

Faith that Endures, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Endurance to the End

Matthew 24:12-14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Spend your first minutes on the question that opens the chapter, because everything in this lesson depends on it and no one will follow you later if you skip it. Jesus walks out of the temple, the disciples point at the buildings, and He tells them plainly that not one stone will be left on another (Matthew 24:2). They come to Him privately and ask when. Everything that follows is His answer to men who had just been told their temple was coming down. Then take your class to verse 34 and let Jesus set His own deadline: "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Roughly forty years later, Titus besieged Jerusalem, the temple burned, and the sacrificial system ended forever. Help your class see that this is not a clever reading. It is the reading Jesus supplied, in the text, with a timestamp. Verses 12-14 sit inside that answer, spoken to prepare real people for a storm that hit their own city in their own lifetime.

The heart of the lesson is verse 13, and it is a sentence your class has heard so often that it has stopped meaning anything. "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." For those first disciples, the end was the end He had been describing all along, and enduring meant staying faithful through the lawlessness, the persecution, and the siege, right down to the moment they obeyed verse 16 and fled. Eusebius records that the Judean Christians did flee, to Pella, before the city fell. Then let the principle carry, because it does. Verse 12 describes the actual mechanism of loss, and it is not dramatic. Lawlessness increases, and love cools. Nobody in Matthew 24 renounces Christ. Their love simply gets tired in a world that grinds at it. That is the same way your class will lose people this year, and it is why this text belongs in a series about faith that endures rather than faith that begins.

Guard this chapter firmly, because it is the quarry from which nearly every premillennial scheme has been cut, and someone in your class has read those books. Matthew 24 contains no secret rapture, no future seven-year tribulation, and no thousand-year earthly reign. Answer it from the text: verse 34 puts the fulfillment in that generation, and verse 15 sends people fleeing on foot from Judea, which is not how anyone describes the end of the world. Then answer it from the rest of the New Testament. There is one return, one resurrection of the just and the unjust, and one judgment (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Christ reigns now, at God's right hand, and He will deliver the kingdom to the Father at the end (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Acts 2:29-36). No one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). Name the error, answer it kindly, and then get back to verse 13, which is the only assignment Jesus actually gives here.

Question 1

Student Question:

Look back at Matthew 24:1–3. What question did the disciples ask Jesus, and why is that question the key to understanding the rest of the chapter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have someone read verses 1 through 3 aloud before anyone says anything about the rest of the chapter, because most confusion in Matthew 24 comes from starting at verse 4. The disciples are doing something touching and ordinary: they are showing Jesus the buildings. The temple was the wonder of their world, decades in the rebuilding, and it was the center of everything they had ever believed about God and about being Jewish. Jesus answers with a demolition notice: “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). Help your class feel that. He did not say the temple would be reformed. He said it would be rubble.

Then look at their question, because the whole chapter is an answer to it. “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Notice what “these things” refers to. It cannot mean anything but what He just said about the stones. And notice that “the end of the age” in the mouth of a first-century Jew, standing in front of a temple he has just been told will fall, is not a question about the end of the planet. The age that was ending was the age of that temple, that priesthood, and that system of sacrifice.

Now make the methodological point, and make it stick, because it will carry the class through the rest of the lesson. When someone asks a question and someone else answers it, the answer is about the question. That is not a theological rule, it is how conversation works. Everything from verse 4 forward is Jesus answering four men on the Mount of Olives who had just been told their temple was coming down. If we forget who asked and what they asked, we will attach these words to whatever is frightening us this decade, which is precisely what has been done to this chapter for two hundred years.

Guard the boundary gently here, because your class will meet it head-on in questions 2 and 9. This is not a hostile reading of Matthew 24 and it is not a modern invention. It is the reading the text hands you in the first three verses and confirms in verse 34. You do not need charts, and you do not need a newspaper. Ask your class a fair question: if you knew nothing but verses 1 through 3, what would you expect the rest of the chapter to be about? Let them answer. Their instinct will be right.

Bring it home before you move on, because this question is doing more than setting context. Ask the class what they have been taught this chapter is about, and where that teaching came from. Not to embarrass anyone; most of us absorbed it without choosing it. Then ask them to read the chapter this week as an answer to a question, and to notice how much of what they were told simply is not in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus announces the temple's total destruction before any question is asked (Matthew 24:2)
- "These things" in the disciples' question can only refer to the stones He just spoke of (Matthew 24:3)
- "The end of the age," asked in front of that temple, concerns the end of the Jewish temple age, not the end of the planet
- An answer is about the question that prompted it; verse 4 forward answers verse 3
- Ignoring the question lets every generation attach the chapter to its own fears
- The reading is supplied by the text itself and confirmed by the timestamp in verse 34

Discussion Prompts

- Reading only verses 1 through 3, what would you expect the rest of the chapter to be about?
- What were you taught Matthew 24 is about, and where did that teaching come from?
- Why does it matter so much who asked the question?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus says in Matthew 24:34, "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Why is this verse fatal to schemes that push the fulfillment of Matthew 24 into our future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Put the verse on the board and let it sit there naked, because it is the hinge of the lesson. "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34). Note the "Truly, I say to you." That is Jesus' formula for a solemn guarantee. Note "all these things," which is the same phrase from the disciples' question in verse 3, tying the two ends of the discourse together. And note the deadline. He did not say soon, or shortly, or in a time known to the Father. He named the people standing in front of Him.

Then show the class how Jesus uses the word elsewhere, because someone has been told that "generation" means race or a future generation. Matthew has used it repeatedly, and it always means the people alive then: "an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign" (Matthew 12:39); "the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation" (Matthew 12:41). And two chapters earlier, in the same week, He said it plainly to the same crowd: "all these things will come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:36). He was not being cryptic. He said it three times in three days.

Now let the class draw the conclusion themselves, because it is more powerful if they do. If verse 34 is true, then everything in verses 4 through 33 happened within about forty years, and the Roman siege of A.D. 70 is exactly the size and shape of what He described. If verse 34 is false, we have a bigger problem than eschatology; we have a Lord who solemnly guaranteed

something that did not happen. Every scheme that pushes this chapter into our future has to do something with verse 34, and there is no honest something to do.

Guard the boundary kindly, and be fair to the people who differ. Godly students of Scripture disagree about where verse 36 turns, and the student guide is honest about that. Some hold the whole chapter describes Jerusalem; others hear Jesus pivot at verse 36 to His final coming at the end of time. You do not have to settle it and you should not spend the hour trying. The point is narrower and unavoidable: verses 12-14 sit well before verse 34, inside the section that answers the disciples' question, and verse 34 has already told us when they were fulfilled. Do not let the class turn a clear verse into a puzzle in order to rescue a system.

Bring it home where it does some good. Ask the class what it costs us to get this wrong. It costs us this: a chapter Jesus gave to make tired disciples endure becomes a chapter we use to guess at headlines. The men who first heard verse 34 did not draw a chart. They remembered it when the armies came, and they lived.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Truly, I say to you” marks a solemn guarantee, and He names a deadline (Matthew 24:34)
- “All these things” echoes the disciples' question in verse 3, binding the discourse together
- Matthew consistently uses “this generation” of the people then living (Matthew 12:39, 41)
- Jesus said the same thing to the same crowd days earlier: “all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:36)
- If verse 34 is true, verses 4-33 were fulfilled within about forty years, in A.D. 70
- Godly brethren differ over where verse 36 turns; verses 12-14 stand well inside the section verse 34 dates
- No system is worth turning a clear verse into a puzzle to rescue

Discussion Prompts

- How would you answer a friend, kindly, who says Matthew 24 is about our future?
- What does it cost a church to read this chapter as a headline guide?
- Why did Jesus put a deadline on His own prophecy?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verse 12, what historical conditions in the decades before A.D. 70 would have caused “lawlessness” to abound and love to grow cold? What parallels, if any, do you see in our own day?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Give the class the history, because “lawlessness” is an abstraction until it has faces. The decades between the ascension and the fall of Jerusalem were among the most violent in the ancient world. Rome under Nero launched the first state persecution of Christians, and it was not subtle: believers were burned and torn apart for public entertainment. Inside Judaism, the Zealots pushed toward revolt, and the Sicarii carried daggers under their cloaks and murdered fellow Jews in crowded places. Josephus, who watched it, describes a Jerusalem tearing itself apart from the inside while Rome closed in from the outside. Famine had already struck under Claudius, which Luke records (Acts 11:28). This was the world verse 12 is describing.

Then trace the connection Jesus makes, because it is not obvious and it is the point of the verse. “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” Lawlessness out there produces cold love in here. Why? Because sustained chaos exhausts people. Suspicion replaces hospitality. Everyone is a possible informer. Helping a brother becomes expensive and then dangerous. The pressure to keep your head down never lets up, and after a decade of that, a man who would have died for his brother in year one simply has nothing left. Paul knew the danger and named it: “let us not grow weary of doing good” (Galatians 6:9).

Now be careful with the parallels, because this is where the hour can go off the rails. Your class will want to talk about the news, and the temptation is to make our decade the worst one and read Matthew 24 as commentary on it. Refuse that, gently. Jesus was describing a specific historical storm with a specific end. But the mechanism He names is not confined to it. Wherever lawlessness rises, love cools. That was true in Nero’s Rome and it is true now, and the evidence in our own time is not political, it is congregational.

So make the parallels concrete and close to home. Ask what the constant noise of outrage has done to your class’s affections. People are exhausted by contempt, wary of one another, quicker to suspect motives than to assume the best, and quietly less generous than they were ten years ago. Nobody voted for that. It happened while they were tired. That is exactly what verse 12 describes, and notice how little it required. Not persecution, only atmosphere.

Bring it home personally, because verse 12 is not about a civilization. It is about a heart. Ask each person where their own love has cooled in the last five years. Not their convictions, and not their attendance. Their love. Then ask what was happening around them while it cooled. Most of them will find that the answer is not a crisis. It is just weather they stopped noticing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The setting is historical and specific: Nero’s persecution, the Zealots and Sicarii, revolt, and famine (Acts 11:28)
- Jesus names a mechanism: increased lawlessness produces cooled love (Matthew 24:12)
- Sustained chaos exhausts love; suspicion replaces hospitality and generosity becomes costly
- Paul names the same danger: growing weary of doing good (Galatians 6:9)
- The prophecy is not a commentary on our headlines, though the mechanism it names still operates

- The verse describes a heart, not a civilization; the evidence is congregational, not political

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your own love cooled in the last five years?
- What was happening around you while it cooled? Was it a crisis, or just weather?
- What has the constant noise of outrage done to how you see your brethren?

Question 4

Student Question:

Is Jesus in verse 12 describing people who were never truly converted, or believers whose devotion has cooled under pressure? What difference does the answer make for how we watch over our own hearts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make the class answer from the words on the page, because the words settle it. “The love of many will grow cold.” You cannot cool what was never warm. Growing cold is a description of a change of temperature in something that had one, and Jesus says it will happen to many. He is not exposing frauds; He is warning disciples. He has just told them what is coming and He is telling them what it will do to them, which is the sort of thing you only bother to say to people who are actually His.

Then name the doctrine your class is up against, because they have heard it and may not know it has a name. Calvinism teaches perseverance of the saints, which requires that anyone who falls away was never saved to begin with. It is an elegant system, and it makes verse 12 unsayable. Watch what it does: it takes a warning Jesus gave to His own disciples and converts it into a description of other people. That is precisely the opposite of the effect He intended. A warning that can never apply to me is not a warning; it is a compliment.

Now let the class see the consequences, because this is a doctrine with a body count. If falling away is impossible for the saved, then a cooling Christian has only two options, and both are bad. Either he concludes that his coldness proves he was never saved, which is despair, or he concludes that his coldness cannot matter because he was saved, which is presumption. Jesus offers a third and truer thing: you are His, your love is cooling, and you can do something about it. The New Testament assumes this everywhere. “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). Brothers. Fall away. The writer would not have wasted the ink if it were impossible.

Guard the other edge too, because the correction can overshoot. Do not let anyone leave thinking that God is watching for the first sign of coolness with His hand on the eraser. That is not the picture. Jesus says this in order to prevent it, which is a kindness. And the very next verse is not a threat but a promise: the one who endures will be saved. God works in us, and we

genuinely cooperate; Paul puts both halves in one breath, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you” (Philippians 2:12-13). Neither half is optional and neither half is the whole.

Bring it home to the watching, because that is what the question asks. If cooling is real and possible for you, then it is worth checking, and it is worth checking with the only instrument that works: someone else’s eyes. You cannot feel your own love cool any more than a man outdoors feels the temperature dropping one degree at a time. Ask the class who is close enough to tell them, and whether that person would.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Grow cold” assumes prior warmth; Jesus warns disciples, He does not expose frauds (Matthew 24:12)
- Against Calvinism’s perseverance of the saints: the doctrine makes this warning unsayable to the saved
- A warning that cannot apply to me is not a warning; it turns Jesus’ words about others
- Scripture warns brothers plainly about falling away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12)
- The false doctrine leaves a cooling Christian only despair or presumption
- God works in us and we genuinely cooperate; both halves stand together (Philippians 2:12-13)
- Cooling is imperceptible from the inside, which is why we need one another to notice

Discussion Prompts

- Who is close enough to tell you your love is cooling? Would they?
- How would you answer a friend who says anyone who falls away was never saved?
- Why does a warning only work on people it could actually happen to?

Question 5

Student Question:

In verse 13, what does “the end” refer to in its immediate context? How does seeing it as the end of the Jewish age (A.D. 70) make sense of Jesus’ warning to flee Judea in verses 15–21?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Answer the first half from the context, because Jesus has been using this word all along. The disciples asked about “the end of the age” in verse 3; He speaks of “the end” in verse 6 and again in verses 13 and 14. It is one subject running through one answer. The end He is discussing is the end of the temple age, the collapse of the old order that He announced in verse 2 and dated in verse 34. Enduring “to the end,” for the men He was talking to, meant staying faithful through everything He had just listed until the thing He predicted arrived.

Then read verses 15 through 21 and let the class hear how physical it is. “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak” (Matthew 24:16-18). He worries about pregnant women and nursing infants and tells them to pray it does not happen in winter or on a Sabbath. Ask your class the plain question: what kind of event is this? Nobody flees the end of the world on foot. Nobody checks the weather before the final judgment. This is a local, geographical, dated emergency with an escape route.

Now let Luke settle it, because he wrote for readers who had never seen Daniel. Where Matthew has “the abomination of desolation,” Luke writes, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near” (Luke 21:20). That is not interpretation; that is the parallel passage saying the quiet part out loud. And history obliges: the Judean Christians fled to Pella, according to Eusebius, and lived, while the city that stayed was destroyed. Jesus gave them a sign, a route, and a reason, and the ones who endured used all three.

Guard the boundary here, because this is where the schemes get built. There is no rapture in this text; the movement in these verses is people running to the hills, carrying nothing, on their own legs. There is no future seven-year tribulation either; Jesus says “then there will be great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21), and verse 34 tells you when “then” was. Say it kindly and answer it from the passage rather than from a system: a text that tells you to pray your flight is not in winter is not describing the end of time.

Bring it home, because the historical work has a point. Notice what enduring actually looked like for them: it looked like believing Jesus about something no one else believed, for forty years, and then acting on it when it cost them their homes. They abandoned property to obey a sentence He had spoken decades earlier. Ask your class what they are currently believing that costs them nothing yet. That is the question this text presses. Endurance is only visible when the armies show up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “The end” runs through the whole answer, from the disciples’ question to verse 14 (Matthew 24:3, 6, 13, 14)
- It is the end of the temple age, announced in verse 2 and dated in verse 34
- The flight instructions are physical and local: rooftops, fields, cloaks, winter, the Sabbath (Matthew 24:16-20)
- No one flees the end of the world on foot or checks the season first
- Luke’s parallel names the event outright: Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20)
- The Judean Christians fled and lived; obedience to Christ’s word was their salvation from the siege
- Against a rapture and a future tribulation: the movement here is people running to the hills, and “then” is dated by verse 34 (Matthew 24:21)

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of event makes you pray your escape is not in winter?
- They believed Jesus for forty years before it cost them anything. What are you believing that costs you nothing yet?
- How would you show a friend, from Luke 21:20, what Jesus was describing?

Question 6

Student Question:

How does the teaching “the one who endures to the end will be saved” show that salvation is conditional and ongoing — not a one-time transaction that cannot be lost? Compare Colossians 1:21-23, Hebrews 3:12-14, and Revelation 2:10.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Read the sentence as if you had never heard it, because familiarity has sanded the edges off. “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” There is a condition, a duration, and an outcome. The condition is endurance. The duration is to the end. The outcome depends on the first two. Jesus is not describing a category of especially heroic disciples; He has just told everyone listening that many will grow cold, and this is the alternative He offers them. Ask your class what the sentence would have to say instead if “once saved, always saved” were true. It would have to say something else entirely.

Then work the three passages the question gives you, and do it in order, because together they are decisive. Paul tells the Colossians that Christ has reconciled them, “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (Colossians 1:21-23). There is the condition, attached to reconciliation itself. Hebrews warns brothers of “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God,” and says “we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14). There is the same “if,” and the same “to the end.” And Christ Himself to Smyrna: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Three writers, one shape.

Now guard the boundary plainly, and name the error rather than hinting at it. “Once saved, always saved” teaches that a person who has once been saved cannot finally be lost. Scripture says otherwise in unembarrassed language. “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). Peter describes people who escaped the defilements of the world through knowing Christ, became entangled again, and ended worse than they began (2 Peter 2:20-22). You cannot be severed from something you were never joined to, and you cannot fall away from grace you never stood in. Say it without contempt for those who hold it. Then let the verses do the work.

Guard the other edge carefully, because a class taught this way can go home anxious, and anxiety is not what Jesus is producing here. Conditional does not mean precarious. Nobody is one bad Tuesday from perdition. The condition is endurance, not perfection, and the promise in verse 13 is a promise: the one who endures will be saved. He said so. The Christian who keeps holding on has the word of Christ that he will arrive, which is a firmer assurance than any theory could manufacture, precisely because it rests on Him rather than on a moment we remember.

Bring it home to where the class actually lives. Ask them where their assurance rests today. If it rests on a decision made at fourteen and nothing since, this verse is speaking directly to them, and it is speaking kindly. And if it rests on how well they are doing, then hear the promise again: the one who endures will be saved. Not the one who never wavers. Not the one who feels certain. The one who does not let go.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sentence has a condition, a duration, and an outcome: endurance, to the end, salvation (Matthew 24:13)
- Reconciliation itself is stated with an “if”: “if indeed you continue in the faith” (Colossians 1:21-23)
- We share in Christ “if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14)
- Christ conditions the crown of life on faithfulness unto death (Revelation 2:10)
- Against “once saved, always saved”: one can be severed from Christ and fall from grace (Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20-22)
- Conditional is not precarious; the condition is endurance, not perfection
- Assurance rests on the word of Christ to those who hold on, not on a remembered moment

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your assurance rest today, honestly?
- What would verse 13 have to say instead if a single past moment guaranteed heaven?
- Why is “endures” a gentler word than “never wavers”?

Question 7

Student Question:

What does “enduring to the end” look like in the daily life of a Christian? Is it dramatic heroism, or the quieter work of consistent faithfulness in worship, service, and love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class answer this from verse 12 rather than from imagination, because Jesus has already told them what the threat is. The danger He names is not a moment of dramatic denial under torture. It is love growing cold. So endurance is the opposite of that, which means endurance is

mostly the maintenance of affection over time. It is not the man on the barricade. It is the man who still means it in year thirty. Ask your class which of those two they have actually been asked to be, and which one they are quietly hoping to be measured by.

Then make it as ordinary as Scripture makes it. The Judean Christians endured for forty years before there were any armies to flee from, and those forty years were made of Sundays. Endurance looked like assembling when they were tired, teaching children the same things again, giving when the money was short, forgiving a brother who did it a second time, and continuing “steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Then, on one particular day, it looked like walking away from a house. But it could only look like that on the last day because it had looked like this on all the others.

Now draw out why the quiet version is harder, because your class assumes the opposite. Drama has adrenaline in it, and adrenaline is free. Consistency has nothing. Nobody applauds year nineteen. There is no crisis to rise to on a rainy Wednesday when the work is unglamorous and no one would notice if you skipped it. That is precisely why love cools in verse 12: not because the pressure is unbearable, but because it is unrelenting and no one is watching. The people who fail this test almost never fail it in a dramatic scene.

Guard a boundary while you are here, because the ordinary can slide into the mechanical, and this series has already met that error in the letter to Ephesus. Endurance is not merely still being on the roll in thirty years. A man can attend for a lifetime with a heart that went cold in the second decade, and Christ says so plainly to a church that worked hard and endured patiently and had abandoned its first love (Revelation 2:2-4). The thing being endured in is love. Duration without devotion is not what verse 13 promises to save.

Bring it home with something small enough to actually do. Ask the class to name one act of ordinary faithfulness they will do this week that no one will see and no one will thank them for. That is the material endurance is made of. And ask them who in the congregation has been doing exactly that for forty years, and whether anyone has ever told them it counted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The threat Jesus names is cooling love, so endurance is the maintenance of affection over time (Matthew 24:12)
- The Judean Christians endured forty years of ordinary Sundays before the one dramatic day
- It looks like the ordinary things: the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, the prayers (Acts 2:42)
- Consistency is harder than drama because nothing rewards it and no one is watching
- Endurance is not mere duration; a church can work hard, endure, and lose its first love (Revelation 2:2-4)
- What is being endured in is love; duration without devotion is not what verse 13 promises to save

Discussion Prompts

- Name one act of faithfulness you will do this week that nobody will see or thank you for.
- Who has been quietly doing that for forty years? Have you ever told them it counted?
- Why is the rainy Wednesday harder than the crisis?

Question 8

Student Question:

In verse 14, Jesus says the gospel will be preached “in the whole world ... and then the end will come.” According to Colossians 1:6, 23, Romans 1:8, and Romans 10:18, had that worldwide proclamation already taken place before Jerusalem’s fall? What does that tell us about whether verse 14 points to a still-future event?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class see what the verse claims and then let the New Testament answer it, because on this one the apostles simply hand you the verdict. Jesus says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Now put Paul beside it. He tells the Colossians of “the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). Not will be. Has been. That letter was written before A.D. 70, and Paul uses the past tense on purpose.

Then stack the rest of it, because one verse could be argued and four cannot. The gospel “in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing” (Colossians 1:6). “Your faith is proclaimed in all the world” (Romans 1:8). And asked whether they had heard, Paul answers, “Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’” (Romans 10:18). Add Pentecost, where Jews “from every nation under heaven” were in Jerusalem and heard it in their own languages (Acts 2:5). By the time Titus marched, the testimony Jesus promised had been delivered.

Now answer the question the class is actually asking, because someone will raise it honestly. Did Paul mean every square mile? No, and he was not confused. “The whole world” in that idiom means the known world of the empire and its nations, the same way Luke uses it when “a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). Caesar did not tax Peru. Jesus promised a testimony to the nations before the end came, and the apostolic generation delivered exactly that, which is why Paul can say it in the past tense to churches who would have laughed at him if it were untrue.

Guard the boundary here, because this verse is a favorite. Premillennial schemes use verse 14 to argue that Christ cannot return until some future missionary saturation is reached, which quietly makes the return of Christ a project we manage. Answer it from the text: the “end” of verse 14 is the same end as verses 3, 6, and 13, and verse 34 has dated it. Then answer it from the whole New Testament: no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36), the kingdom is not waiting

to be set up because Christ reigns now at God's right hand (Acts 2:29-36; Ephesians 1:20-23), and He will deliver that kingdom to the Father at the end (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Nothing is pending. Nothing is on a timer we can read.

Bring it home, because the mission is still ours even though the countdown is not. The gospel goes forward, not to trigger anything, but because it is the overflow of a living faith, and because our neighbors are lost. Ask your class the honest version: if preaching does not hasten the end and does not appear on any chart, what would make you do it? The apostolic generation covered the empire in one lifetime without a single deadline. They just believed it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Paul says the gospel "has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven," in the past tense, before A.D. 70 (Colossians 1:23)
- Four passages agree: the word had gone out in that generation (Colossians 1:6; Romans 1:8; Romans 10:18)
- At Pentecost, Jews "from every nation under heaven" heard it in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5)
- "The whole world" is the idiom of the known world, as when Caesar taxed "all the world" (Luke 2:1)
- Against premillennialism: verse 14 is not a still-future trigger; its "end" is dated by verse 34
- Christ reigns now at God's right hand and will deliver the kingdom to the Father at the end (Acts 2:29-36; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26)
- No one knows the day or the hour, so no missionary tally can be a countdown (Matthew 24:36)

Discussion Prompts

- If preaching hastens nothing and appears on no chart, what would make you do it?
- Why does Paul dare to use the past tense to churches that could have contradicted him?
- What is wrong with a doctrine that makes Christ's return depend on our project management?

Question 9

Student Question:

Why is it important to reject the premillennial idea that Matthew 24 describes a secret rapture, a future seven-year tribulation, or an earthly thousand-year reign of Christ? What damage does such teaching do to the plain meaning of Jesus' words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take the three claims one at a time and answer each from the passage, because that is more useful to your class than a summary verdict. A secret rapture: there is none here. The only movement in this chapter is people fleeing Judea on foot, told not to go back for a cloak

(Matthew 24:16-18), and no New Testament writer anywhere describes a silent removal of the church followed by a second chance. The doctrine is not old and it is not apostolic; it took shape in the nineteenth century through J. N. Darby and spread through the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. Note that carefully for your class. We are not rejecting an ancient reading. We are declining a recent one.

A future seven-year tribulation: Jesus says “then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matthew 24:21). The word is “then,” and verse 34 tells you when then was. Josephus describes what happened inside those walls in A.D. 70 in language no one wants read aloud in a class. The tribulation Jesus named was real, local, and historical, and it fell on the generation He said it would fall on. And an earthly thousand-year reign from Jerusalem: it is not in the chapter at all. It has to be brought in from elsewhere and installed.

Now give the class the positive answer, because refutation alone leaves people empty. Christ reigns now. Peter preached at Pentecost that God had raised Him and seated Him on David’s throne (Acts 2:29-36), and Paul says He is seated “far above all rule and authority,” with all things under His feet, head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:20-23). We were transferred into that kingdom already (Colossians 1:13), and we are receiving “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28). And at the end, “then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father,” for “he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). Notice the direction. The kingdom is not coming down at the end; it is being handed up.

Then finish the boundary with what happens when He returns, because the class needs the whole picture in one place and this is where to put it. One return. One resurrection, of the just and the unjust together: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). Paul says the same before Felix, that “there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15). One judgment. And no date: “concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36). Every man who has ever set a date has been wrong, and Jesus told him he would be before he started.

Bring it home to the damage, because that is what the question asks, and be specific rather than scornful. The damage is this. A chapter Jesus gave to make frightened disciples endure gets turned into a decoder ring for the news. Endurance becomes escape: we no longer need to be faithful to the end, only to be gone before the trouble. And when the dates fail, as they always do, honest people conclude the Bible cannot be trusted. Say it kindly. These are not wicked people; most inherited it. Name the error, answer it from the text, and then hand them back verse 13, which is what Jesus actually said and is quite enough to live on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- No secret rapture is in the text; the movement here is flight on foot from Judea (Matthew 24:16-18)
- The rapture doctrine is a nineteenth-century development through Darby and the Scofield notes, not an apostolic teaching
- The great tribulation was real, local, and historical, falling on that generation (Matthew 24:21, 34)
- No thousand-year earthly reign appears in the chapter; it must be imported
- Christ reigns now on David's throne, far above all rule and authority (Acts 2:29-36; Ephesians 1:20-23)
- Christians have already been transferred into a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28)
- One return, one resurrection of just and unjust, one judgment, and no known date (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Matthew 24:36)

Discussion Prompts

- How would you answer a friend, kindly, who is sure a rapture is coming?
- What does a theology of escape do to a command to endure?
- Why is "he delivers the kingdom to the Father" fatal to a coming earthly reign?

Question 10

Student Question:

Taking verses 12–14 as a whole — warning, promise, and mission — what practical steps can you take this week to guard your heart against growing cold and to remain faithful to the end?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class put the three verses together, because the shape of them is the answer. A warning: lawlessness rises and love grows cold. A promise: the one who endures to the end will be saved. A mission: this gospel will be proclaimed to all the nations. Notice that the diagnosis is about the heart, the promise is about the finish, and the remedy in between is about other people. That is not an accident. Jesus does not tell a cooling disciple to feel warmer. He tells him what is true, tells him where it ends, and points him outward.

Then be honest with the class about how the guarding actually happens, because "guard your heart" is useless as an instruction. Nobody can feel his own love cooling; that is what cooling means. So the practical steps have to be the kind that a person can verify from outside himself. Am I still assembling, or have I started to negotiate about it? Am I still in the word this week, or am I living on what I learned years ago? Have I done a single thing for another Christian this month that cost me something? Those are answerable. Feelings are not.

Now give them the mechanism this series has been building toward, because Lesson 8 supplied it and this lesson needs it. The Christian who never notices his own drift is not left helpless; God

gave him a congregation. Somebody else can see what he cannot, which is why Hebrews says “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Deceitfulness is the whole problem. Verse 12 describes a cooling that the cooling man is the last to know about. Ask your class who is authorized to tell them, and whether they have ever given anyone that permission out loud.

Guard the last boundary before you land, because both errors are in the room and both are comfortable. Do not let anyone leave thinking his baptism thirty years ago settles the question regardless of what happens next; Jesus said the one who endures will be saved, and He meant the endurance. And do not let anyone leave frightened, measuring himself hourly, as though God were waiting to catch him. Verse 13 is a promise made by the Lord to people He knew were about to be exhausted. The steady place is not confidence in our record and it is not anxiety about it. It is holding onto Him.

Bring it home and make them name something. Not a resolution to do better, which is what a class produces when the teacher stops one minute early. One thing, this week. The person you will call. The habit you will resume. The permission you will give somebody to tell you the truth about yourself. Then read verse 13 one more time and let them go on it: “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” They have His word for it. He has never yet failed to keep one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The three verses give a warning, a promise, and a mission; the remedy in the middle points outward
- “Guard your heart” is unusable as advice because cooling is invisible from the inside
- Practical steps must be externally verifiable: assembling, the word, and costly service to others
- God’s provision against unnoticed drift is the daily exhortation of other Christians (Hebrews 3:13)
- Sin’s deceitfulness means the cooling man is the last to know
- Against “once saved, always saved”: a past obedience does not settle the question apart from endurance (Matthew 24:13)
- The promise is meant to steady exhausted disciples, not to make them anxious

Discussion Prompts

- Who has your permission to tell you the truth about yourself? Have you ever said so out loud?
- Name one thing you will do this week. Not a resolution, a thing.
- Is your assurance resting on your record, your anxiety about your record, or on Him?