KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material – *from Jenny Laithwaite*

**Matthew 24:1-14**

Week of 25th August 2024

## Standing firm

# Leader Preparation

This week is MISSIONS SUNDAY! Spend time in your groups sharing about and praying for our missionaries. Encourage people to get involved in praying for a missionary, supporting someone financially (once-off or regularly), going on a short term missions trip, or yes, even exploring their own calling from God!

Our passage this week is Matthew 24:1-14. People often have one of two attitudes to the end times. Some people are desperately intrigued by whatever details they can gather and put together into a picture that they understand. Others are happy to ignore the details as being too vague or unhelpful to draw many conclusions. The fact that Jesus speaks to his disciples about this subject means that we should not be ignorant, at least about the information that we *have* been given.

As you discuss this topic this week perhaps use the following guardrails:

- As much as people express what they hope or expect at the end of the age, regularly take them back to what we *know* from scripture
- Rather than focusing in only on complex details, keep using that as a prompt to bring people back to concern for the lost and missions.

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# Group Time:

The passage this week speaks about the “labour pains” that precede the end of the age. Pregnant women are always warned to have a bag of essentials ready for when their labour pains start and they need to go to the hospital.

- In your daily life, what is an item that you always like to have with you in case of a difficult situation?
- What is something that you always pack into your suitcase when you go away from home?

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# Exploring the Passage

## READ Matthew 24:1-14

Verse 3 follows the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem, saying “you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” and then his prophesy that the temple would be destroyed. So there are suggestions that the question asked by the disciples refers to both the immediate destruction, and to the end of the age.

- Read Matthew 13:40 and Matthew 13:49
- What does the term “the end of the age” refer to?

Verse 4 and 5 warn us of people who might lead us astray.

- How can we be protected from false christs?
- How can our understanding be strengthened to identify people taking us in the wrong direction?

Verses 6 to 8 speak of “the beginning of the birth pains”

- Does the onset of birth pains tell us exactly when the baby will arrive?
- What do you see in the world around you that makes you think that we are living in this time?
- Do you think that the apostles may have thought the same in the 1st century?
    - There was a great famine during the reign of Claudius Caesar
    - There were numerous wars, skirmishes and rebellions in the land of the Jews and abroad within the borders of the Roman Empire
    - A huge earthquake hit the cities of Pompei and Herculaneum in 62AD
- Bearing this in mind, when we are aware of the coming end:
    - How should we pray?
    - How should we behave?
    - What should the Church look like?
    - How should we interact with the world around us?

Verses 9-12 speak of the difficulties that believers will face in these times.

- Do you view persecution as a normal part of following Jesus?
- When we are surrounded by Christians, it is easy to act like a Christian. When people around us start to be corrupted by those around them, it can be much harder for us to hold firm to our faith. Have you ever been tempted to take an easier route rather than following Christ?
- When the road is hard, our faith can also grow cold. Have you experienced a time when you battled to sense the joy and warmth of your faith?

Verses 13 and 14 encourage us to hold firm right to the end, and to share the good news

- Considering that the disciples saw the temple as the representation of God's presence with them:
    - How would they have felt about the temple being destroyed?
    - How was access to God going to change after Jesus' death and resurrection?

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## Prayer

Pray for one of the RUC missionaries. Look at the prayer requests they have put forward and commit as a group to praying for them regularly. You may like to contact their sending cell (or Jenni Kurten at jenni@ruc.org.za) to ask to receive their regular updates.

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