Matthew 24:21-22 (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.*

P. The severity of the distress

Q. Days kept short for the sake of the elect of God

- 1. “Chosen ones”
- 2. Saved during the tribulation

Matthew 24:23-26 (23) *At that time if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or, “There he is!” do not believe it. (24) For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. (25) See, I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, “Here he is, in the inner rooms” do not believe it.*

R. Don’t worry about missing the return of Christ

- 1. It will be “the event”
- 2. False prophets will try to wow the crowds in those days

S. Not possible to deceive God’s elect

- 1. Secure in Christ

T. So how will they know that Christ has returned?

Matthew 24:27-29 (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.”*

U. Getting things ready for that “glorious day”

1. As the tribulation ends
2. Utter darkness

V. No one will miss it

1. Lightning lighting up the sky
2. Out of a blackened sky....Jesus will light up the sky

Matthew 24:30-31 *(30) At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (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.*

W. The appearance of Jesus is probably “the sign”

1. Will appear with his angels in power and great glory
2. We (the church) will return from heaven with him
 - a. Right after the marriage supper of the Lamb
 - b. The church is called his Bride
3. To establish the Kingdom
 - a. A place prepared for his bride...the church

X. Why the nations will mourn

Y. Gathering the elect

1. Literally, “his chosen ones”
2. Believers saved during the tribulation
3. Will include masses of converted Jews
4. Some believe this will be the time of the Rapture

Z. Gathering them to enter into the earthly kingdom

1. Or for a brief trip to heaven

1. But, how long before that happens?

Matthew 24:32-33 (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 is near, right at the door.*

2. The Fig Tree

1. The fig tree in my neighbor's yard (California)
 - a. Looked dead
 1. Brown
 2. No leaves
 - b. But come spring?
 1. It bloomed to life!
2. There were signs that it was about to bloom
 - a. Branch becomes tender
 1. Sap begins to flow
 - b. Green
 - c. May not know the exact day—but do know it is coming
3. Same thing with the return of Christ

(33) Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

- a. The second coming is the “it”
 - b. “*it* is near, right at the door”
4. “When you see all these things”
 - a. The signs of prophecy just mentioned
 1. Wars and rumors of wars
 2. Abomination of desolation
 3. Seven years of tribulation

- b. Means Christ will return at any moment
- c. Matthew 24:8 says these are the “birth pains”

3. The fig tree is probably Israel

1. Restored in 1948
 - a. After looking dead for 1900 years
 - b. Sap started flowing again
2. God promised to restore Israel physically and spiritually
3. The tribulation will turn many Jews to Christ

4. The other trees of Luke 21:29

(29) He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees.

1. “All the trees”
 - a. The other nations
2. The Middle East today
 - a. The oil issue
 - b. Iraq and Iran

Matthew 24:34 *(34) I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*

5. Has led to all kinds of speculation

1. Used by some to set a date for the rapture
2. But Jesus wasn’t even speaking of the rapture
3. Talking about his second coming

6. The possible identity of “this generation”

1. *The disciples he was speaking to*
 1. But it didn’t happen in their lifetime

2. They didn't live to see *the* Great Tribulation

3. Didn't live to see his Second Coming

2. *Generation alive in 1948*

a. Generation alive when the fig tree (Israel) came back to life

b. The leaves sprouted in 1948

c. Those born in 1948—

1. Generation?

2. Twenty years or 40 or 80?

d. Jury is still out

3. *Those who will witness the birth pains*

a. The right answer

b. They'll witness the "delivery"

c. "The generation" that witnesses the birth pains—tribulation

1. All will be fulfilled in the lifetime of that generation

d. Encouragement...You'll see my coming and my kingdom

Matthew 24:35 (35) *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

7. To encourage the suffering believers of the tribulation

1. Hang in there!

2. Won't be much longer!

8. Heaven and Earth may pass away

1. And they were about to

2. But God's promises will never pass away

Matthew 24:36 (36) *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

9. Jesus now returns to their original question

1. "When will these (second coming) things happen?"

10. Only God the Father knows when the Glorious Return will occur

1. Same answer in Acts 1:6-7

(6) So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

11. All previous attempts to figure it out have been wrong

1. The decision of the Jewish father to send his son to get his bride

Matthew 24:37-39 *(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.*

12. Some time after the tribulation ends?

1. People going about their business

13. This is not talking about the rapture

Matthew 24:40-41 *(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.*

14. Who gets "left behind?"

1. Actually it's the believers on earth who are left behind
 - a. To go directly into the Kingdom
2. Sinners taken away to face God's judgment
3. Different from the rapture (I Thess. 4 and II Thess. 5)
 - a. Sinner left behind

Matthew 24:42 *(42) Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day our Lord will come.*

15. The key message

1. I'm coming to establish the kingdom on earth
2. No one but God the Father knows the exact time
3. We should be ready and about his business at all times

16. What does it mean to be ready?

III. Summary

A. What if October 21st really is the day?

1. Four months....120 days
2. What would you do differently?

B. Looking toward that “glorious day”

*One day the trumpet will sound for His coming
 One day the skies with his glories will shine
 Wonderful day my beloved one bringing
 My Savior Jesus is mine
 Living He loved me
 Dying He saved me
 Buried He carried my sins far away
 Rising He justified freely forever
 One day He's coming
 O glorious day*