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Sermon Notes

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Run for Your Lives!

Matthew 24:16-28

I can hardly imagine a more terrifying scenario than running for your life with some powerful and violent men chasing you... seeking to capture you... to bring you in... to interrogate you... to imprison you... to torture you... and perhaps ultimately to kill you

It is a scene that was played out again and again in the dark days of World War II; Nazi troops would win battles and conquer territory; on their heels would come the S.S. and the Gestapo, who would seek to weed out every Jew and every perceived threat to the Nazi state, including Christian leaders

Refugees would flee in the middle of the night... breathlessly waiting under bridges while their Nazi pursuers would travel over them, so close they could hear their conversations

Others fled by train using falsified travel permits... they had to endure the suspense of Gestapo agents moving systematically through the rail car, checking papers, asking questions

Others fled through mountain passes into Switzerland, avoiding the Nazi roadblocks only by scaling forbidding mountainsides and enduring freezing temperatures

Some hid among the baggage and crates on freight ships... their hearts beating wildly and beads of sweat forming on their brows as Nazi guards with German shepherds inspected the cargo holds where they were hiding and got closer and closer to their positions

All of these refugees were fleeing because of terror... fleeing the might of the most sinister and most powerful force for evil the world had ever seen

But all of these experiences of fleeing are as nothing compared to the days that are to come... the days when the Antichrist will be ruling the world and seeking to exterminate anyone who refuses to worship him

Brothers and sisters, I don't know if that day will come in our lifetime... but we are required by Scripture to GET READY for what is coming

This is precisely why Jesus gave us this instruction to us in Matthew 24... forewarned is forearmed

Context:

- Jesus' statement about the destruction of the Temple

Matthew 24:2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

- The disciples' private question

Matthew 24:3 "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

- Matthew 24: Jesus' teaching on the end of the world
- Matthew 24:4-14 The nature of life between the first and second comings of Christ
- Matthew 24:15 The "abomination of desolation"
 - In a nutshell... two-fold answer... both the desecration of the temple by Roman soldiers in AD 70 and the final desecration of the temple at the end of history by the Anti-Christ are in view in this phrase
 - Last week: we saw how God has four times allowed Gentiles to trample on His holy place—in the time of Eli, when the ark was captured by the Philistines; when the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple; in 162 BC, when the Greek king Antiochus Euphrones sacrificed pig's blood in the Temple that Haggai had built; then in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Herod's Temple
 - I believe this points to a final act of the same drama... "As it was... so it will be"
 - The Jews will rebuild the temple in defiance of the finished work of Christ on the cross; The Antichrist will desecrate the temple one final time, and Jesus Christ will return

Today: Jesus' advice...

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand... then..."

RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!!!

I. The Desolation Leading to the Flight

A. The Spiritual Desolation of Israel: Rejection of Christ

1. Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah is the essence of their desolation

Matthew 23:38-39 Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

2. Spiritual desolation leads to physical desolation... a city of slaughter, left with no inhabitants
3. The demonic side: Jesus predicted that, because Israel had rejected Him, when He left to return to His Father's throne, the demons he had cast out would return with a vengeance

Matthew 12:43-45 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

Notice: this "wicked generation"... He was speaking of the whole nation of Israel... the demonic powers that Jesus banished from Israel would come flooding back with a vengeance... part of that vengeance would be the total destruction of Jerusalem

B. "As it was, so it will be..."

1. Twin statement in Luke

Luke 17:26 as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

Luke 17:28-30 as it was in the days of Lot... so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

2. Dress rehearsals... history repeats itself
3. As it was in the days of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, so it will be in the days before Christ returns
4. AND as it was in the days of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (of Daniel 8 and Daniel 11), so it will be in the days before Christ returns

C. A.D. 70 a Dress Rehearsal for Final Desolation

1. The signal to Christian Jews: get out of Jerusalem

Luke 21:20-22 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the

city. ²² For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.

2. Josephus: The horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem

Rome was the dominant world power. Judea, at this time was ruled by Roman procurators most of whom knew little or nothing about the Jewish religion which resulted in continuous irritations to the Jews from the Romans. A group within the city of Jerusalem, known as the Zealots, were active at this time. The Zealots convinced the temple priests to discontinue the daily offerings for the emperor and the empire which was basically a rebellion against Rome.

When Roman authorities heard of the uprising, they dispatched Roman military under the command of Cestius Gallus in 66 AD to put down the rebellion. After surrounding Jerusalem they began a siege of the city, but, after a short time, for no apparent reason, Cestius withdrew his troops and left in retreat. The Jews pursued the Romans killing many and capturing their abandoned war machinery. This humiliating withdrawal by the Romans gave the Jews a false sense of being unconquerable.

When the news of Rome's defeat at the hand of the Jews reached the emperor Nero, he was upset with the poor performance of Cestius. Nero dispatched Vespasian, a veteran general, back to Jerusalem in 67 AD to crush the Jewish revolt and avenge Rome's humiliation and the damage to its ruling prestige. Vespasian advanced into Galilee, the region north of Jerusalem. He conquered its major cities and subdued the land. After the Galilean campaign in the north he marched south and encamped around Jerusalem, but when word came of Nero's death back in Rome, Vespasian abandoned his plan for taking Jerusalem, withdrew his troops, and returned home to become Emperor. Once again the Jews prevailed.

Shortly before Passover in April, 70 AD, Titus, the son of Vespasian arrived at Jerusalem with his legions at the northern outskirts to finally put an end to the Jewish revolt and crush the insurrection. He had marched south through Galilee and set up three camps overlooking the city. Initial efforts were made to persuade the Jews to surrender thereby preserving the city, but these failed.

Titus then encircled the city to prevent help from reaching the Jews and began his final siege. During this time those who attempted to flee were either prevented from doing so, killed by the Jewish factions inside the city, or captured by the Romans, tortured and crucified by the city wall so that all could see. An embankment or rampart was constructed just as Jesus had foretold in Luke 19:43, 44.

Titus' soldiers breached the third (outer) wall of Jerusalem on May 25th and captured the newer portion of the city. By June the siege had progressed into the second wall area and the Jewish people retreated behind that last wall that protected the city. The Fortress of Antonia was taken by Titus on July 22nd followed by the Romans setting fire to the gates of the temple. Against the desires of Titus, during the attack a soldier threw a firebrand through a window into one of the temple side chambers followed by a second firebrand being thrown into the Holy Place which set the sanctuary ablaze. The Royal Portico was also consumed by fire killing about 6,000 people who were seeking refuge there. All Jewish resistance had been quelled in the city on September 26, 70 AD.

According to Josephus, one point one million Jews were killed in the attack on the city and 97,000 were taken into captivity. Over the next three years the temple stones were dismantled and leveled to the ground which Josephus describes as, "it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited." Caesar gave orders to level everything with the exception of what we can still see today. Part of the wall was left standing to provide a camp for the soldiers and other parts to demonstrate to the world what kind of city it had been that the Roman valor had subdued.

GIVEN THESE HORROR WERE COMING....

3. Practical and prophetic advice: run for your lives!
 - a. Jesus knew that some of His precious people, His church, would be in Jerusalem at that time
 - b. Here He is warning them to flee for their lives when they see the city surrounded by soldiers
 - c. There is no record of the Christian church of that time and how they fared during this onslaught by the mighty Roman empire
 - d. However, we have to imagine that the church HEEDED this warning when the time was right and FLED Jerusalem when most other Jews would have been fleeing INTO the walled fortress of Jerusalem for protection
4. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was just a dress rehearsal for the final desolation

D. The End of the World: The Final Desolation

1. The spiritual desolation of Israel continues to the final generation
2. The Rebuilding of the Temple: evidence of the desolation
 - a. They reject the work of Christ on the cross
 - b. They yearn to fulfill the Law of Moses, including animal sacrifice
 - c. They rebuild the temple... apparently with the permission and backing of the Antichrist
3. The Antichrist's Final Desolation

Daniel 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

II. The Danger that Causes the Flight

A. Basic Concept: We Must Run Because We Can't Handle the Temptation

1. Consistent biblical precept: flee temptation

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 10:14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

1 Timothy 6:11 But you, man of God, flee from the love of money

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth

2. Lord's prayer

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

Note: not merely "deliver us from evil" but "deliver us from THE EVIL ONE"

B. Key Parallel: The Night Jesus was Arrested

1. Physical danger could have resulted in the loss of their faith

- a. The chief priests and Roman soldiers were there, the bitter enemies of Jesus
- b. They would have loved to have arrested ALL of Jesus' chosen leaders that night
- c. But Christ took control of that encounter

John 18:4-9 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" ⁵ "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

2. Christ made a way of escape

3. John's analysis of that encounter... Christ did not LOSE them spiritually because He did not LOSE them physically to a trial greater than they could bear

Jesus knows there are some physical trials that are too difficult for us to face spiritually... there are temptations too great for us to bear

Peter, in his arrogance, followed Jesus at a distance, thinking he could handle whatever was coming his way... before the evening was done,

Matthew 26:74 [Peter] began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.

THAT is the power of temptation... overpowering temptation!! It can get a strong believer in Christ to deny that he even knows Jesus in the span of a few hours

How much greater will the temptation be when the Antichrist is in his glory... setting himself up as god in the flesh, desecrating the temple, doing signs and wonders, accepting worship from people all over the world!!

C. Antichrist: Indwelt and Empowered by Satan

1. The "Beast" of Revelation 13

Revelation 13:1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea.

2. Given direct power by Satan himself

Revelation 13:2 The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

3. Able to do great signs and wonders

Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

2 Thessalonians 2:11 God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

4. Will rule the earth and conquer the saints

Revelation 13:5-8 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ⁶ He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. ⁷ He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast-- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

5. Far too powerful for any person to resist

D. Antichrist's Specific Enemies: Jews and Christians

E. Deception Leads to Eternal Destruction... so We Must RUN!!!

Revelation 14:9-12 *A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." ¹² ¶ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.*

F. Even Having Run, Other Deceptions Abound

Matthew 24:23-26 *At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time. ²⁶ "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.*

1. It will be a time of unparalleled spiritual assault
2. Other deceptions will flow
3. There is NO OTHER REFUGE than Christ
4. All the elect can do is to run

III. The Desperation that Characterizes the Flight

Matthew 24:17-21 *Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again.*

A. Immense Urgency... Breathless Pace

B. No Earthly Possession Worth Your Souls

1. There isn't even time to go from the roof of your house to get anything out of the house

- a. Houses in Palestine frequently have flat roofs that people go to recline on at the end of the day... it's cooler
- b. When the alarm comes, there won't even be time to get any possession from the house

2. So also someone working in the field won't even have time to go get a coat

C. Dreadful for those Who Can't Run Fast

- 1. Pregnant women
- 2. Nursing mothers
- 3. The whole issue is RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!!!!

D. Pray for an Easement of the Circumstances

- 1. Jesus counsels that His people pray for some easement of the circumstances of their flight
- 2. That it wouldn't take place in the winter or on the Sabbath
- 3. Anything that would SLOW DOWN the headlong flight is a detriment

E. Unequalled Distress... and Thankfully Unrepeated

Vs. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again.

This is the famous "GREAT TRIBULATION"... (KJV, ESV, RSK, NASB all use the same expression)

IV. The Destination of the Flight

Matthew 24:16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

A. The Mountains... Perhaps the Caves and Craggs and Hiding Places

Luke 23:30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"

- 1. They will look for refuge... a hiding place from the forces of the Antichrist
- 2. The mountains of Judea will be the place for the people in that region to hide when the time comes

B. The Purpose: To Wait Upon the Lord and Count the Days

V. The Duration of the Flight

A. The Shortening of those Days

Matthew 24:22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

B. The Counting of the Days

1. The trial of that time will be so extreme that life itself will be hanging in the balance
2. Jesus says those days have already been counted, weighed and measured out
3. If those days had been any longer, no one would have survived

C. Full Understanding of Daniel 12?

Daniel 12:11-12 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Many commentators have given their conjecture on the mysterious 1290 days and 1335 days of Daniel 12:11.

My thoughts are that, since Daniel 7 refers to the second coming of Christ, and Daniel 12:2-3 speaks of the general resurrection from the dead of both the righteous and the wicked, and the fact that the righteous will shine refers to the end of the world:

Daniel 12:2-3 ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

It could very well be that the 1290 days and the 1335 days refer to the very end of the world... the time of the Antichrist, when God's people will be in caves and hiding places counting the days until Christ returns

Daniel was told to seal up the words of his prophecy because it was for a future generation

At some point, Jesus will say

"Let the reader understand" and all doubts about Daniel's prophecy will disappear

D. Who are the Elect Christ had in mind?

1. Jesus said:

But for the sake of the ELECT, those days will be shortened

2. WHAT elect? Could it be that at last, the Jews who still survived will turn to Christ and trust in Him
 - a. God has chosen that final generation to turn to Christ and trust in Him
 - b. Their trust in the animal sacrifices has at last been shattered by the Antichrist
 - c. Perhaps this is the exact time when they will finally hear the gospel with faith

Romans 11:25-28 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs

Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

VI. The Destiny Beyond the Flight

Matthew 24:27-31 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." ³⁰ "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

- A. The Lord Returns in Glory
- B. The Second Coming of Christ Will Occur... More next week

VII. Applications

- A. Come to Christ!
 1. These dreadful days are coming, and nothing that earth has ever seen will compare with them

2. However, nothing on earth will compare with the horrors of hell
3. Flee the wrath to come!!!
4. Flee to Christ crucified!!
5. Christ is coming back to destroy the antichrist and establish His own Kingdom
6. We either enter that Kingdom NOW by faith, or we will never enter it at all

B. Flee Temptations

1. Joseph RAN from Potiphar's wife... leaving her holding onto his tunic
2. We are told to pray

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

3. Christ makes a “way of escape” for us

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

4. Learn to avoid tempting situations
 - a. If the Mall tempts you toward materialism, avoid going there... lingering there, drifting around there and absorbing its messages
 - b. If the cable TV and other forms of entertainment lead you toward selfishness and flesh-feeding tendencies, then FLEE
 - c. If you have trouble with your eating, flee tempting situations
 - d. If you struggle with sexual lust, flee tempting situations

C. Study the End Times

Matthew 24:24-25 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

Why did Christ tell us ahead of time except that He wanted us to KNOW these things... so the elect would NOT be deceived

1. Concerning the Book of Daniel, Jesus said, ***Let the reader understand***

2. For Christians who do NOT live in the final generation (how can we ever know that for sure until we die), we are challenged to study the Book of Daniel and all the issues of the end of the world
3. For the final generation, Jesus' words will be similar to

Genesis 1:3 "And God said 'Let there be light' and there was light.

Luke 24:45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

D. Prepare Your Children for the Coming of the Antichrist

1 John 2:18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

The Apostle Paul "KEPT telling them" about the coming of the Antichrist... he mentioned it many times

No, this was not the most important issue of theology...

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

BUT just because the Antichrist is not the MOST IMPORTANT topic of theology doesn't mean we should never teach on it

Prepare your children to be the final generation

E. Know Your God

1. The only remedy to the power and temptation of the Antichrist is to KNOW YOUR GOD

Daniel 11:32 With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

2. The more you can know God through Bible reading, prayer, and courageous obedience, the more able you will be to stand firm to the end