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Matthew 24:35 - 24:44



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg discusses Matthew chapter 24, emphasizing the difference between the signs of destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the actual Second Coming of Christ. He explains that there are indicators that foretell the former, but no signs for the latter. Gregg warns against fatalism and encourages listeners to pay attention to what Jesus actually says, pointing out that mundane activities such as eating, drinking, and getting married are not inherently sinful and that people make plans for the future. Ultimately, Gregg underscores that the Second Coming will be unexpected and judgmental, catching everyone by surprise.

Transcript

Today we're beginning our study in Matthew at chapter 24, verse 35. Matthew 24, verse 35. Now, we've been covering this discourse for probably a couple of weeks now, and this is called the All of It Discourse, in which Jesus responds to the questions of His disciples, who ask Him, when will the temple be destroyed? Jesus predicted it would happen, and they said, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And in putting this discourse together, Matthew has done something rather interesting, and that is that he has taken two separate discourses of Christ and put them into one chapter as if they were one protracted discourse.

The reason we know that he's done this is because if we look at the parallel material in the Gospel of Luke, we find that there are two discourses. One of them is found in Luke chapter 17, and one is found in Luke chapter 21. And these two discourses are given on different occasions, actually to different audiences, about different subjects, and yet Matthew has taken them and put them together into one chapter.

Now, lest anybody think that this is a criticism of Matthew or a defect in Matthew, let me make it very clear. Matthew is not doing anything tricky or dishonest or wrong or even inaccurate. What Matthew does in his Gospel generally is to group the sayings of Jesus topically.

There are five discourses, large discourses, in the Gospel of Matthew, and each one of

these discourses is a composite of several things that Jesus said on different occasions. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is six times as long as the Sermon on the Mount in Luke. However, the additional material that's found in Matthew's version is found in Luke elsewhere, in other places.

Likewise with the other discourses in Matthew, Matthew has gathered the sayings of Jesus that Jesus gave on various occasions, and he's put them together in a topical arrangement, and this chapter is no different than his normal policy. Jesus on two occasions gave discourses about future things. One of them is recorded in Luke chapter 17, and that is apparently a discourse about the second coming of Christ.

The other is recorded in Luke 21, which is apparently a discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Now, until we realize this, we'll be at a loss to know what to think of Matthew 24, because Jesus gave two separate discourses on different occasions to different audiences on different subjects. In Luke 17, he spoke about the second coming of himself and the end of the world.

In Luke 21, he spoke about the destruction of the temple, which happened in 70 AD. Matthew has taken both of these discourses and put them together one after the other. Now, we have studied in our previous sessions Matthew 24, verses 1 through 34.

If you consider the parallels in Luke, you will find that the material we have just covered in these previous sessions is parallel to Luke 21, which is Jesus teaching about the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. And we have seen, at least I have sought to demonstrate, I don't know whether anyone has stood convinced of this or not, but I have sought to demonstrate that the verses in the first 34 verses of Matthew 24 do in fact, as does Luke 21, predict the events of that period within that generation, all those things took place. However, when we come to verse 35 and the verses following, we find that we are now looking at material that does not parallel Luke 21, as the previous material has done.

The material before us now parallels Luke 17, a different discourse on a different subject. In Luke 17, let me just show you the difference in the subject matter. We have already looked many times at Luke 21 as a reference to the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem.

But in Luke 17, beginning at verse 20, we read, Now when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, See here or see there, for indeed the kingdom of God is within you, or we could translate, is within your midst, or is in your midst, among you. Then he said to the disciples, The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and not see it. And they will say to you, Look here or look there.

Do not go after them. Do not follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also shall the Son of Man be in his day.

But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will also be in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot, they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But on the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

In that day, he who is on the housetop and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise, the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife.

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed, the one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding together, one will be taken and the other left.

Two men will be in the field, the one will be taken and the other left. And they answered and said to him, Where, Lord? So he said to them, Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Now there are a few verses in Luke 17 which we've just read that have been reproduced in Matthew 24 in the earlier portions.

They've just been kind of mixed in there. And we can see that by mixing these two discourses, the one in Luke 21 and the one in Luke 17, Matthew has sort of blended them in a certain way. But what we come to now in these later verses of Matthew 24 do not correspond with the Luke 21 discourse on the events of 70 AD, but they actually correspond with the Luke 17 passage about the second coming of Christ.

Now the transition that is used here is rather interesting because in verse 34, which closes out the first section, this is Matthew 24, 34, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things are fulfilled. Okay, well, that has to do with the things he's spoken of previous to that. All those things were fulfilled in that generation.

That was the destruction of Jerusalem. And then Jesus said in verse 35, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour, no one knows.

No, not even the angels of heaven, but my father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood, they were

eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming.

Then he went on and said some more things that we'll talk about later. At this point we have our work cut out for us for this session. Now, how is it that Jesus transitions, or in Matthew's combination of things that Jesus said, is the transition made from that discussion in the earlier verses about 70 A.D. to a discussion about the second coming of Christ? Well, the transition is very smooth.

In verse 35, Jesus said, That is, even though the created universe is, because it is physical, it is temporal, and it will have an end, yet the words of Jesus, which are life and they are spirit, according to his own statement on the subject, in John chapter 6, verse 63, he said, Now, even though the heavens and the earth pass away, his words will not. But what about this matter of the heavens and the earth passing away? Well, he says in verse 36, Now, notice the contrast here. When it comes to the destruction of the temple, Jesus was able to put a time frame on it.

He was able to say, this generation will not pass until all these things come about. That was a time limitation Jesus put on the events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. However, when it comes to when the heavens and the earth are going to pass away, the end of the world, he said, Now, there's a contrast here. Because there would be signs and indicators to foretell when 70 A.D., when the temple was going to be destroyed.

Jesus gave those indicators in the earlier part of the chapter. However, when it comes to a discussion of the end of the world, there is no indicator of when that will be. He said that even the angels of heaven don't know it, and in one of the parallels, he actually says, even the son, meaning himself, even I don't know, he says.

So, there is another subject here. There is the destruction of Jerusalem, and then there is the end of the world. Of the first, he says, this generation will not pass until it happens.

Of the second, he says, no one knows when that's going to happen. No one knows when the heavens and the earth will pass away. Not even the angels of heaven.

But only my father knows that. Now, see, the point is that God does know when that will be, but he hasn't revealed that. And at the time when Jesus was on earth, his father hadn't even revealed it to him.

Nor to the angels. So, that's one of the most closely guarded secrets in the mind of God. And that is, when will the heavens and the earth pass away? When will the earth end?

Well, some have speculated about that and tried to put dates on it.

But they've usually done so on a very shaky basis. And that is, they usually assume that the signs that we read of earlier in Matthew 24 apply to the end of the world. And then they look and say, well, it looks like these signs are happening now.

So, we must be near that time. And they don't realize that the signs in the earlier part of this chapter were not signs of the end. They were signs of the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in the first century.

When it comes to the actual second coming of Christ, there are no signs that he gives. As to when it is near. For example, he said it will be like the days of Noah were.

Notice in verse 37, he says, But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Now, what's he saying about that? Now, he does say that the days before his second coming will be, in some sense, like the days of Noah.

Unfortunately, many Christians have failed to see what he is saying in terms of likening the end times to the days of Noah. Many times people assume that when we look at Genesis and we see that the days before the flood were full of violence and wickedness and sin, that Jesus is saying that the days just before his second coming will be full of violence and wickedness and sin. If that is what he is saying, it gives us reason to be encouraged when we see great sin in the world.

Because we say, oh, well, then that's an evidence that Jesus is coming soon. And unfortunately, there are many Christians who have taken it that way. They see great injustice.

They see great violence and wars and rumors of wars and say, well, praise the Lord. The coming of the Lord must be near. When in fact, sin is not a cause for rejoicing.

Sin and violence and wickedness are not pleasing to God and therefore should not be pleasing to Christians. And too many Christians have looked at the degenerating state of the world and said, well, Jesus said it would be like the days of Noah. Look, it's getting that way more all the time.

And instead of thinking that there is something, some work that should be done to right the wrongs and to redress the evils and to try to inhibit the decay, many times Christians just say, well, it's inevitable. Jesus said it would be like the days of Noah and it's getting more that way all the time. Well, I would ask you to pay attention to what Jesus actually did say.

Jesus did not say that it will be a time of great wickedness and corruption as it was in the days of Noah. He likened the end times to the days of Noah, but not in that particular respect. He made no reference to the moral state of the times of Noah.

Notice what he did say. As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark. Now, the only thing that Jesus said was similar between the days of Noah and the days of his coming would be that they were doing things like what? Raping, pillaging, fornicating.

No, it doesn't say any of those things. What did they do? Well, they ate and they drank and they got married. Well, is that bad? Is there something wrong with people eating and drinking? Is that not something that all people do, even the most godly people eat and drink? And what about getting married? Is there something dishonorable about getting married? It seems clear that Jesus is not trying to tell us anything about the moral state of Noah's day.

We know from Genesis that it was a very immoral time, but that's not the point Jesus is making. Jesus is not saying that the days of the end times will be morally equivalent or similar to the days of Noah. He said the similarity is on a different plane.

Eating and drinking and getting married are not sinful actions. And if Jesus had wanted to liken the days of Noah to the end times in terms of sinful behaviors, he could have done that. He could have said, as in the days before the flood, there was murder and robbery and rape and adultery and child molesting and homosexuality.

And he could have named all those things, but Jesus didn't name one thing that was a sin when he talked about the days before the flood. Which is not to say he didn't think there was a great deal of sin. It's just that that's not the point of comparison that he's making.

What is it he is saying? Well, they were eating and drinking and getting married right up until the day the flood came. What are we to think of that? Well, eating and drinking are things that people do on a daily basis. And getting married is an ordinary daily event.

You know, people are getting married every day of the year. And people get married because they anticipate a future, don't they? I mean, if you thought there was going to be no future, if you thought the world was ending later today, would you make plans to get married tomorrow? I doubt it. You see, what he is saying is the people were going along in their regular life, doing ordinary things, right up until the day they were killed in the flood.

What he is saying is they were oblivious to the fact that judgment was impending. And that's exactly what he says. In verse 39 he says, They did not know until the flood came and took them all away.

So what does Jesus tell us about the people before the flood? He doesn't tell us about their sins. Although there were sins, but that is not what he wants us to know about. He wants us to know that there will be a similarity before he comes in the mentality of the people of the world to that mentality of the people before the flood.

In what respect? In this respect, that the people before the flood had no idea they were about to have the boom lowered upon them. They had no idea the flood was about to come right until the day that the flood took them away. They did not know.

And they went on with the ordinary things of life, eating and drinking, getting married, as if the world was going to go on. You see, if you knew you were going to die tomorrow, you might not have much of an appetite today. You certainly wouldn't have much motivation to get married and try to start a family.

The point is that these people were going about the ordinary events. He is not speaking about the morality or the immorality of it. He is just talking about the ordinariness of it.

Their lives went on as usual. And they did not know, they were oblivious to the fact that the flood was going to come when it did. Now, that is the point that he is making.

He is not saying that the days of the end times will be the moral equivalent or the social equivalent of the days of Noah. He is just saying that just as that horrible judgment came on the whole world and caught the unbelievers totally unsuspecting, so will the second coming of Christ be. That the world will not be anticipating it when he comes.

They will be going on, the day he comes will be very much like the day before as far as their actions are concerned. They will not be pursuing God. They will not be praying.

They will not be serving God anymore than they would be the day before. I mean, if you knew Jesus was coming today, I dare say, you would probably turn to Christ and try to live a life pleasing to him. And yet, most people do not do that.

Even a lot of Christians do not live with that kind of commitment. And the reason is they do not really believe Jesus is coming back today. Well, let me tell you something.

I do not really think he is coming back today either. I am not saying he cannot. He can, but we do not know when he will come back.

I do not have any reason to believe it will be today any more than yesterday or the day before or tomorrow or the next day. But it could be any day. Jesus could come any day he wants to.

Any day, I should say, that his Father wants him to. And when he does, it will catch everybody by surprise. Will it take the Christians by surprise? Well, what does Jesus say? He says in verse 40, Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken in the other left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken in the other left. Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. You, Christians, do not know at what hour your Lord is coming.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him. Who doesn't? The disciples.

Jesus' coming will be at an hour that even his disciples don't expect him. So what does he say to do? You should be ready all the time. You need to live the life today that you would live if you knew he was coming today.

Not because you do know or have any way of knowing that he's coming today, but simply because whatever day he does come will be as unexpected as if he were to come today. I mean, if he came today, wouldn't you be surprised? Well, whenever he comes, it'll be just like today. It may not be today, it may not even be in our lifetime, but the day he comes he will catch the world and his people, unsuspecting.

He says your Lord is coming at a time when you do not expect him. Now he does talk about people being taken and left, and most Christians have applied this, it seems, to the rapture of the church. But I don't think that's the correct way to understand it, because the disciples in Luke 17, which has the parallel, after he says three times, one will be taken and the other left, one will be taken and the other left, the disciples say, where, Lord? In other words, where are they taken to? And his answer is, where the corpses are, the eagles will be gathered.

In other words, these who are taken seem to be destroyed, not raptured. Likewise here, he says that the flood came and took them all away, and so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. One will be taken and the other left.

In the illustration he gives of Noah's day, the ones that were taken were the ones who were outside the ark. They ate and drank and were given to marriage until the flood came and took them all away. The taking away was not a matter of rapturing anyone, it was a matter of simply judging them.

They were taken out of the land of the living, they were killed. And when Jesus said one will be taken and the other left in Luke 17, the disciples said, where, Lord? And he said, well, where the corpses are, the eagles will be there. You looking for them? Look for the circling vultures.

Because those who are taken are the ones who are judged at his coming. When Jesus comes, it will be like the flood, an unexpected judgment. Even Noah didn't know what day it was going to come, and certainly the people outside the ark didn't know what day

it would come.

Likewise, when Jesus actually does come, no one, even the Christians, will know when that's going to be. And therefore, Jesus says, be ready all the time, just like you would be if you knew a thief was coming to your house at some time, but you didn't know when. We'll continue our study in this discourse next time, but we're out of time today, so join us again tomorrow.