

SO WHAT? (Matthew 24:15-28)

His name was Haddon Robinson. He was one of my homiletical heroes. As a preaching professor, he taught and mentored more than one generation of preachers. His goal was that his students would faithfully and effectively preach the biblical text. One of the things he emphasized was that all preaching involves a “so what?”

In his classic book, *Biblical Preaching*, Robinson claimed:

Normal people do not lose sleep over the Jebusites, the Canaanites, or the Perizzites . . . They lie awake wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, quarrels with a spouse, diagnosis of a malignancy, a frustrating sex life, or the rat race where only the rats seem to win. If the sermon does not make much difference in that world, they wonder if it makes any difference at all.

When I stand up behind this pulpit to proclaim what’s what, you sit back and wonder to yourself, “So what?” To be a good preacher, I need to anticipate that and make clear why the message is relevant and how it intersects with your life.

We come today to a passage of Scripture that is of historic interest, but my goal is more than just to help you be better player at *Trivial Pursuit*. We should never make knowledge of the Bible just an academic exercise so that we can impress people with what we know.

One of my favorite NT verses is Romans 15:4 where Paul claims: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

The purpose of the Bible is not to fill our heads with mere information; it is to fill our hearts with needed hope. We need the kind of hope that will motivate us to carry on and follow through with being the people of God where He has placed us. You do not live where you live and do what you do by accident. You have been providentially placed where you live and where you work. Those who are within your circles influence are there by God’s design. Now, we are to let God use us as He wills in the lives of those who cross our paths—some daily and some only occasionally.

Turn with me to Matthew 24. We will be looking at vv. 15-28. I am going to approach this passage differently than how most of you have heard it taught previously.

Let me lay my cards on the table and make my position clear from the outset. I do not believe this passage deals with what is often called the Great Tribulation near the end of time. If the Bible teaches that, you are going to have to find it some place other than Matthew 24.

This passage does talk about a time of tribulation, to be sure. This is made clear by v. 29. What I am saying is that “the tribulation of those days” is not at some point in the future. Instead, from our view, they were at some point in the past. Jesus told the disciples in v. 2 that the temple was going to be utterly destroyed. In v. 3, the disciples asked, “When is that going to happen?”

Starting with v. 4, Jesus began to tell that kinds of things that they would soon experience. I believe Jesus answered their question in v. 34. Jesus was asked, “When will the temple be destroyed?” Jesus answers, “In your generation.” Jesus did not say those things would happen in my generation or your generation or a generation yet to come. He looked and His disciples and said, “Your generation.”

A generation in the Bible is commonly considered to be 40-years. In less than 40 years after Jesus spoke those words a multiple number of Roman legions surrounded the City of Jerusalem. They laid siege to it in April of 70 AD. At some point in August of that year, they routed the city. They set the temple on fire. Eventually, Roman soldiers dismantled the temple completely so that not a single stone lay atop another. What Jesus said would happen happened.

You may be thinking, “If what Jesus said would happen has already happened, of what benefit is this passage to me?” That is a fair question, and I want to give you a good answer. Let’s read our text—Matthew 25:15-28. The title of our message is, “So What?”

I believe the verses we just read teach us three things about Jesus, and how we are to live in light of those things.

I. JESUS KNOWS; SO, LISTEN TO HIM.

What does Jesus know? Specifically, He knows what the future holds. The future is not a mystery to Jesus. He is not waiting in suspense to see what happens. Jesus was not a mere man. He became a man. He is the God/man. He left the glory of heaven and was born as a baby boy. I like how Eugene Peterson paraphrased John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

As God, Jesus was and is privy to inside information. He knows things we don’t know. Fortunately, for us, God likes to talk. He enjoys divulging what He knows, but He doesn’t just tell anybody.

Twice in Scripture, Abraham is referred to as the “friend” of God (2 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23), and one additional time, God describes Abraham as “My friend” (Isaiah 41:8).

You tell friends, good friends, things that you don’t tell other people. The same is true of God. In Genesis 18:17 we read, “The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?’” God then proceeded to tell Abraham how that He planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

There are many things about our lives that we simply do not know and could never know on our own. As, however, our friendship with God deepens, God may choose let us in on what He is doing and what He is about to do. He is not going to tell you everything, but He will likely tell you some things simply because you and He are such good friends.

Because God knows and because God likes to talk, especially to His friends, we need to listen. We need to listen really well.

As I think about listening to Jesus, I think about a woman who shows us three times in the gospels. Her name was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

- It was Mary who broken an expensive bottle of perfume and used it to anoint the feet of Jesus. She proceeded to dry His feet with her hair.
- It was Mary who listened to Jesus while He was teaching and while her frustrated sister was toiling away in the kitchen all alone.
- It was Mary who after her brother died and after Jesus showed up four days after Lazarus' burial, who fell at Jesus' feet and complained, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She was saying, "Jesus, you came too late." At least she lodged her complaint from the right place, from kneeling at the feet of Jesus.

The truth is that all three times we find Mary, we find her at the feet of Jesus. When she anointed Jesus feet, she was kneeling at his feet. When she was listening to Jesus teach, she was sitting at the feet of Jesus. And when her broken heart cried out, she was kneeling at Jesus' feet.

Let's develop a habit, everyday, of sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Him and talking with Him.

Erwin McManus, a pastor in Los Angeles and an author of numerous books told a story about his son and about hearing the voice of God. Listen to what McManus said:

My son, Aaron, was five or six when he began asking me, "What does God's voice sound like?" I didn't know how to answer.

A few years later, Aaron went off to his first junior high camp. In the middle of the week, I went up with another pastor at Mosaic to see our kids. Aaron, I learned, had started to assault another kid but had been held back by his friends. He was unrepentant, wanted to leave camp, pulled together his stuff, and shoved it into the car.

I asked him for a last talk with me before we drove away. We sat on two large rocks in the middle of the woods. "Aaron," I asked, "is there any voice inside you telling you what you should do?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"What's the voice telling you?"

"That I should stay and work it out."

"Can you identify that voice?"

"Yes," he said immediately, "It's God." It was the moment I'd waited for.

"Aaron," I said, "do you realize what just happened? You heard God's voice. He spoke to you from within your soul. Forget everything else that's happened. God spoke to you, and you were able to recognize him."

I will never forget Aaron's dug-in response: "Well, I'm still not doing what God said."

I explained to him that that was his choice, but this is what would happen. If he rejected the voice of God coming from deep within and chose to disobey his guidance, his heart would become hardened, and his ears would become dull.

If he continued on this path, there would be a day when he would never again

hear the voice of God. There would come a day when he would deny that God even speaks or has ever spoken to him.

But if he treasures God's voice however it comes to him—through the Scriptures, through his conscience—and responds to him with obedience, then his heart would be softened, and his ears would always be able to hear the whisper of God into his soul.

Aaron chose to stay, I'm grateful to say. If he had chosen differently, he would have begun the path toward nominal discipleship. Perhaps he never would have rejected the faith overtly. He might have even chosen to be a faithful attender at a church and been by everyone else's estimation a good man, but he would no longer be a close Jesus-follower.

I urge you to become a close Jesus-follower. Let's learn to long for and to cultivate the ability to hear and follow the voice of our Savior.

II. JESUS LOVES; SO, BELIEVE HIM.

The reason Jesus told the disciples what He told them, and the reason these verses were included in the NT is that Jesus loved His Jewish followers in Jerusalem, and He wanted them to know what was coming so that they could save themselves from the terrible fate that those who ignored Him would face.

Jesus drew a parallel between what would happen to the temple with something that had already happened earlier in their history, and it was something that the prophet Daniel foretold in the book that bears his name. Four times Daniel writes about an abomination that causes desolation. Most commentators believe this was fulfilled in 168 AD. That was the year when Antiochus IV, who was known as Antiochus Epiphanes, seized Jerusalem. Having done so, he erected an idol of Zeus in the Jewish temple, and he desecrated the altar by sacrificing pigs upon it.

Jesus was saying that something similar was coming. In the spring of 70 AD, just a few days before Passover, while the city had swelled due to the influx of Jewish pilgrims, Roman soldiers laid siege to the city. The siege lasted four months, and during that time thousand upon thousands died of famine. Hundreds upon hundreds of Jews were caught by the Romans who had tried to flee the city. They were crucified upon crosses that lined the city wall of Jerusalem.

The Roman legions were accompanied by numerous standards that bore an idolatrous image of an eagle.

Before the Roman army marched upon Jerusalem, they systematically marched through the cities and towns of Judea gobbling them up. The Jewish people had shown themselves to be problem children to the Roman Empire. It was decided to put them in their place once and for all.

One of the few to survive the Roman campaign against Judea was a former Jewish priest in his early 30's who had been the mayor of one of those Judean towns destroyed by the Romans. We know him as Josephus. Josephus became a historian. He wrote

numerous volumes about Jewish history. In his book on Jewish wars he included a long recitation of what happened in the siege of Jerusalem. He wrote than never “did any other city suffer such miseries.”

Josephus was used by the Romans to talk to the authorities in Jerusalem. He appealed to them to surrender. They were promised that if they would surrender, they would be shown mercy. They refused. They continued to fight and resist, and in the end, they were slaughtered. He estimated that 97,000 Jews were taken captive as slaves, and 1.1 million Jews died in the siege of Jerusalem.

It is believed that very few if any Christians died because they remembered what Jesus said, and when they saw the Romans coming, they got out of dodge. Look at vv.16-19.

We can believe what God says because He loves us, and He has clearly demonstrated His love for us.

In May of 2016, a woman by the name of Nicole Cliffe wrote an article entitled, “How God Messed Up My Happy Atheist Life.” She told how that all of her adult life she had been an atheist, and how that she had been quit content in her atheism. But soon, God began to intrude upon her thoughts. She found herself crying often as she thought about what the Bible says about us and what it says about God. She began to read Christian books, and every time she read one, she would cry. Finally, she emailed a Christian friend and asked if they could talk. Here is what Nicole wrote in her article:

But about an hour before our call, I knew: I believed in God. Worse, I was a Christian . . . I was crying constantly while thinking about Jesus because I had begun to believe that Jesus really was who he said he was . . . So, when my friend called, I told her, awkwardly, that I wanted to have a relationship with God, and we prayed . . . Since then, I have been dunked by a pastor in the Pacific Ocean while shivering in a too-small wetsuit. I have sung “Be Thou My Vision” and celebrated Communion on a beach, while weirded-out Californians tiptoed around me. I go to church. I pray . . .

[Even after accepting Christ] I continue to cry a lot. [I read a news article] that literally sank me to my knees at how broken this world is, and yet how stubbornly resilient and joyful we can be in the face of that brokenness. My Christian conversion has granted me no simplicity. It has complicated all of my relationships, changed how I feel about money, messed up my public persona . . . Obviously, it’s been very beautiful.

Jesus loves us. It is time to trust Him. That brings us to the last “So What.”

III. JESUS WARNS; SO, OBEY HIM.

Jesus warns His hearers to flee when they see what is taking place. He warns them to waste no time. He warns them not to be duped by those claiming to be the Christ or by false teachers.

As an argument against false Christs and false prophets, Jesus says basically, “When I

come back, you'll know it. You'll see Me."

On April 25, 1982, millions of people around the world were having their morning coffee, reading the newspaper when they came across a full-page ad that declared, "THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE." That ad was placed in 20 major newspapers around the world—Rome, London, New York, Los Angeles, and other major cities. The ad claimed that Christ would reveal Himself and His identity within the next two months via a worldwide TV and radio broadcast. That was more than 38 years ago, and the world is still waiting.

Understand this: When Jesus comes back, He is not going to have to take out an ad in USA Today or the New York Times, or the Enid News and Eagle to announce His arrival. Every eye will see Him. He will return literally, physically, and visibly.

Until then, we simply need to do what He says.

Before his death in 2015, Danny Lotz would take his wife to football games at his alma mater, the University of North Carolina. He was married to Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham. Anne once said that at those games, there are throngs of people in the parking lots, so many people that she couldn't even see where she was going. She says that in such cases, she held Danny's hand. Danny stood 6-feet, 7-inches tall. He played on the North Carolina basketball team in 1957 when they won the NCAA Championship. At 6'7", Danny can look over the crowd. Anne explained, "The way I get from the car to my seat is just by holding his hand and following him closely through the crowd.

She went on to say that she attempts to follow the same procedure with the Lord. "I just try," Anne said, "to faithfully follow the Lord step by step and day by day. Ten years from now, I just want to look back and know that to the best of my ability I have been obedient to God's call on my life."

Friend, put your hand into the hand of the Lord and keep following Him. Keep listening to Him. Keep believing Him. Keep obeying Him.

I began this message by talking about hope. Let me return to that theme. Years ago, Paul Powell, who was a Southern Baptist pastor, observed that when trouble invades your life, you can do one of four things.

Some people try to grope their way through. They are confused, dazed, and they often ask, "Why?" Why did this have to happen? Why did it happen to me?

Some people try to mope their way through. They complain. They engage in self-pity. They cry, "Woe is me."

Some people try to dope their way through. They turn to a bottle. They pop pills. They take drugs in order to deaden the pain they are feeling.

What you and I need to do is to hope our way through. Put your hope in God. He will see you through.