

Jesus Prepares His People for the End: *A Study of Matthew 24-25*

Lesson One: Matthew 24:1-14

Background

Matthew 24:1-2

1. What prompted this discussion about the end of the world?
2. What event is Jesus talking about in verse two?

Matthew 24:3

3. Note that Jesus' disciples are asking more than one question in verse three (although we could debate whether they saw what they were asking about as separate things). What are their questions?

Matthew 24:4-8

4. List the events that Jesus says will take place before the end of the world.
5. Which of these are taking place already?
6. Explain Jesus statement that "All these are the beginning of birth pains."

Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article iv: "Because monastic vows are in direct conflict with the first and chief article, they should simply be done away with. It is about these that Christ spoke in Matthew 24[:5*] ("I am Christ..."). For those who vow to live a monastic life believe that they lead a better life than the ordinary Christian, and through their works they intend to help not only themselves but others get to heaven. This is known as denying Christ, etc. They boast, on the basis of their St. Thomas, that monastic vows are equal to baptism. This is blasphemy against God."

7. React to Luther's quote, and apply it to our lives.

Matthew 24:9-14

8. Which of the things that Jesus predicts here concern you the most? Why?

9. Apply these verses to our lives as Christians, as a congregation, and as a synod.

10. Why do you think Jesus tells us all these negative things? Wouldn't it be better not to know?

11. Some churches teach a triumphant and prosperous reign of Christ and the Church on earth before the end of time. What do these verses say to that?

12. What does Jesus say will immediately precede his return?

Philip Melancthon, Apology to the Augsburg Confession (1531), Art. XII: "These are the last times, during which Christ predicted there would be the many perils for religion."

13. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. For centuries, believers have recognized the signs Jesus gave. What good are they?

14. What does Jesus say will immediately precede his return?

15. Read 2 Peter 3:8-9. Combining this with what we've heard from Jesus in Matthew 24, what insight and comfort do we gain for the End Times?

For Next Time:

- Review: Read Matthew 24:1-14, Mark 13:1-13, Luke 21:5-19
- Preview: Read Matthew 24:15-35, Mark 13:14-31, Luke 21:20-33

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Lesson Two: Matthew 24:15-35

Review

- What question(s) had the disciples asked Jesus that prompted his teaching in Matthew 24-25? (v. 3)
- What are some of the signs that the end of the world is near? (v. 4-13)
- What does Jesus say will happen right before his return? (v. 13)
- What is “prophetic perspective,” and how does it help us to understand the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and of Jesus’ return on the Last Day?

Matthew 24:15-25

This phrase “abomination that causes desolation” is used three times in the prophet Daniel (9:27, 11:31, and 12:11), each time referring to one or more of the following:

- a. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (168 b.c.)
 - b. The Destruction of Jerusalem (70 a.d.)
 - c. The Work of the Antichrist (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4)
 - d. The Last Day
1. How does the parallel account in Luke 21:20 help us to understand what Jesus is referring to here?
 2. Why do you think Jesus adds the comment, “Let the reader understand”?
 3. Describe what you would have been feeling, if you had been there to hear Jesus’ words directly.
 4. How does Jesus show that his warning applies not only to those living in the city itself?

5. Read Daniel 12:1-3. Jesus' words here are very similar to what the prophet wrote. Look carefully at v. 21. Which of the following do you think this verse refers to, and why?
 - a. The destruction of Jerusalem
 - b. Jesus' return on the Last Day
 - c. (a), foreshadowing (b)

6. What does it mean that the days were "cut short...for the sake of the elect"?

7. What remarkable attribute of God do we see, even as he threatens judgment and destruction?

8. How is a time like the destruction of Jerusalem a prime time for "false Christs and false prophets"? Apply this to our day.

9. Comment on the warning and comfort in Jesus' words: "to deceive even the elect—if that were possible."

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration: Article XI: God's eternal election not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect but is also a cause of our salvation and whatever pertains to it, on the basis of the gracious will and good pleasure of God in Christ Jesus. As this cause, it creates, effects, aids, and promotes our salvation. Our salvation is founded upon it, so that "the gates of hell" [Matt. 16:18] may not have any power against this salvation, as is written, "No one will snatch my sheep out of my hand" [John 10:28]. And again, "As many as had been destined for eternal life became believers" [Acts 13:48].

Matthew 24:26-31

10. Identify words or phrases that show that we are no longer talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in these verses.

11. How do these verses exclude the idea of an invisible return of Christ to rule with the saints or the rapture of believers up into heaven leaving some behind?

12. Describe the events of the Last Day.

13. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. What is the significance of the “loud trumpet call”?

Matthew 24:32-35

14. Explain Jesus’ point about the fig tree.

15. Our understanding of verse 34 depends upon what Jesus means by “these things.” Noting the immediate context of verses 32-33, what do you think Jesus means by “these things”?

16. Why is verse 35 comforting to Christians, especially in view of the End Times?

For Next Time:

- Review: Read Matthew 24:15-35, Mark 13:14-31, Luke 21:20-33
- Preview: Read Matthew 24:36-51, Mark 13:32-36, Luke 21:34-36

Brief Summary of the Destruction of Jerusalem

The destruction of Jerusalem, as was mentioned, prefigured the end of the world and signaled the beginning of that end. When Jesus approached the city on Sunday of the Passion Week, he wept over it and said, “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Lk 19:43–44). Two days later he again warned his disciples, “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (Lk 21:20).

Josephus has detailed the horrors of this prophecy’s fulfillment. When the Jews rebelled against the tyranny of Rome, the Roman legions under Titus moved swiftly to crush the revolt. In the year 70 they laid siege to Jerusalem. The city’s population was swollen with refugees who poured in from the countryside. A plague broke out, and thousands died. Hundreds tried to escape, but the ever-alert Roman legionaries caught and crucified as many as five hundred a day. Hunger stalked the streets of the doomed city, and mothers cannibalized their own children.

Finally, Titus captured the castle of Antonia. A torch was put to the temple, and the hill on which it stood was soon carpeted with corpses. A river of blood flowed down its slopes. Over a million Jews either died of starvation and disease or were killed. A hundred thousand were carried away as prisoners of war. The Roman soldiers planted their eagles on the smoldering ruins, offered sacrifices to their gods and proclaimed Titus *Imperator*. Such was the horrible fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation in the holy place (Dn 9:27; 12:11) to which Jesus alluded in Matthew 24:15 (cf. Lk 21:20), and such was the appalling way in which Jesus’ words concerning the people were carried out, “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations” (Lk 21:24). To this day the Jews are scattered among all nations.

(Wilbert Gawrisch, “Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations, Lecture II,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 84:202-3)

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Lesson Three: Matthew 24:36-51

Review

- What two events are seen side-by-side from a “prophetic perspective” in Matthew 24?
- Identify phrases from v. 26-31 that show that Christ’s return will be unmistakable and universally recognized.

Matthew 24:36

1. Read Luke 2:52, John 17:5, and Philippians 2:5-8. How do these passages help us to understand how not even Jesus knows the day or hour of the Last Day?

Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VIII: According to the personal union he always possessed this [divine] majesty, and yet dispensed with it in the state of his humiliation. For this reason he grew in stature, wisdom, and grace before God and other people [Luke 2:52]. Therefore, he did not reveal his majesty at all times but only when it pleased him, until he completely laid aside the form of a servant [Phil. 2:7] (but not his human nature) after his resurrection. Then he was again invested with the full use, revelation, and demonstration of his divine majesty and entered into his glory, in such a way that he knows everything, is able to do everything, is present for all his creatures, and has under his feet and in his hands all that is in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, not only as God but also as human creature, as he himself testifies, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” [Matt. 28:18], and St. Paul writes: He ascended “above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things” [Eph. 4:10]. As present everywhere he can exercise this power of his, he can do everything, and he knows all things.

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Of course, he also possessed this majesty from his conception in the womb of his mother, but, as the Apostle testifies [Phil. 2:7], he emptied himself of that majesty, and as Dr. Luther explains, he kept it secret in his state of humiliation and did not use it all the time but only when he wanted to.

John Schaller (1859-1920), *Biblical Christology* (p. 86-87): Although the human nature of Jesus Christ was endowed with divine majesty by virtue of the personal union with the Logos, he voluntarily gave up full use of these prerogatives for a season, bearing and suffering in the form of a servant that which he could not have taken upon himself if he had exercised the communicated attributes to their full extent.

Matthew 24:37-39

2. In what ways will the “coming of the Son of Man” be like the days of Noah?

3. Read Genesis 6:3 and 2 Peter 2:5. What is the only way that the people “knew nothing about what would happen”?

4. How is this like “how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man”?

For Further Study

Read the other New Testament references to the flood, and note similarities and differences to Jesus’ point here:

- Luke 17:20-37
- Hebrews 11:7
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- 2 Peter 2:1-10
- 2 Peter 3:3-8

Matthew 24:40-41

5. What popular false teaching are these verses used to support?

6. Read Matthew 25:34,41. What does it mean to be “taken” (literally “taken along”)? What does it mean to be “left”?

7. In context, what is clearly Jesus’ point in these two verses?

Matthew 24:42-44

8. Explain Jesus’ brief parable about the homeowner whose house was broken into.

9. What is the only way that Jesus is like the thief in the night?

10. Jesus says, “keep watch,” and, “be ready.” What does each add to how Jesus expects us to wait for his return? (Note: Both thoughts are stated in a way that says, “Always be doing this; don’t stop”)

11. How do these verses show that it is foolish to try to figure out when Christ will return?

Matthew 24:45-51

12. Explain the parable:
 - a. Who is the master?
 - b. Who are the servants?
 - c. What does the master expect of his servants?

13. Read Jeremiah 23:28 and 1 Peter 4:10.
 - a. What is the “food” our master entrusts to us until his return?
 - b. How does he expect us to use it?

14. What leads the servant in the story to be unfaithful? How is this a warning for us?
15. What kind of behaviors in our lives might verses 48-49 be describing?
16. Verses 50-51 might suggest that Jesus hopes to catch people off-guard so that he can punish us. Read Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, and 2 Peter 3:8-9. Why did Jesus say what he did in Matthew 25:36-51?

For Next Time:

- Review: Read Matthew 24:36-51, Mark 13:32-36, Luke 21:34-36
- Preview: Read Matthew 25:1-13

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Lesson Four: Matthew 25:1-13

Review

- How could Jesus say that he didn't know the day or hour of the Last Day? (24:36)
- How will Jesus' return on the Last Day be like the coming of the flood in Noah's day? (24:37-39)
- What two different but related commands does Jesus give us, as we wait for his return? (24:42-44)

Background

- Waiting for the Bridegroom
- Lamps

Matthew 25:1-13

We need to be careful not to over-analyze or over-interpret Jesus' parables. Some of the details just fill out the story but don't necessarily add to the point of the parable.

1. What is the main point of the parable?
2. Recall who Jesus' audience is, as he speaks these words (See Matthew 24:3). How does that affect our understanding of this parable?

3. What similarities do you see to what Jesus said in 24:42-44?

4. What differences do you see?

Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article XXI: We contend, however, that we are justified by the merits of Christ alone, not by the merits of the blessed Virgin or the other saints. It has been said about other saints [1 Cor. 3:8], "each will receive wages according to the labor of each," that is, they cannot bestow their own merits on one another like the monks who peddle the merits of their orders. Even Hilary says of the foolish virgins, "Since the foolish virgins could not go out with their lamps extinguished, they begged the wise ones to lend them oil. These latter replied that they could not give it because there might not be enough for all. That is, no one can be helped by the works and merits of another, because it is necessary for each one to buy oil for one's own lamp."

5. How did Melancthon apply this parable to the Roman Catholic practice of praying to the saints and applying their "treasury of merits" to the lives of other believers?

6. "Sir! Sir!" (*κύριε, κύριε*) is translated in other passages as "Lord, Lord." Read the following passages. Describe those who will hear Jesus say, "I don't know you."
 - a. Luke 6:46-49

 - b. Matthew 7:15-23

7. Agree or Disagree:
 - a. This parable teaches that half the world will go to heaven and half to hell.

 - b. This parable teaches that everyone will be alive when he comes again.

For Next Time:

- Review: Read Matthew 25:1-13
- Preview: Read Matthew 25:14-30

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Lesson Five: Matthew 25:14-30

Review

- What is the main point of Jesus' parable of the ten virgins? (v. 13)

- Describe some of those who will hear Jesus say on the Last Day, "I don't know you."

Background

- Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

1. What similarities do you see between this parable and the parable Jesus told in Luke 19:11-27?

2. What differences do you see?

3. What do the "talents" in the parable represent?

Matthew 25:14-15

4. Comment on the significance of entrusting different amounts to different servants.

5. How does the master determine what he will entrust to each servant?

6. What is the significance of this in how we view what has been entrusted to us?

Matthew 25:16-18

7. Comment on these phrases in v. 16:

- “went at once”
- “put his money to work”

8. Comment on this phrase in v. 18:

- “his master’s money”

Matthew 25:19-23

9. Agree or disagree: The master rewards his servants for successfully gaining a return on his investment.

10. The reward for faithful service is not to be released from responsibility but to be given more of it. It is not to “retire” from serving the Lord but to have more opportunity to serve him. React.

Matthew 25:24-27

11. Was the master “hard” to the point of being cruel or dishonest? Why or why not?

12. How did the one-talent servant trap himself with his own words?

13. What was Jesus trying to teach us in depicting the one-talent servant as the unfaithful one?

Matthew 25:21,23,29

14. What ultimate reward do faithful servants have to look forward to?

15. What details from the parable teach us that this is a reward of grace (rather than based on merit)?

Matthew 25:14-30

16. How does this parable fit into a discussion of the end times?

For Next Time:

- Review: Read Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27
- Preview: Read Matthew 25:31-46

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Lesson Six: Matthew 25:31-46

Review

- Recall the timing of these words of Jesus (see 26:1-2).
- What do the talents of money in Jesus' parable (25:31-46) represent in our lives?
- How does the generosity of the giver of the "talents" affect how they are used?
- Choose one word to describe how Jesus wants us to use our "talents."

Matthew 25:31-33

1. Identify three events that will take place on the Last Day.
2. Read Daniel 7:13-14 and John 5:22,27. What significance do you see in the title Jesus chooses for himself in Matthew 25:31?
3. How universal is the judgment Jesus is describing?

Matthew 25:34-40

4. In what ways does verse 34 show that the blessings of heaven are not based on merit?

5. Read Ephesians 1:3-11 and 1 Peter 1:18-20.
 - Name some things that have been done “since the creation of the world.”
 - What is the impact of knowing that?
6. What are your observations about the types of works that Jesus praises?
7. Why do those on Jesus’ right not realize the works they have done?
8. Why did Jesus mention outward fruits of faith and not those of the heart, which he is certainly fully aware of?
9. Read Isaiah 43:25. Why won’t Jesus mention our failures on the Last Day?
10. The only words that Jesus reports from the righteous on the Last Day seem to be their argument *against* going to heaven. How does this differ from how some have imagined it will be when they “stand before God”?
11. Who are “these brothers of mine”?
12. Read the quote below, and discuss the high privilege God gives us to do good works to and for him.

Luther says that God wears masks when he interacts with man. On Halloween, a child wears a mask to turn his cherubic face into the haunting face of a ghoul, that he might scare someone. But consider our God! His is a face at which all the cherubim cover their eyes; from his face shines glory so great, and beauty so indescribable, that no one in earth or heaven can fully bear that sight. He wears a mask that we might not be scared, but succored; that we might not be killed but cared for.

What is the mask that God wears to interact with the world? You. He wears you and your works and your ways. He puts you on and wears that mask as he protects and preserves this world. Here is life with high dignity. Not only that you should be called sons of God, but that God would use you and even the

smallest things you do to care for his world. The masks of God are "the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings. For examples, he gives to the mother breasts and milk for her infant or gives grain and all sorts of fruit from the earth for sustenance—things no creature could produce for itself." (Luther's Large Catechism, First Commandment)

God feeds your children; but he wears a mask when he does it, the mask of Christian father. God protects the helpless, but he wears a mask when he does it—the mask of Christian police officer. God comforts and heals the sick, but he wears a mask when he does it—Christian nurses and doctors. Here is the high dignity in whatever sphere or role God has assigned the Christian.

The Christian autoworker heads to the plant each day knowing that even the repetitive nature of his job cannot take away the dignity of being God's mask to provide for his family. The Christian homemaker covered in baby food knows that lack of recognition for her work cannot take away the dignity of God wearing her as a mask today to care for these young ones. From janitor to general manager, from engineer to day laborer, God has given every Christian a calling to serve the needs of neighbor and family, with the high dignity of fulfilling God's purpose as his mask.

Suddenly the works of active righteousness that avail us nothing for salvation are of infinite worth here on earth. Here on earth, our acts of righteousness become the acts of God wearing the mask—the mask of us. (Jonathan Schroeder, "Our Calling," essay delivered to the 60th Biennial Convention of WELS, July 27-29, 2009, page 12)

13. How does this perspective affect how we live our lives?

Matthew 25:41-46

14. Look carefully at verse 34 and verse 41. What differences do you note?

15. Read Hebrews 11:6, Galatians 2:20, and John 15:4-5. What is the difference between the "good" things unbelievers do and the good deeds that Jesus praises in believers?

16. Read 1 Timothy 2:3-4. Comment on the significance of Jesus' statement that the eternal fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels."

17. What does verse 46 say about the concept of purgatory (a place where sinners are sent to suffer to pay for the rest of their sins before entering heaven)?

18. Read Hebrews 9:27 and Luke 23:43. If judgment takes place at the moment of death, what is Jesus describing that will happen on the Last Day?

Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See (CW 219)

Lord, when your glory I shall see
And taste your kingdom's pleasure,
Your blood my royal robe shall be,
My joy beyond all measure!
When I appear before your throne,
Your righteousness shall be my crown;
With these I need not hide me.
And there, in garments richly wrought,
As your own bride I shall be brought
To stand in joy beside you.