KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material – *from David Laithwaite*

Matthew 24:15-35 (Part 2)

Week of 8th September 2024

Events Surrounding the End (Part 2)

Leader Preparation

This week we look at the second part of the passage we started last week. Perhaps you managed to cover some of this last week, or perhaps you felt like there was more to be explored and ran out of time … this week is a second chance to dig into Jesus' teachings about the end of the age.

For those who were not able to join us at the Lead Table this week, Zwai was talking about how we need to "cultivate resilient faith"; in ourselves as leaders but also with our group members. Why resilience? Because the spiritual battle is all around us and God calls us to remain strong in Him (just like we are reading about in Matthew). As Jude writes at the start of his letter (v3), he appeals to us "to contend for the faith".

As you prepare for this week, take some time to stop and pray for yourself and for your group. Pray that the Holy Spirit would be the one that directs your time together and that He would keep you strong, resilient and would bring life to you and your group members. Perhaps use Psalm 36 as a meditation:

v5: Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens

v6: Your judgements are like the great deep

v8: They feast on the abundance of your house

…. And you give them drink from the river of your delights

v9: For with you is the fountain of life

Group Time:

To get the conversation flowing, discuss how Hollywood depicts major disasters or apocalyptic 'end of the world' themes in movies?

Discuss or even show the trailer for one of the following movies (or your own favourite): Armageddon; The Day after Tomorrow; Wall-E (*a slightly lighter look at the subject*)…etc. How does this align to or differ from what the bible teaches?

or talk about the rise of dystopia (A future where there is generally a breakdown of social order) movies as a common theme and form of entertainment.

Exploring the Passage

READ Matthew 24:15-35

Remember that this whole section and final instructions from Jesus started from a simple question from the disciples in v3: "tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" *(I don't think they realised just how big that question was?)*

Let the group share what they have taken out of the last two weeks, and whether they would agree with Richard's summary of the intended impact of this final discourse from Jesus to his disciples on the Mount of Olives as developing "Resilient Hope" and "Faithful Perseverance".

Richard took us through the eight images or signs that Jesus refers to, linking the Old Testament to what the disciples (and all of us) should know and watch out for. In case you missed them:

- The abomination of desolation
- The time of great tribulation (these two we dealt with last week)
- Rampant deception
- War to end all wars
- Cosmic cataclysm
- Mass repentance
- The coming of the Son of Man
- The gathering of the elect.

[choose EITHER Route A or Route B]

Route A:

Take some time to look at the passage and these signs again.

Discuss how God is in control and intentional in all these aspects of the end of the age.

Notice the change and swing that happens in v29 with the word "immediately". Some hints: mankind actions versus Godly actions; going out and spreading versus gathered together.

Let one or two people talk about a "sudden shift" in direction in their lives. Maybe it was the time they stopped running away from God and moved towards him, maybe it was some other event that caused a change.

V29 talks of unmistakable cosmic signs that nobody will miss. Check out Rev 6:12-13 and 8:12 for similar descriptions of these events.

V30: "The sign of the Son of Man".

- How does this confirm Jesus' identity?
- How might people respond to him in this moment of complete revelation?

Would you like to be around on this day? Why or why not? *(We will witness it either way, either from the grandstands if you like, or on the field while it happens)*

Make the link again how Jesus says that this is when you will see him (Matt26:64) and that this will be the Son of God. A great reference for anyone who says Jesus never claims to be God.

Route B:

Perhaps as an alternative have a look at Isaiah 24 – 27 and see how these chapters link to the Matthew 24 passage. Here are some interesting verses to get you started:

Chapter 24: (Judgement on the Whole Earth)

- V1: Desolation of the earth; scattering of the inhabitants
- V16: Betrayal and traitors
- V18: Many will flee but perish
- V19: The earth is utterly broken
- V21: On that day! (the pivotal verse)
- V22: Gathering of those scattered (in this case of those who are judged)

The Day of the LORD:: Have a look at the different times that the phrase "on that day" is used in chapters 24 – 27. In each case, see what Isaiah prophesies will happen:

- 24: 21
- 25: 9
- 26: 1
- 27: 1,2
- 27: 12

(The questions above from Route A on V30 would be a good way to close out this part of the discussion – see above.)

Closing off

Jesus ends this discussion with the illustration of the fig tree. Jesus uses it to say that they should be alert to the signs around them … but my sense is that these will be even less subtle than a fig tree in springtime. (Point of interest: Fig trees are part of the Promised Land, Deu8:8. Fig trees were part of God's creation and perfect design, but here we are talking about the groaning and failure of that world, but also to the renewal of the created world … the New Jerusalem)

Do you long for "signs and wonders", evidence that God is who he says he is? If so Why? What was Jesus' response when asked for such signs? (Matt16:1-4) Is this enough for us to hang onto?

Close having a look at V35: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away". Cross-reference to Isaiah 40:8, where the prophet talks about "the word of our God". Again, Jesus linking the prophecies of the OT with himself.

How can we take strength and encouragement from this teaching into our week?

Take time to pray for one another. Perhaps change your format a bit (smaller groups, in twos..) so that we can pray personally that God will be sufficient for us this week.
