

*Alêtheia Christian Fellowship*  
*December 13, 2020*  
*“Hope for the Ready”*

*Sunday school at 8:30, Service at 9:15, Service at 10:45 with King’s Kids.*

***NEWS***

Be respectful of others by allowing them to deal with COVID 19 in their own way.  
 Wednesday Night Activities at 6:30 PM

330 N. Somers Rd. (Mail: PO Box 10626) Kalispell, MT 59904~ (406) 755-1776

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New Podcast Host: [myaetheia.podbean.com](http://myaetheia.podbean.com) Or go to Spotify, and type in [myaetheia](http://myaetheia)

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Emails: [pastor@myaetheia.com](mailto:pastor@myaetheia.com), [stacey.sundt@myaetheia.com](mailto:stacey.sundt@myaetheia.com)

From God breathing His “Breath of life” into man (Genesis 2:7), to Him “Walking in the Garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). From God saying to Abraham, “I AM God Almighty” and “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:1-7). To God saying to John the Baptist, “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit...” And John confirming “This is the Son of God” (John 1:33&34). Everything is about God reaching out to human beings. Everything in the Bible, from the first bit of Genesis, to the last bit of Revelation, is about God interacting with us.

We might ask why? Well, specifically, for the reason of \_\_\_\_\_.

How is your intimate, personal relationship with Jesus?

You might say, not as good as I’d like... Well, you fix that by never forgetting the purpose, point and priority. Focus more on the goal than on the thing itself.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

**MATTHEW 23:36****MATTHEW 23:37-39**

“Stoning those who are sent.” We could think of Stephen, but stoning here is just a way of saying a Jewish religious execution of a blasphemer.

“How often I wanted.” Only God can gather a nation of people under His wing as the Holy Spirit would do. Ruth 2:12.

“Your house is being left to you desolate!” Jeremiah 22:5, I Kings 9:6-9.

When was the return that He spoke of here? When a person truly sees Jesus, they do so because they have recognized Him.

Since no one has any clue when their Day will be, we must all be ready today and every day.

**Matthew 24:1&2**

Everything can change in an instant, even when it seems impossible. You must be ready to meet the Lord face-to-face at any moment.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

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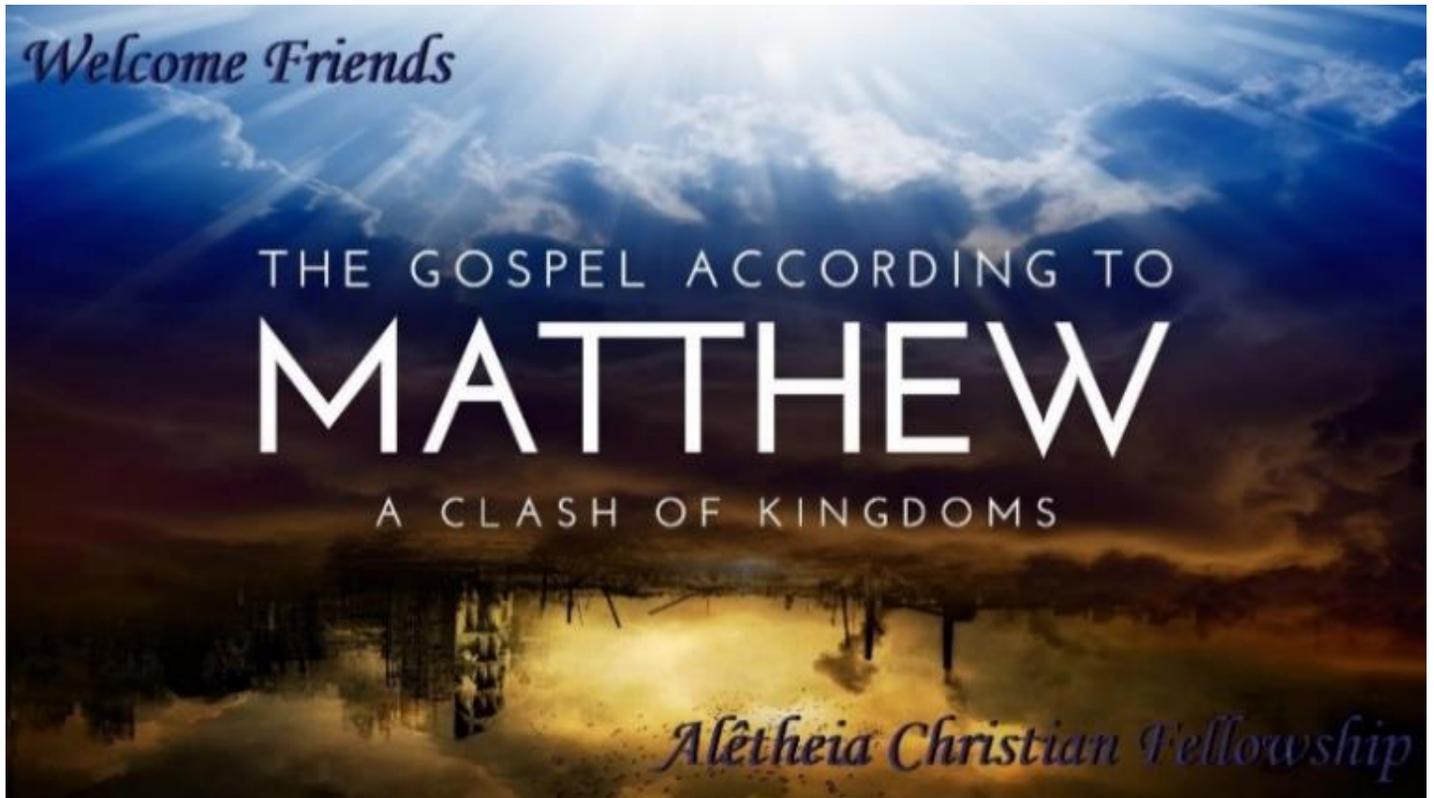


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Alêtheia ~ Matthew 24a ~ 121320  
“Hope for the Ready”



Last week we read nearly the entire 23rd chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. It is a thorough, lengthy, in-your-face, rebuke of religiosity posing as righteousness.

From God breathing His “Breath of life” into man (Genesis 2:7), to Him “Walking in the Garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). From God saying to Abraham, “I AM God Almighty” and “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:1-7). To God saying

to John the Baptist, “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit...” And John confirming “This is the Son of God” (John 1:33&34). Everything is about God reaching out to human beings. Everything in the Bible, from the first bit of Genesis, to the last bit of Revelation, is about God interacting with us.

We might ask why? Well, specifically, for the reason of Agapê Love, “For God so loved the world that He gave up, handed over, His One and Only unique Son.” It is to say, that He sacrificed what was most precious to Him, the maximum thing He could give, His own flesh and blood, so to speak. God has repeatedly demonstrated His desire to relate to people who likewise desire to relate to Him.



He has never desired for people to put Him at arm's length through their religious fervor concerning Him. Do you see what I just said there? The more we practice religion in the natural human fashion the more we put up barriers to genuine interaction with God Himself.

People are endlessly doing good Christian things that have the net effect of actually pushing God away. Christians furiously study the Bible... One Bible study after another, one Sunday school class after another, one group discussion after another, and in many cases, all that study takes the place of being with God. It's just one example. People get heavily involved in service, in

charity, in missions, even in prayer and miss the time just fellowshiping with Him.

Oswald Chambers said that, for him, the greatest barrier to intimacy with the Lord, was the ministry. It is so much easier for most of us to do, than it is to relate.

That tendency is what creates Scribes and Pharisees.

The 23rd chapter of Matthew is God clearly and dramatically saying, "That's not what I want. I want people who want to be less like humans and more like Me. I want people to be My children and My friends (John 15:13-15). I want that to be so true that they treat others the way I treat them... Not reacting in fear, but proactive in love."

Right away, we might begin questioning the details and the mechanism - in other words the doctrines involved and as soon as we do, we demonstrate our need to "Do," instead of to "Be."

We can discuss those doctrines and we have, we do, and we will. We never shy away from learning here, never run from the difficult passages, or concepts, never skip the hard questions, but please understand

the purpose of the investigation, the point of all the doing. Which leads us to the priority of things.



We put God first, we do all the other stuff second to that, and in order to do that, better. For us, it is all about Jesus - He's the One the Father gave and He's the One the Holy Spirit highlights, illuminates and points us to. How is your intimate, personal relationship with Jesus?



You might say, not as good as I'd like... Well, you fix that by what I just said. Don't forget the purpose, point and priority. In other words, focus more on the goal than on the thing itself. As an example, in prayer, focus more on the goal of being dependently in His presence, than on getting the words right, or remembering the details of what you're praying about. God already knows all about it and quite frankly, He's already decided what He's going to do... As it must be. Mature Christians pray for God's Will to be done on earth as it is in heaven because mature Christians not only trust God with His decision, they know that His Will done is the best thing that can happen, even when it seems like a total disaster from a human perspective. Mature

Christians are willing to admit that they don't know it all, they can't see the future, they don't have the big picture and they don't know what's actually best. But they trust.

Why pray then? The goal. Spending quality time in a humble, grateful, dependent, trusting attitude with Almighty God. There is a saying attributed to Nora Roberts, "What's the point of playing if winning isn't the goal?" That's dumb. The point of playing is the goal. What I mean is you set the goal. Take playing basketball. Is your goal exercise, is it fun, is it improving your passing skills, is it entertainment, is it comradery? What is your goal when playing? Then, don't lose sight of it and get distracted into thinking your goal is winning... Never lose sight of the "Why."

Other examples... In church, focus more on the goal of relating to Christ and to others around you, than on checking the box, doing the right thing, annoying your kids, or being personally edified. In Bible study, focus more on better knowing Jesus, than on gaining more knowledge about Jesus... You get the idea - focus on the goal, by not losing sight of the purpose... Loving God best - genuinely relating to Him - that's the goal.

Regardless of the doctrinal issues or the mechanics of how it all works, the bottom line is that some people respond positively to God's demonstrated desire to save them, seal them, and interact with them as their Heavenly Father forevermore, and some people chose to do what's easier.

Of course, what's easiest is not taking the time to consider eternity at all and then ridiculing the people who do, but beyond that... What's easier is making religions without the ambiguity of relationship. What's easier is making a list of do's and don'ts without the challenge of finding the answer from applying Biblical principles.



The Bible, and therefore Christianity, isn't about rules, regulations, rituals, traditions, rites, or any religious practice, in that sense... It is about relating to Almighty God. Relating to Him as He enables.



Whether a person likes it or not, God gets to set the parameters. We don't get to dictate to God how we're willing to relate to Him... He gets to establish the boundaries and contents of that relationship and He has done that very thing. He gave up and handed over His Own Word to be brutalized as a man so that we could join a Heavenly Holy family, not by our merits or worth, but by His.

Will you humble yourself enough to quit trying to earn what cannot be earned and accept the payment you couldn't make? Can you embrace the sacrifice God made in order to wipe away your sin? Will you rest in Him? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to show you how magnificent and how undeserved the gift of that Heavenly family truly is, and will you prove that you get that Truth by being so grateful that you yourself become more like Him?

More like Him in your generosity, in your compassion, in your mercy and grace... Can you forgive others who will never themselves be worthy of, or deserve forgiveness? Will you be more like Him?

Or will you choose the easier path of religiosity like the Scribes and Pharisees before you?

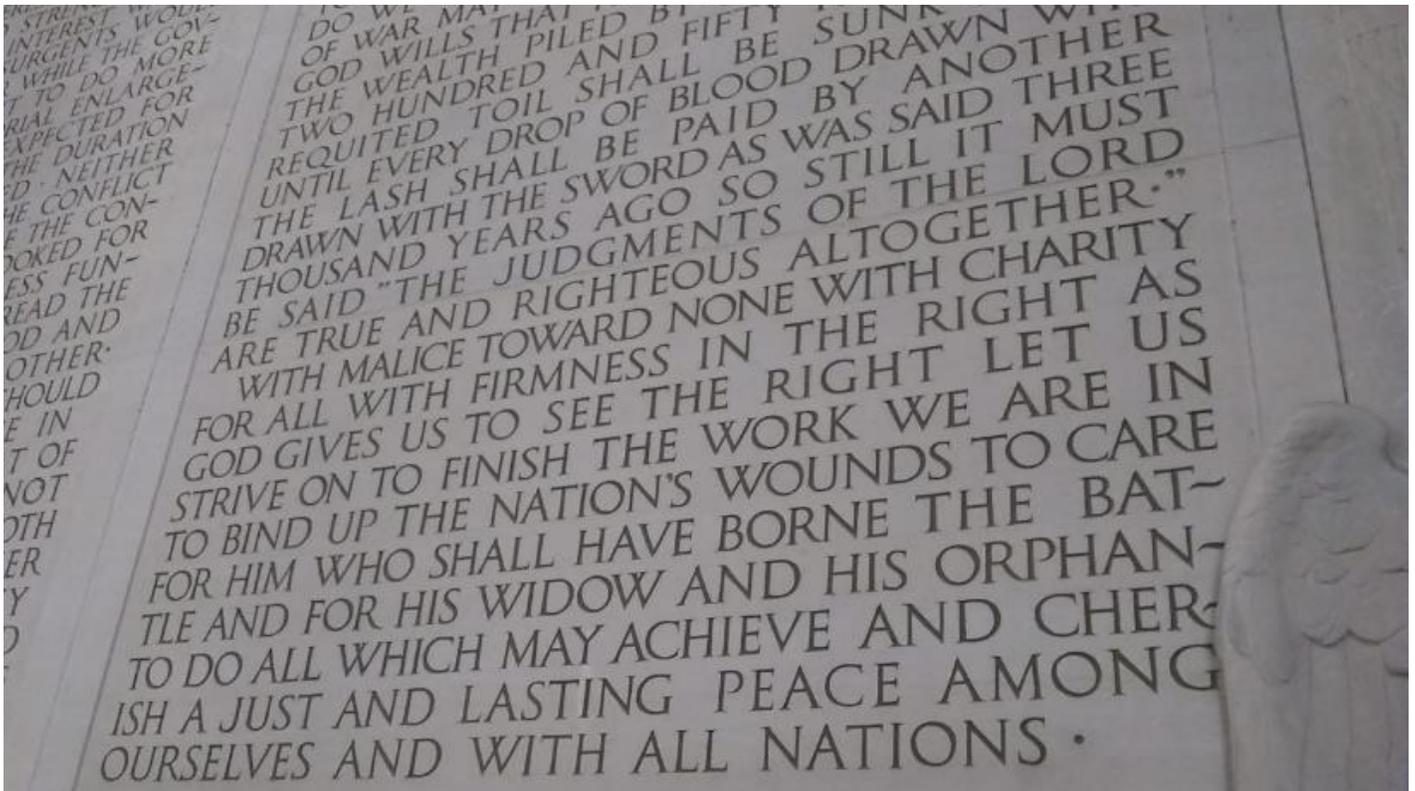


After a chapter of chastisement replete with prophetic judgments, Jesus went on to say in, Matthew 23:36, “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

There have been a lot of different ways to interpret this statement over the centuries, but the simplest, most straightforward way is best. The generation of Jewish people alive at that time would see God’s judgment poured out. Obviously, this is a generalized pronouncement, like everything in the polemic, to which it refers. That cuts two different ways. 1) The first is that not every individual person alive in that moment would see the judgment, but the vast majority of them would. 2) The second, even though the polemic was

against the elite leadership of Jewish people, the entire nation would be caught up in the judgment.

That is historically the way it goes. As a general rule of thumb for military planners, 2/3 of the casualties in war, will be civilian non-combatants. 67% of those wounded, maimed, dehumanized, and killed will be bystanders.



America as a nation, hasn't really done anything good or bad in the sense of being completely unified in the activity. Take the reprehensible practice of slavery. 1) An incredibly small minority of Americans owned slaves. 2) Now a much larger number openly supported it and were involved in perpetuating it. 3) An even bigger group of Americans than that overlooked

the vile practice - dismissing it as none of their business, ignoring the evil with a live and let live attitude all the while justifying their passive acceptance because they weren't directly participating. 4) Even so, there were many who were adamantly opposed to enslaving other human beings and they worked diligently praying and picketing, voting, and educating, to eradicate the evil in America. It didn't matter, when God's judgment came, in the form of the Civil war, the entire nation suffered as a whole.

For nearly 50 years we have had a similar phenomenon in America with abortion of live human babies on demand. Do you seriously think that as God's wrath is poured out, those of us who are adamantly opposed will be spared?

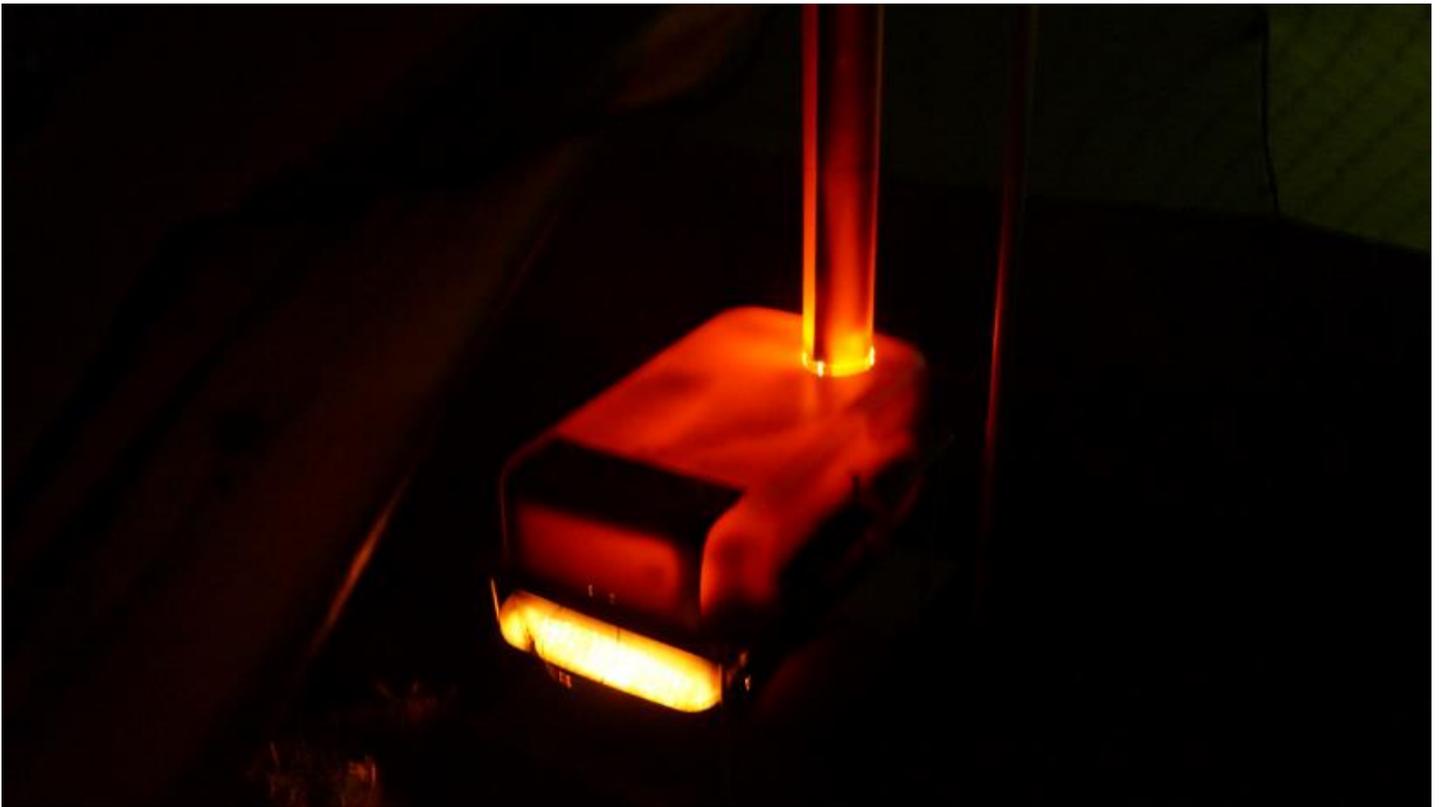


Jesus went on in Matthew 23:37-39, 37“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39“For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ”

This is technically a lament. Woe to you, judgment is coming, and I so wish that it could have been avoided.

In verse 37, Jesus doubles Jerusalem to key His audience into the thrust of His next words. They would have all immediately understood this to be a Godly

lament, Godly sorrow over the unnecessary pain, suffering and devastation for all parties involved. All parties. I think we sometimes forget how painful it is for a parent to punish their children, even for a Heavenly Father. Everyone is going to suffer.



All they had to do was do what was right - listen to their Father and follow His instruction. I've told this story many times, so I apologize, but it's apropos. When our son was a miniature munchkin, we had a wood stove to heat our house. Mariah hadn't been out of Texas all that long at the time and she liked to keep the temperature a nice Texas Panhandle, Llano Estacado, frying pan, hot. The stove would glow red. I'm surprised

it didn't melt. I was terrified that Scotty was going to burn himself. He was always reaching out to touch it and we would grab him and tell him no. We would be nice, we would be forceful, we would explain, we would demand, we tried every tactic to ensure he stayed away. I even built a fence around the stove. Alas, it was to no avail. He eventually did touch the stove. He never touched it again. The lesson was learned, not just for him, but for me as well. As painful as it was for me to see him suffer, it was worse knowing that sometimes, no matter how much you try to prevent it, your kid has to touch the stove.

It was a similarly painful lesson learned as a pastor. Oftentimes, you can see exactly what a person needs to do, but rare is the person who seeks counsel, listens, and follows through.

Jesus used past tense, "Killed the prophets," along with a tense in Greek that means the present and continuing action of "Stoning those who are sent." We could think of Stephen, but stoning here is just a way of saying a Jewish religious execution of a blasphemer and so it fully applies to Jesus as the ultimate victim of their man-made religious fervor.



In the second half of that verse, Jesus says something profoundly shocking. When you recognize what Jesus was saying as a prophetic lament, then you realize that He put Himself in the position reserved only for Almighty God. He said, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.”

He’s not simply conveying God’s Words like an Old Testament prophet did; He’s claiming that unique role for Himself... It isn’t “Thus sayeth the Lord God Almighty,” it’s “How often I wanted.” How often Jesus wanted. Naysayers often cry, “Jesus never claimed to be God.” Well, they’re stupid. Jesus claimed to be God

right here. If you understand anything about the Bible and ancient Judaism that much is obvious.

Only God had for ages wanted to gather the people, only God can gather a nation of people under His wing as the Holy Spirit would do. Ruth 2:12 speaks of the Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel, having wings under which people can find refuge.

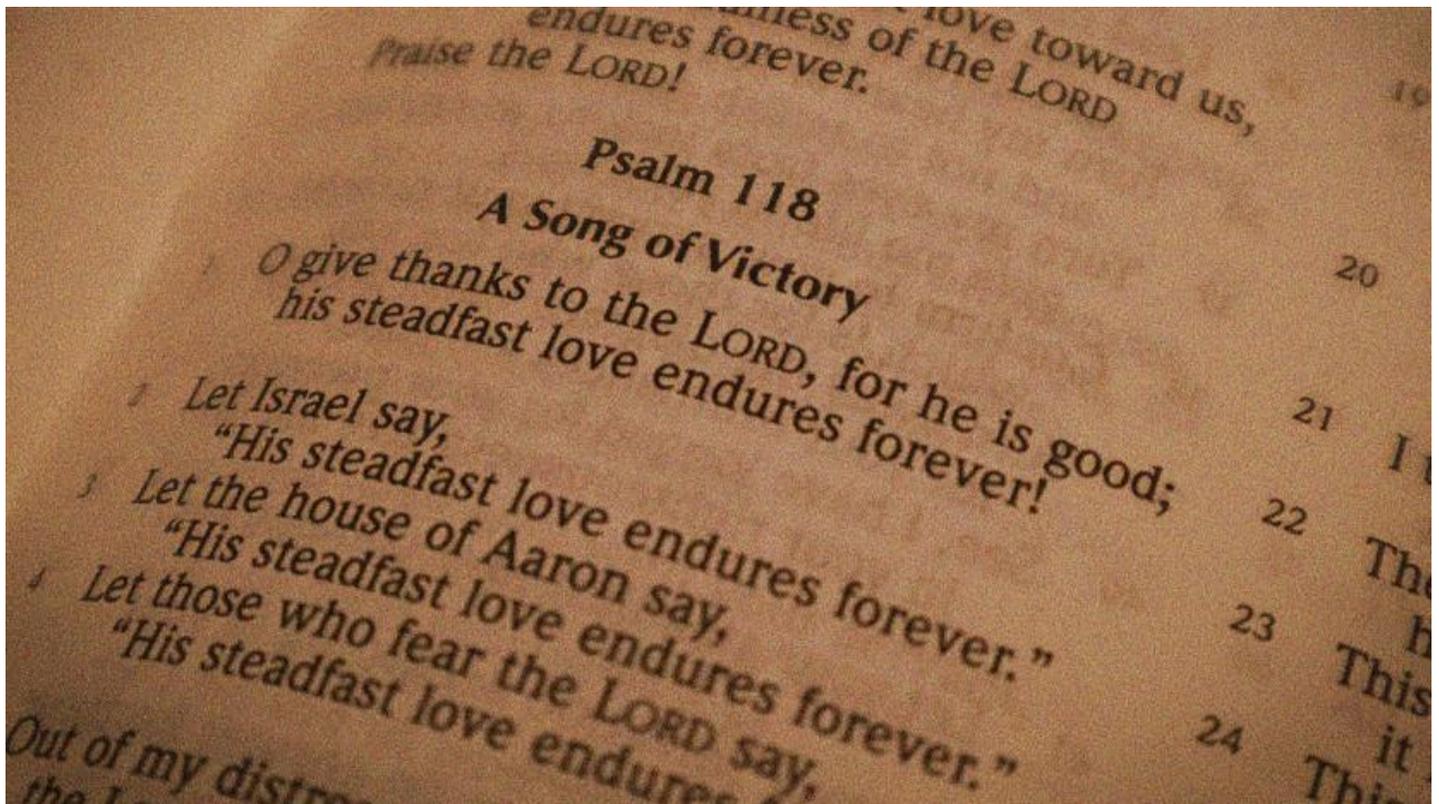
The gathering that Jesus spoke of was ultimately Salvation. It is refuge, protection a place of safety, but the people, by and large, were unwilling. They had to touch the stove, and it's sad.



So, for the sins of some, all would pay. “Your house is being left to you desolate!” A quotation of Jeremiah 22:5, and alluding to I Kings 9:6-9, which states, God speaking, 6“But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 7then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 8“And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?’ 9“And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the Lord has brought all this adversity on them.’ ”

After this prophecy, United Israel, under King Solomon, was split. The Northern Kingdom was devastated by the Assyrians, while the Southern Kingdom was taken into exile in Babylon. The Temple was destroyed. Notice, that there was no rapture of the Good Jews prior to the slaughter.

Jesus, in our passage today, was clearly predicting the destruction of the second Temple and the Jewish Nation in the first century. Then we have verse 39, which is another interesting and shocking statement, as well as one needing careful examination particularly as to the question of “When?”.



1) First, the profound bit. The second half is a quotation from the Messianic Psalm 118, that was on full display during Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem a few days beforehand. We talk about it every year at Eastertime.

Jesus was clearly, boldly claiming to be the Messiah. More than that, He was claiming that He would leave the Jewish people and wait until they got their act together and then return again... Hopefully they would be ready the next time. That was a common Jewish motif. A prophet or other Messenger from God would find the people unready and they would leave, being taken into Heaven, and await the time when their Message would be properly received. The best Old Testament example is Elijah.

There's a lot to digest here beyond an unambiguous claim to be the long awaited Anointed, Messiah, Christ, sent by God to save the people. As I mentioned, "When?" We know Jesus was talking about the first century with His lament, but what, or really, "When" would people see Jesus again?

To help answer that question we need to remember the context. Not only was Jesus talking about the generation at the time, but He was also talking to the generation at the time. His audience was the "Crowds and His disciples." First century Jewish people still open to Jesus at that moment. Hold that thought.

He told them the leaders had corrupted the faith and as a result, horrible things were going to happen to everyone. He lamented that it had to be that way and conveyed how much He wished that He could have spared everyone from the coming judgment. Then He gave them hope.

That's what verse 39 functions as... It is hope that all is not lost. Jesus was going to go away, and He would return later and when He did, some would welcome Him as the Messiah He was. That's what "Until" means. It means there is a possibility.

Imagine how easy it would have been to leave that "Until" bit out. Jesus could have told them, "From now on you will have no hope, all is lost, because you did not fully accept Me as the Messiah when you had the chance." Instead, Jesus told them "You will not see Me until you" recognize and accept Me as your Messiah. That means potential - possibility - hope.

When though, when was the return that He spoke of here? It's difficult to say with certainty because we know so much more than the people to whom Jesus first delivered these Words.

The easiest and most comprehensive meaning is that at any point, an individual person recognizes Jesus for Who He truly is, they see Him. More technically, the two things are interwoven and could be said to be simultaneous... When a person truly sees Jesus, they do so because they have recognized Him.



Of course, as we continue in this Gospel, we'll see that ultimately the Messiah will come again, in glory leading His angelic army to Jerusalem. Be ready for that day - "The coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:37). Think about that for a moment... It's kind of a spoiler alert. We always repeat what the Bible declares, "Repent, the end is near." We talk about making sure

that we're ready when the day comes... Please realize that the Day is different for nearly everyone. Sure, eventually it will be one day, but for billions of people over the last two thousand years their Day has already come and gone.

Since no one has any clue when their Day will be, we must all be ready today and every day. Your Day could be today. Stay alert.



Matthew 24:1&2, 1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not

one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

Specifically, here, once again, Jesus was talking about the generation alive at the time. He spoke those words to His guys in approximately 30 A.D. Roughly 36 years later, in 66 A.D. the Jewish people revolted against Rome. By 70 A.D. the Temple was completely destroyed and Jerusalem was sacked. By 74 A.D. the mopping up operations in the outlying areas was finished with over a million Jews killed, an untold number of them brutalized and 100,000 of them marched to Rome as slaves.



The treasury of the Temple funded the building of the Colosseum in Rome and the Jewish slaves provided much of the labor to build it.

Tough times indeed. Put yourself in the Disciples sandals. It would have been impossible to really imagine. They had spent hours in the Temple and passed through the city. It was a remarkable feat of engineering and construction. The Temple was widely renowned throughout the Roman Empire as an opulent and beautiful edifice.

Jesus had just delivered what we have as an entire chapter of doom and gloom. They had passed out of the Temple and down the stairs. They had crossed over the Kidron Valley either by road or by bridge and looked back at the magnificence of the skyline in the setting sun.

How could such a grand city be brought low?



I used to have long layovers in downtown Manhattan once in a while. It was always fun walking around in the Big Apple. Normally, that layover was in conjunction with long-haul flying from Liberty Airport on the New Jersey side. One September morning we rode the crew van from our hotel through Holland Tunnel to the airport for a non-stop to Seattle. As we left the Tunnel on the Jersey side, one of our flight attendants had us all look back at Manhattan. The sun was just coming up on a crystal-clear day bathing the skyline in light. Most significant was the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

I'm not a city guy, never was a city guy and likely never will be a city guy, but even I had to be somewhat awed by the splendor and the permanence of, especially those two massive towers. The very next morning they were reduced to rubble.

Everything can change in an instant, even when it seems impossible. You must be ready to meet the Lord face-to-face at any moment.

