

Living in Hope!

Matthew 24:15-16

Jesus enclosed a snapshot of what life on earth was like--just before the Ground Zero of His Second Coming.

We have been looking at those snapshots in Matthew. So please open with me to the greatest sermon on the end of the world ever preached—Matthew 24. Jesus is mapping out the future. He is walking His disciples through a long and complex answer to their simple question in v. 3:

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

As Jesus proceeds through this answer He gets to an amazing sight, He sees a future Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. And He sees a future antichrist defiling that temple. Look at that section with me in Matthew 24:15-16.

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Now, stops for a moment and think with me. What use would this section of the Bible be for us? We are not Jews, we aren't in the Tribulation, nor do we expect to be. Is it even profitable to study?

That is a great way to start this morning—answering that vital question. Here is the reason—Paul actually taught this very passage to a group of new believers on his missionary journeys. Did you know that? Turn there with me to II Thessalonians 2:1-5.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless

- the falling away comes first, and

- the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped,
- so that he sits as God
- in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.
- 5 ***Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?***

Wow, what a line. Paul told them about those things way back then? What was the context? What good would teaching about the antichrist and the end of Jerusalem and a temple rebuilt and defiled do for anyone?

The answer lies in the letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians believers after he taught them all these things in Matthew 24.

He was teaching them the value of thinking about Christ's return. Listen as I summarize the entire book of I Thessalonians. You can turn there as I share this background.

The ancient city of Thessalonica was honored city in the Roman Empire. So, archaeologists at the turn of the century wanted to find the Thessalonica of Paul's day.

Today all that's left of the city of Paul's day is one archway. That's the only reminder of the ancient world that Paul preached. So the archaeologists started their mapping and exploration of the ancient boundaries of the city. A group of French archaeologists actually took the Thessalonica dig and staked out the area. They put cross pieces and started digging down and looking.

Archaeologists never know what they're going to bump into so they dig cautiously and carefully. The first thing they found was a cemetery. As they were digging down and their picks and shovels poked on some thing. They started brushing away the dust and soon came up with a marble head stone of a grave. They thought it was very interesting. They recorded it and picked it up and they put it under the tent and as they brushed it off they looked closely and there was one word on the headstone and it was the word ***amemptos***.

So the archaeologists said that's interesting. ***Amemptos*** used to live here. They kept excavating and a few days later they hit another gravestone. They brushed it off and looked and it said ***amemptos***. They said wow- 2 people in this town have the same name. So they went back and they dug and as they worked for months they found every single headstone in that cemetery had one word engraved in the marble--***amemptos***.

You say who was it? To find out, open with me to 1 Thessalonians 3:13. This verse contains the central message that the Apostle Paul proclaimed to those people. There was one thing Paul wants them to remember. He says it 3 times in this book and it was the center of the Gospel presentation he gave to these people that were so immersed in sin as all of us are. Here is what he wrote—

¹³so that He may establish your hearts **amemptos**- unashamed life before God in holiness

Amemptos means—

- I will never **have to answer** to God for my sins if I am in Jesus.
- I will never **be judged** for my sins if I am in Jesus.
- I will never **be condemned** for my sins if I am in Jesus.
- I will never **have to pay** for my sins if I am in Jesus.

Did you know those people listened to what the Apostle Paul said? And they heard that Gospel message so clearly that when they came to know Jesus Christ there's one thing they couldn't forget and that is that they could stand before God **amemptos--** unashamed of their sinful lives that they had lived before Christ. What kind of lives did they live?

You see the Apostle Paul's writing back to them—he ministered here probably 6 weeks. 3 weeks in the synagogue and 3 weeks out—then he's driven out of town and he goes to Athens and he goes on and after a few weeks he writes a letter back to them but when he writes back to them he said did you know people from Thessalonica have come to me and told me about our ministry we had there? And this is what they said. Look at 1:9-10:

⁹For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

Do you know what that says? The people in Thessalonica were formerly idolatrous people—

¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

You know what these people learned? That their former lives to their idols, false gods that were dead and weren't living and weren't true. They could turn from those past sins and never look back. They could look to Christ and be **amemptos--** unashamed of their sinful lives. Now you say I don't have a wicked, sordid, depraved, debauched, life in the past. But you know what? All of us are sinners. So what ever we have done, we can know it is forgiven, it is gone!

Jesus paid it all, I will live for Him. I will neither be ashamed of my past nor waste my present and future—but live it for Him.

Now look at 1 Thessalonians 3:13

¹³so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness...

My past is paid for, and my present is consecrated.

Don't ever come before God and think God I'm ashamed of who I was, I'm ashamed of what I was. Now the Apostle Paul said that the things that I did were shameful things. But Paul never was afraid to come into the presence of a holy God because he knew my sins are gone and shall not be remembered. God in mercy lovingly forgave me.

What did he teach these people that helped them come to this conclusion?

What did he teach them in that city that caused them to have in their cemetery every single grave stone from the first century era—around the time of Paul's ministry—all inscribed with that word that he preached to them?

What was it that constituted this life that could be called blameless?

- #1 they weren't ashamed of their past because they knew it was covered by the blood of Christ.
- #2 they weren't' ashamed of their present conduct because they knew that the way they lived their life was unblameable in the sight of God.

1Thessalonians 1:10 Paul said you have A NEW GOAL—living each day for Christ's coming. Forgetting the past, trusting that it is forgiven, cleansed and gone.

Your former goal was living for yourself, accumulating, having pleasure-what every your life's goal was before it's changed now. It's not trying to see how much you can promote yourself. It's not trying to see how much you can gain power in life. It's not to see what kind of new and exciting things you can experience – to travel or see or do. Here's your new goal- Wait for His Son. That's a new goal in life. Did you know only Christians are waiting for the Son

Now, with that in mind, open with me again to the greatest sermon on the end of the world ever preached—Matthew 24. Jesus is mapping out the future. He is walking His disciples through a long and complex answer to their simple question in v. 3:

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When Christ Returns there is-- the Return of the Wandering Jews to the Promised Land. God promised over 26 centuries ago that at the end of the

world--Jews would begin to regather in Israel. Open with me to Matthew 24 and notice the "orientation" of this text.

Matthew 24: 15-16 *"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),* **16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.** Before we look at all the promises that God would regather His Jewish people back to His Land—notice that Jesus spoke of them at the end as—already there and with a Temple!

- ***Ezekiel 37:21-22 "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; 22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.***
- ***Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.***
- ***Jeremiah 31: 7-10 For thus says the Lord: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O Lord, save Your people, The remnant of Israel!' 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, And gather them from the ends of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child And the one who labors with child, together; A great throng shall return there. 9 They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn. 10 "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, And declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.'***

Since 1948 the world has witnessed the call of God deep within the hearts of 5.4 million Jews who have done everything they could to get to the Promised Land. And more arrive each day!

What is one of the greatest signs of God's Word being true? God predicted over and over again the preservation of His people the Jews. And He especially tells us about their return to their land. We hear that but have you thought about how amazing it really is?

Modern man and all his machines is amazing. It seems we can do almost everything—everything except tell the future. The future contains too many variables to accurately predict.

Let me brush you up on some ancient history:

"Take the restoration of Israel, for example. Israel was destroyed in 702 BC by the Assyrian king, Sargon II, who conquered the kingdom of Israel.

It was common practice for a conqueror to uproot and displace the conquered people to another part of the empire, repopulating that place with a conquered people from somewhere else.

The reason for that was to separate a people from their land, which effectively prevented uprisings. The northern Kingdom of Israel was scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire, and was effectively lost to history, leaving only the tiny southern kingdom of Judah.

A century later, the Kingdom of Judah was similarly conquered by the Kingdom of Babylon, who also displaced its population, deporting them into captivity in Babylon.

To a Jew living in Babylon during the Captivity, it seemed certain that Judah would go the way of Israel and would similarly be lost to history.

Yet the prophets of the Captivity, like Daniel and Ezekiel, wrote confidently that in the last days, there would again be a nation called 'Israel' and that its citizens would once again inhabit the same piece of real estate from which they had been displaced, seemingly forever.

Yet Ezekiel wrote, "And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." [Ezekiel 34: 13]

The Jews would be gathered from the countries, and brought into THEIR OWN LAND, upon the mountains of ISRAEL, and not some other place.

Writing of the Gog Magog invasion, God inspired Ezekiel to prophesy: "After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them." [Ezekiel 38: 8]

In this passage, we find the time frame in which Ezekiel's prophecy would come to pass -- 'after many days, in the latter years'. And again, we find that it is not Judah, but ISRAEL, of whom the prophet prophesied. That they would be 'brought forth from the nations' to a land that had 'always been waste' -- until they returned.

For more than 2,500 years, this prophecy remained dormant, until, on May 14, 1948, the survivors of the Holocaust were 'brought forth' under the banner of

'never again' to the 'mountains of Israel' -- which 'had always been waste' as the nation of 'Israel'.

In his book, 'Personal Witness' Abba Eban, one of the founders of Israel, noted that when David Ben-Gurion cabled President Truman to ask the United States to recognize the Jewish state, the Jews still hadn't decided what to call it.

Eban noted, 'Some wanted to call it Zion, others Judah . . . what about 'Israel'?' The name was chosen only hours before the state came into existence.

In 1897, the 1st Zionist Congress petitioned the government of Great Britain for a Jewish state in what is today the African country of Uganda. The British told the Jews to petition the Ottoman Empire, who at that time controlled Palestine.

The Jews would have settled for Uganda as a Jewish homeland, but the prophets said that the Jewish homeland of the last days would be 'on the mountains of Israel'. And that is exactly what happened.

The prophet Daniel, also writing from captivity in Babylon, penned the future history of Israel, [a nation that had not existed for a century] dividing its future into 70 weeks of years. During the 70th and final week, Daniel prophesied the revival of an empire [Rome] that, in Daniel's day, would not see its FIRST incarnation for another 500 years.

Today, the nation of Israel exists, composed of a people 'brought forth from the nations' while, for the first time in 2000 years, a European superstate made up of what had once been the territory of the Roman Empire, seeks involvement in a peace process that Daniel said would be confirmed by a leader of a revived Rome.

We are indeed living in the 'age of miracles' but they are miracles of God, against which the miracles of science cannot possibly compete.

We in this generation have been given the unspeakable gift of certainty that the Lord is about to return, a warning that time is running out, and a renewed commission to go out into all the earth and make disciples of all nations, before time has run out.

No man can know the future, but the God of Creation foretold it --in detail -- so that there could be no misunderstanding. The Lord is about to return.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." [1st Corinthians 15: 1-52]

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Wherefore, comfort one another with these words." [1st Thessalonians 4:16-18]"¹

God is in charge of the future.

We can trust God with our future.

I can trust God with my future.

**Wonderful merciful Savior,
Precious redeemer and friend,
Who would have thought that a Lamb could
Rescue the souls of men?
O, You rescue the souls of men!**

CHORUS

**You are the One that we praise
You are the one we adore
You give the healing and grace
Our hearts always hunger for
O, our hearts always hunger for.**

Verse 2

**Counselor, Comforter, Keeper
Spirit we long to embrace
You offer hope when our hearts have
Hopelessly lost the way
Oh, we've hopelessly lost the way**

**Almighty, infinite Father
Faithfully loving Your own
Here in our weakness You find us
Falling before Your throne
O, we're falling before Your throne**

¹ Jack Kinsella, The Omega Letter Daily Intelligence Digest, Volume 41, Issue 15.