

October 13, 2019

“When Will These Things Be?”
Matthew 24:1-28

FCF: The danger of going astray in our search

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Author of the story has told us how it will end.
(magnet) We need to carefully consider what He has to say.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Search For Buried Treasure Linked To Illinois Man's Death At Yellowstone” ([READ](#)):

(In the summer of 2017), 53-year-old Jeff Murphy was hiking in Yellowstone National Park when he disappeared. Park investigators found his body on June 9, where Murphy had fallen 500 feet from Turkey Pen Peak, after accidentally stepping into a chute.

But he wasn't on just any hike. He was [looking for a treasure box of gold and jewels](#) worth up to \$2 million, buried somewhere in the Rocky Mountains by an eccentric millionaire named Forrest Fenn.

Fenn, an art dealer and millionaire in his 80s, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In his self-published memoir, Fenn included a poem that supposedly leads to the treasure he hid in the mountains.

"The ornate, Romanesque box is 10-by-10 inches and weighs about 40 pounds when loaded...Fenn has only revealed that it is hidden in the Rocky Mountains, somewhere between Santa Fe and the Canadian border at an elevation above 5,000 feet. It's not in a mine, a graveyard, or near a structure."

Murphy is the fourth man to die while searching for the chest.

There is a danger in going astray in our search for treasure. Or even for meaning and answers.

Jesus knows this. Our hearts long to connect with spiritual things, including the desire to know how things will ultimately end. Jesus knows this and speaks to the danger of going astray.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 24:1-28](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

A “spoiler” is when someone reveals an unknown aspect of something you likely would have rather learned on your own. Hence, the term “spoiler alert” when something is about to be given away. Here are some classic examples. “Did you know the Planet of the Apes was Earth all along?” “What? Darth Vader is Luke’s father?” “No! Snape killed Dumbledore!” Those are spoilers. They ruin the experience. To learn how things end before you get there is always bad.

Well, almost always. Not every spoiler is bad. There is one that is quite good. The exception is with the story of the world, the great meta-narrative in which we live. The Author of that story has told us how it will end. And we need to carefully consider what He has to say.

A recap of where we are. Jesus has ridden into the city of Jerusalem to the praise of the people. He has judged and cleansed the Temple. He has warned the people about the religious authorities and warned the religious authorities about their hypocrisy. He has shouted sobering woes upon them. And cried a sad lament over them. Which brings us to this ([READ Matthew 24:1-3](#)). The rest of chapters 24 and 25 are Jesus’ answer to these questions. Again, the Author of the story has told us how it will end. We need to carefully consider what He has to say.

That careful consideration touches on three things. First, the humility of our approach. Second, the reality of these events. Third, the necessity to prepare. Let’s look at each of these.

I. THE HUMILITY OF OUR APPROACH

First, the humility of our approach. We need to recognize that there are different levels of clarity to be had with biblical teaching. The truths expressed in the ancient creeds and the solas of the Reformation are obvious. But other things are less so. And we need to know that.

A) *Jesus' Very Words*

Jesus' very words as He starts to answer these questions point to the need for humility.

1. The caution

He begins with a caution (**READ Matthew 24:4**). "Don't be deceived or drawn away."

2. The reason

Why does He have to say that? Verses 5-14 tell us. He says, "For..." and then lists "signs of the times" - characteristics of the last days, the times between the times, the days in which we now live. False teachers, wars and rumors of wars, persecution, apostasy, and the spread of the gospel - these things have all been true since Jesus' day and will intensify as we reach the end. And so Jesus says, "It's going to be hard and get worse before it gets better. So don't be led astray."

B) *Things Worth Noting*

That demands a humility as we read such things. Some other points are worth noting.

1. Three types of passages

We need to take into account that there are different types of passages that speak of the last days. First, imminence passages - it could be any minute. Second, interval passages - be ready to wait. Third, ignorance passages - we have no idea when. All three are mixed within Matthew 24-25.

2. Two different periods

Something else to take into account. Not just three types of passages but two time periods are in view - the already and the not yet. The "already" are things that have been fulfilled. The "not yet" are things that await fulfillment. And, again, we see both of these here in Matthew 24-25.

All of which should steer us towards a humility in our approach to what Jesus says.

Application:

The Gospel message itself demands humility in all things. And complications such as we see here do as well. "But can we be certain of anything with Jesus' return?" Absolutely. Listen to these words from the angels to the disciples after Jesus' ascension (**READ Acts 1:11**). Did you catch it? We can *know* three things. His return will surely be personal, visible, and glorious.

That much we know for sure. But again, the Author of the story has told us how it will end. We need to carefully consider what He has to say. And that begins with a humble approach.

II. THE REALITY OF THE EVENTS

Which takes us to this, the reality of the events. Remember the "already and the not yet."

A) *The Fall of Jerusalem*

Jesus speaks here of the certain and coming fall of Jerusalem (**READ Matthew 24:15-20**).

1. Abomination of desolation

This "abomination of desolation," a detestable devastation, was in 70 A.D. We read Daniel 9:27 earlier. There were levels of fulfillment to this. One was in 167 B.C. during the Maccabees era - a crass defiling of the Temple. Another defilement would come with the Roman siege of the city.

2. A great tribulation

It was a time of “great tribulation,” mega tribulation - affliction, distress, and oppression. Which is the reason for Jesus’ warning. “When you see this, get out. Go and don’t delay. Just run!”

Illustration:

Flavius Josephus was a 1st century Jewish historian. No other source, other than the Bible, gives more relevant information of those times. This is part of an excerpt from his work, *The Jewish War*, recounting the terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple ([READ quote](#)):

While the Temple was ablaze, the attackers plundered it, and countless people who were caught by them were slaughtered. There was no pity for age and no regard was accorded rank; children and old men, laymen and priests, alike were butchered; every class was pursued and crushed in the grip of war, whether they cried out for mercy or offered resistance. Through the roar of the flames streaming far and wide, the groans of the falling victims were heard; such was the height of the hill and the magnitude of the blazing pile that the entire city seemed to be ablaze; and the noise - nothing more deafening and frightening could be imagined. There were the war cries of the Roman legions as they swept onwards en masse, the yells of the rebels encircled by fire and sword, the panic of the people who, cut off above, fled into the arms of the enemy, and their shrieks as they met their fate. The cries on the hill blended with those of the multitudes in the city below; and now many people who were exhausted and tongue-tied as a result of hunger, when they beheld the Temple on fire, found strength once more to lament and wail. Peraea and the surrounding hills, added their echoes to the deafening din. But more horrifying than the din were the sufferings. The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives.

B) A Foreshadowing of the Last Day

But the fall of Jerusalem, horrible as it was, was but a foreshadowing of the last day.

1. A real but symbolic event

([READ Matthew 24:21-22](#)) The fall of Jerusalem would have felt like the end. That said, real and traumatic as it was, it was symbolic, a foreshadowing and prefiguring of something worse.

2. Prophetic foreshortening

As we listen to Jesus in vv.21-22, we need to understand the concept of prophetic foreshortening. Events in the distant and near future can look close together. Something like as we gaze over distant mountain peaks, many miles apart, that look close together. Jesus is speaking that same way here, seeing at once both the destruction of 70 A.D. and things beyond that as well.

Not that one horizon is real and the other is not. There is a sure reality to all these events.

Application:

The Christian message is more than history but it is not less. The Bible is full of names, places, and events. It has genealogies and maps. There is a gritty reality to it ([READ Matthew 24:2](#)). This is not a metaphor. You can walk the pavement today and see where those stones fell.

Keep in mind that Jesus spoke these words decades before this happened. It was wise to listen to Him about those events. And it is wise to listen to Him about the events yet to come.

The Author of the story tells us how it will end. We need to consider what He has to say.

III. THE NECESSITY TO PREPARE

But what was Jesus’ point in all this? The need to prepare ([READ Matthew 24:23-28](#)).

A) The Warning Jesus Gave Them

This is now the second time Jesus presses in with these warnings of what to watch for.

1. What they heard

“Look out for false prophets, telling you all is well.” The desolation and tribulation was coming.

2. What they did

And, according to ancient records, many of those early disciples listened. They headed into the Judean mountains and then went north, through the Jordan valley to Pella. And they were safe.

B) The Warning Jesus Gives Us

For they heeded the warning Jesus gave them. And we need to do the same.

1. Not charts

But note that Jesus did not give us charts. He did not give us dates of when He would return.

2. But signs

He gave us signs, things to look for - birth pangs - which would help us to then be prepared.

The assurance is that something is coming. And so then the necessity of being prepared.

Illustration:

Think about what we see in the wild this time every year. From deer to birds to bears, many animals are triggered by the shortening days to switch into a preparation mode. It might mean gathering food, finding mates, migration. But whatever it may be, they are getting ready.

Application:

That’s the point of Jesus’ charge - for us to be awake and alert, vigilant and ready, waiting and watchful. It is not to waste time on forecasts and predictions. That is not the emphasis of His words at all. So put the charts away. They are a distraction. They are far more sensational than helpful. What then? Jesus wants to see faithfulness from His followers, not forecasts.

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CONCLUSION:

Some things do need to be read with care. We know that from everyday experience. You can spoil recipes, ruin laundry, wreck engines if you don’t read with care. Your application for a job or the results of your final exam could be at stake. Or even where you end up. I still remember seeing Michael Lewis on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* back in 1985. Who was Michael Lewis? He was the guy who traveled half-way around the world and back because he boarded the wrong plane in Los Angeles, thinking his flight was going to Oakland, CA when it was really heading to Auckland, New Zealand. Foreign accents and a series of miscues changed his itinerary from a 400-mile trip to a 6,500-mile journey. And that was just one way.

Some things need to be read with care. That’s true for travel. How much more so Jesus’ words of His return? Our humility, these realities, and the necessity of preparation. The Author of the story has told us how it will end. We need to carefully consider what He has to say.

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