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The Book Ends of the End of the Age; Matt 24:15-28
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Introduction – In vv4-14, Jesus describes the age known as the last days. It begins with the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple and will continue until the gospel has reached every nation. So all of the things in these verses are going to happen and continue with frequency and intensity, much like birth pains, right up until the end. Jesus spoke of national and natural turmoil, persecution, falling away from the faith, false prophets and teachings, and loss of neighborly love. All these things increase during this age as sin increases. These things are shocking and heartbreaking to experience but they shouldn't be surprising. Jesus told us these things, so that we would know. He said in v6 "this must take place."

Now that Jesus has described our current age, I understand that in vv15-28 He goes back and speaks of the beginning and the ending in further detail. That's why the title for today's sermon is The Book Ends of the End of the Age, or maybe even better would be The Book Ends of the Last Days.

- I. The Fall of Jerusalem Signals the Beginning (vv15-20)
 - a. So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (temple)
 - i. Daniel 11:31
 - ii. That prophecy was fulfilled around 160 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes erected a pagan altar over the altar of burnt offering.
 - b. Let the reader understand (those first readers of Matthew's gospel) – in other words, another fulfillment of that prophecy is going to occur. That would happen in 70 AD when Rome desecrates the holy city and the holy temple. Luke 21:20
 - i. For us as readers of Matthew's gospel, we need to understand this prophecy will be fulfilled another, final time when the final antichrist desecrates all that is sacred.
 - ii. You see it's like the birth pains. It's going to keep happening in frequency and intensity until it reaches that final time.
 - c. But for those first generation readers of Matthew, they will live to see the fulfillment of 70 AD.

- i. For those in that day Jesus sounds the alarm for them to flee. Don't even stop to grab your possessions. When you see the armies surround Jerusalem, get out as quick as you can, if you can.
 - ii. It won't be easy and it will be especially difficult if you're pregnant or have infants. If it happens in the winter, you'll face the harsh weather as refugees. If it happens on the Sabbath, you won't find much assistance from those who resist any work on the Sabbath. It will be difficult to be on the run, but it would be worse to be captured, so run.
 - iii. We've witnessed a flight similar to what Jesus describes here in our own day as Afghan believers and assistants to the US tried so hard to flee when the Taliban took control.
- d. This intermediary fulfillment of Daniel will signify the beginning of the last days.

II. The Great Tribulation Signals the End (vv21-28)

- a. Now when Jesus says "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" I take that to mean Jesus has skipped all the intermediary period that he described in earlier verses and is now speaking of what signals the end of this age.
 - i. For then means some time after 70 AD. Here's why I believe that to be the case.
 - 1. He calls this great tribulation – so it's not the same as the tribulation He speaks of in v9. The tribulation of v9 is describing the persecution that God's people will experience during this age. It's going to continue with frequency and intensity until it reaches the final tribulation, which will be great tribulation.
 - 2. It's the most intense period of persecution of all. Jesus says as much.
- b. V22 – In other words, God has determined a definite period of time for this final tribulation. He has set boundaries around it. Sin and darkness will reach a tipping point and if it were not for divine restraint, no human would survive it.

- i. But because God's people will be present during it and God watches over His own, sin will not reach its goal. God will cut it short. Many believers will suffer during this time and many will become martyrs, but God will not allow His people to be utterly wiped off the face of the earth.
- ii. Rev 6:9-11
- iii. When I approach the texts of Scripture that address the end times, I try to stay away from interpretational categories that we impose on the texts and just simply try to follow the texts. I try to read it just like the first readers would have read it.
- iv. There are 3 views of the rapture and 3 views of the millennial reign. The first readers of the NT were not trying to decide which of these views fit the text better. They were just reading the text. Now I know that some of you and maybe most of you believe the rapture will take place before the tribulation. I tend to believe the rapture takes place after the tribulation, mainly because of Matthew 24.
- v. I look at it this way. Matthew was written before 70 AD. Revelation was written after 70 AD. Matthew 24-25 are like the forest of the end times and Revelation is the trees. In Matthew we get a flyover view of what is to come. In Revelation we get a detailed view of what is to come. The rapture of the church is a massive event. If it were going to take place before the tribulation, you would see it in a flyover view – you couldn't miss it.
- vi. Now Matthew 24 does speak of the rapture in v31, but there it occurs simultaneously with the return of Christ. And according to v22 believers are present for the tribulation.
- vii. Now – are we still friends? You can disagree with me on this, that's ok. However it ends, Jesus returns, Satan is defeated, and we are saved forever – Amen!
- viii. But as our pastor, I can't tell you what I think you want the Bible to say. I have to tell you what I believe the Bible teaches to the best of my ability. It's possible that I could be wrong. But listen, when it comes to the timing of the rapture, I would rather prepare us for the tribulation and be pleasantly surprised that I was wrong than to not prepare us for the

tribulation only to our dismay. Enduring the tribulation will be test enough for our faith, we don't need interpretational error to add to the weight. And that's what Jesus addresses next.

c. Vv23-25.

i. V23 – then (during the tribulation)

ii. V24 – those false christs and prophets that Jesus speaks of in v5 and v11, they are going to continue in frequency and intensity until the final lot of them arrive during the tribulation. And these will have the ability to deceive like none before them.

iii. Jesus says their power to lead people astray will be greater than ever before – in fact, they will be so convincing that if it were possible to snatch true believers away from the faith, they are the ones who could do it. It's not possible to ultimately deceive true believers, but if it were, they would.

1. Just note, this is the second time Jesus refers to believers being present during this time of tribulation.

2. You see those days are going to be so dark and difficult, and believers will know that Jesus is soon returning, so we will be looking for Him more than ever. So when someone shows up performing signs, those who are not truly in the faith will flock to them for rescue, and those in the faith will be tried and tempted too. But we will not be deceived. You know why?

iv. V25. Jesus has prepared us so that we won't be deceived.

d. Vv26-27 – When Jesus returns, it won't be a secret, private, hidden return. You won't have to go looking for your Savior. He will split the eastern sky and the world will know the King has come!

e. V28 – Jesus uses a common saying – when you see vultures gathering, you know there's a dead animal there. You don't wonder what's going on. You know. That's how it's going to be with the coming of Christ. You won't wonder if He has returned. His coming will be crystal clear.

Conclusion – (1) this world is not our home. And as this age continues, that's going to become more and more evident. (2) Jesus is our Savior. And at the end of this age, that's going to be absolutely certain and evident.