

Matthew 22-06-19b

Let's pick up our study here in Matthew chapter 24. We are looking at this concept of God waiting until the cup of iniquity is full and then dispensing judgment. We in our human view would often like to have the godlike power to stop iniquity in its tracks.

We see something perverse, we see various things on the news, and I don't have to tell you what some of them are, whether it's in the south or in the east or overseas or where our money goes and what happens when you pull up to the gas pump or whatever else. We would love to fix it and fix it now. I have physical suffering, I want to fix it and fix it now.

I've got circumstantial challenge, I've got people problems, I've got political haywire that is affecting me and vacuuming the modest amount of money that God has given me for stewardship and it is escaping by means beyond my control and is being spent for things that I violently disagree with by an overreaching and morally underperforming government. And I can't do anything about it and I feel like the people in Malachi, where is the God of justice? And there's people that say there really is no God of justice, that's why we can get away with whatever we want. God says, patience.

The sound of the cup that holds this iniquity, we hear the burbling as it gets closer and closer to the top. This iniquity is filling it and filling it and the closer it gets to the top, the more we hear it, the more we see it, the more we smell it, the more we experience it. There is a corrupting, a separating, an awful level.

And as I said before the break, what distinguishes this from many other periods in history, you can imagine times and locales where people have seen all of this and worse. Even in our current day, some of the persecution of Christians in Africa is, there is violence, bloodshed, egregious murder and people fleeing in fear of their lives for their faith that is very hard to keep up with because it's not being reported on. You really have to dig to find the level of persecution going on in Africa.

At the same time, there is a tremendous revival going on in southern India, southeastern portion of India. And there is a toehold, a clinging level of Christianity and Christian ministry in Spain, in Andalusia. There is a Christian ministry there that I am personally involved with and in communication with on a weekly basis, but it is difficult.

And these candles are burning down and becoming dimmer. They have had their heyday and persecution and suppression and cancellation and limitation and devious means of cutting off their communication are everywhere. And this is global.

Never before in history has Christianity and the light of the word of God been suppressed so entirely and so universally with such vigor, with such bitter hatred. It is as though Satan is coming out from behind his subterfuge, coming out from behind his devious

measures and just walking to and fro and up and down in the earth, seeking whom he may devour. And the point for me here in this passage is God is currently allowing it.

This is something we often forget. And if we forget that there is a purpose in God giving evil its head, letting go the reins for a time and a space, if we forget that this is a consistent pattern through history, God waits until there is critical mass. Then he judges.

There is going to be a different paradigm in the millennial kingdom when the Lord Jesus Christ and David and the sons of David are ruling the world from Jerusalem, and in particular, the kingdom of Israel itself, the millennial version described in Ezekiel, that's when evil will be suppressed as soon as it emerges, as soon as it expresses itself. That rule will be with a rod of iron and any little clay pot that is not shaped by the master's hand is going to be shattered with that rod of iron, shattered into shards, crushed into powder for almost 10 centuries. And we'll get to see a new phase in a new set of conditions in human history.

Every dispensation, I personally am dispensational. I think you all primarily are dispensational. We know that God changes the conditions in which human choice is embedded, in which it is tested.

Perfect people, perfect environment in the Garden of Eden. Fallen people, fallen environment in various stages of divine provision. In the days of the visitations by God and communications from God and expressions of covenant promise, very few.

From the days of Noah down through to the time of Joseph, very limited interaction with God. Most of Genesis is narrative. Very little of it is revelation from God until you get to Moses.

In the time of Moses and the dispensation of the law, now you have replete quantities of divine revelation. What Moses brings down from Sinai is fulsome. God's communication to Moses during the wilderness wanderings, after that, God's dealings with His people in the days of Joshua and in the days of the judges.

We have these written records of visitations by angels, of expressions of God's will and God's purpose, down through the time of the kings and the prophets that we studied for so many years. Then in the days that we're looking at now, the post-exilic day, you have Malachi and then for 400 years, nothing. 400 years after what we saw in Genesis chapter 15, God's covenant with Abram and the smoking furnace going through the divided sacrificial animals.

He says for 400 years, starting after the time of Joseph, people are going to be oppressed. Between Joseph and Moses, where is the revelation? It's a period of silence for 400 years. From the time of Malachi to the time of Christ, you have 400 years of silence.

Why? Everything you need is in the revelation. When's the last time God dispensed revelation to His people in this dispensation? It's been close to 2,000 years. That's five sets of 400 years.

Five. The number five. Five 400s.

It could be that there will be six 400s. As incredible as it may sound, as bad as we think things are, we do not know how near the end of the church age is. We don't know how close the rapture is.

I do know that for me, it is no more than a few decades away, maybe less, because at the end of our human life, that's the rapture for us. So regardless of the timing in human history, the days are short and the warnings that God gives to His disciples in Matthew chapter 24 and 25, all of the warnings in this latter portion of Jesus' ministry, this week before His crucifixion, are pertinent for us because they reflect the similarity of hardship, persecution, opposition, suppression that are a part of the life of the people of God until iniquity is full. The iniquity of the Amorites among whom we live is not yet full or the rapture would take place and the tribulation would begin.

It's not yet full. As hard as that is to believe, I think it's almost full. I don't see how without some massive weeding out to allow the remnant to persist and persevere, I don't know how it could go much further.

But people have thought that before. What I do know is that for each one of us, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in the air to take us to Himself is measured in two-digit years at most. Nobody listening to the sound of my voice has to wait more than a few decades for the return of the Lord Jesus.

He is coming and He is coming immediately at the end of our earthly life. Whether we're walking around or at the point that we stop registering on any of the monitoring equipment, in one sense it doesn't really matter. We need to be ready.

You do not know the hour at which the Lord Jesus will return for us, just as these people will not know the hour of His return, historically speaking, in their generation. My generation, when I come to the end of my experience of my generation, I'm going to see the Lord Jesus in the air. Same for you.

So we've got something measured in two-digit years at most, perhaps far less, to be prepared, to be faithful, to demonstrate our will and our choice in response to God's promises, God's offer of deliverance, God's grace, God's mercy, God's love, the unique opportunity to be in Christ and to share in all of His blessings, all of His opportunities, as He is the firstborn among many brethren, and that's us. To enter into that inheritance, to secure a place in the eternal future, it is here and it is now. And what happens in the world, I can't control.

What happens in my soul, what happens in my attitude, what comes out of my mouth, that I can control. That I choose. And that gets entered into the books.

Every moment of my waking life, and I think sometimes even in my dream life, I had a very interesting dream. I was in a position where I had a choice to do something nefarious in my dream, and I thought, wow, that is so wrong. And I think that decision counts.

I don't think you get a free pass to engage in fantasies just because you're dreaming. What kind of heart do you have that you would pursue something wicked in your dream that you wouldn't contemplate in real life? All of our decisions, all of the attitudes that we express, the words that we speak, are being recorded. And as the world becomes increasingly hostile, where is our heart? Where is our faith? Are we willing to stand on our faith at the risk of sacrifice, at the risk of loss? There are people in Africa who are losing everything they have and losing their lives because they will not abandon their faith.

It reminds you of the first few generations of Christians in the Roman Empire. And there is a valley of decision for us, just as there is a valley of decision at the end of the tribulation. So that's what we're looking at.

As this cup of iniquity fills, what do we understand about it? It's a part of God's plan. The judgment does not come until that cup is full. We've seen it in Genesis 15.

We've seen it in Leviticus 18, the fulfillment of what God said to Abram. We've seen it in 1 Kings 21 with Ahab. We've seen it in 2 Kings 21 with Manasseh.

You can turn to Daniel 8.23. Daniel 8.23. In the latter time of their kingdom, talking about the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms arising out of that nation, but not with its power. In the latter time of their kingdom, when transgressors have reached their fullness, this kingdom is going to arise out of four that precede it. And when transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise with fierce features who understands sinister schemes.

God times. God invokes angelic operations and inhibits or promotes activity among the nations. And He watches for the level of transgression.

And it is like watching your gas gauge. When you see the needle creeping toward E, you know it's time to put in gasoline. God monitors righteousness.

And when the righteousness in a particular area, in a particular nation, or in a particular generation reaches empty, that's the time when He doesn't necessarily refill the tank. He'll just scrap the car and start something new. So you find this in the New Testament.

We saw this in our When He's talking to the Pharisees, you're witnesses against

yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Your ancestors murdered prophets. You are their sons.

And Jesus says in verse 32, fill up then the measure of your fathers. They started it. You are going to fill it up.

And this generation of pharisaical, self-righteous, self-indulgent, self-seeking, self-serving individuals didn't pass away before judgment fell. Jesus spoke these words and in 40 years, the nation, the temple, the entire structure that these people built and exploited for their own benefit and their own aggrandizement was destroyed and them along with Serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of Gehenna, the condemnation of Hades, the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify.

Some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. And we looked at that in detail. All these things will come upon, look at verse 36, this generation, this Gehenna.

The Hebrew word is dor, d-o-r. The Septuagint translates dor into Greek as Gehenna. The word here translating what Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic is Gehenna.

So what is our response? And I'm just having you kind of put a mental sticky note every time we see this word generation, because this is going to help us understand Jesus talking about a generation passing away related to the fulfillment of his prophetic word. And he goes on in verse 37 here, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Here is the will of the Lord Jesus to gather and embrace the people of Jerusalem. Whose will prevails? If Jesus wills gather them, why are they not gathered? This puts the lie to the unfortunate misunderstanding on the part of those who think that God's elective will is irresistible. I just don't know how you can sustain that in the light of so many passages of scripture.

Some that we've looked at just in the past few weeks in the Old Testament in Jeremiah. All day long, I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people. Turn, turn.

Why will you die, O house of Israel? Don't be a part of the judgment generation. Be a part of the delivered generation. The Lord Jesus often wished that he could gather the people of Israel, represented here by the people of Jerusalem, the capital, the leadership, where the Levites and ostensibly the government represented by Judah should have

recognized him, should have acknowledged him, should have worshipped him as Lord and God, having the heart that the fathers had.

But they don't. Often I wanted to gather you together. You are not willing.

See, your house is left to you desolate. You will see me no more until you say. He doesn't say you will see me no more until the God in heaven who elects the righteous says.

You know when you're going to see me again? When you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the parousia presence of the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't come until people receive a love of the truth, until they look for and accept and celebrate the Lord Jesus Christ. The deliverer, the salvation of God, his very name, Yeshua, represents salvation.

But Jesus doesn't say you will not see me until the time appointed by the Father. You will not see me until you've got the heart to see me. It's up to us, even in our lives, in our day-to-day lives, to what extent is the Lord Jesus present in our heart, in our life.

You remember in the Gospel of John, we have the wonderful promise in John 14, 21. Whoever has my words and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and reveal myself to him.

That's a version of parousia for us. If you have my commandments and keep them, that is the demonstration of love. That is going to be written in the books.

That is going to determine present provision and future blessing. Having his words and keeping them. Put an asterisk, be sure and write down John 14, 21, because we have a passage in our context that directly references this concept.

So what is our response to this truth? We say, okay, I get it. Suffering is a necessary part of life. It is woven into God's plan.

He doesn't like it. It grieves him. It makes him sorry to look at Noah and seeing him bobbing around in a sea of iniquity.

And he is eventually going to create a sea of judgment into which Noah is also going to bob around before he emerges into a cleansed and refreshed environment where he can begin to build anew. But the seeds of corruption are still present. You remember Noah and his vineyard, and it isn't yet a perfect world.

What's the problem? There wasn't anything wrong with the environment. It was the decisions made by Noah and Mrs. Noah and Canaan, the son of Ham. The human heart has not yet been delivered from the influence of sin and the influence of evil as it will be in the future.

God has a purpose in that as well. So what are we called to turn to Luke chapter 21, Luke

chapter 21, this is still the Lord Jesus speaking, uh, 21, 13, during a time of persecution, during a time of hardship, there's earthquakes in various places, famines, pestilences, fearful sites, great signs from heaven. Before all these things, they lay their hands on you and persecute you, deliver you up to synagogues and prisons.

You'll be brought before Kings and rulers for my name's sake. That's verse 12, verse 13, but it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. It is an occasion for witness.

Remember Hebrews 12, one seeing that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses of testimonies in chapter 11, by faith, by faith, by faith. This will be a chance for us when we are enduring hardship and opposition and persecution, and just the friction and the slings and arrows of outrageous evil, just being in the world, we pick up road dust even when we do everything right. It will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony, therefore settle it in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer.

We tend to think, well, should I become a doomsday prepper? Should I start making all kinds of preparations for the apocalypse and post-apocalyptic nuclear holocaust and the sun not shining and the moon not giving its light? And should I lay in bed? We can make whatever sort of physical preparation we deem appropriate. I would say prayerfully using common sense. I can't put my faith in preparation.

You lay away dried foods and they rot in the containers. You put away water and it might leak out of a cracked plastic container. We can make preparation, but the Lord Jesus says, don't put your faith in preparation now for what you anticipate in the future.

You don't have to work yourself into a lather. Just be prudent. Everybody keeps food beyond today.

Walmart may operate on just-in-time resupply for their shelves. Homeland and these other stores, Kroger and these others, Reesers and whatnot, they may let their shelves get emptied and resupply it overnight and be ready for the next day. But most of us, we go to the store and we lay in food for several days.

We don't lay in food for three years. We lay in what is prudent, what is appropriate, what we have capacity for, and we trust that God will give us today, today's bread. Do not worry about tomorrow, Jesus says.

We saw that earlier. Take no thought for what you will eat, what you will wear. And this doesn't mean make no plan and have no preparation.

It means don't take thought in the sense of worry and undue concern. Just be prudent. Relax.

If plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense, just like Bible interpretation.

So settle in your heart not to meditate. Get your heart settled.

It's similar to what Jesus says in John 14, let not your heart be troubled. If you're troubled about the future, you need to rethink that. That's a bad attitude.

Settle it in your heart that you're not going to over anticipate. Don't write your speech ahead of time. Don't lay in too many provisions ahead of time.

Just be prudent. If your headlights only show you the next 500 feet of highway, then make your plan accordingly. Not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer.

I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. This notion of what you will say and the answer that you will give is representative of anything you need in the future. If we need to sock something away, God is going to put it in our hearts.

If we need to prepare ahead of time, we will be able to make a kind of provision that none of our adversaries are going to be able to counter. God will give us the wisdom. Instead of watching a lot of prepper videos and can I make my own refrigerator and all the rest of it, you might do that.

Some of those things are kind of fun. I'm in the process of trying to make a wood gas generator. I've got enough firewood to last through the millennium probably.

If I have a wood gas generator, then I can run internal combustion things like my generator off of it. But it's a fun project. I'm not out there putting it ahead of everything else.

If I can get to it this summer, it would be a fun thing to try. It would be cool to have that back pocket as an option. But it's an option.

God hasn't put it in my heart to get it ready by the end of the month, thankfully. But whatever God puts in our heart, we go first to God. Lord, place in my heart this wisdom that adversaries cannot counter, can't cancel, can't confiscate, can't refute.

We do what we do with a settled heart. Jesus says, first and foremost, settle your heart and don't worry too much about what you think you might need in the future. Well, I might be standing before a king.

What will I say? Jesus says, don't worry about that. God will put the wisdom in your heart for what to say. I would submit this has application for the immediate future.

What if they start coming and confiscating things? What if they declare property to be the... You've seen this happen in socialist environments in the past. Learn from history. What happened in the days of Ho Chi Minh? What happened in the days of Pol Pot? What happened in the days of Hitler? What happened in the days of Mussolini? What happened

in the days when government overreach got to the point, look at what's happening in Australia.

Heck, look at what's happening in Australia. What government can do. Don't think it can't happen here.

It's already happening. It's not as bad or as obvious, but it's happening. We have confiscation in subtler forms taking place right now.

If anything unsettles our heart, the first thing we have to do is get that unsettledness fixed. And it isn't fixed by practical measures. It's fixed by going to God.

What does Jesus say in John 14? Don't let your heart be troubled. You believe in God and you believe in me. That faith ought to settle your heart.

God has us in his hands and God has promised, look at this, it will be given to you in that hour, the wisdom that you need. If we need wisdom for this hour, go to God. Say, Lord, I am claiming your promise.

I feel like I need some wisdom here. My heart's starting to be unsettled. I'm starting to feel like those faithful believers in Malachi that are kind of wondering if the righteous are going to survive.

Lord, bring to my heart through the ministry of your Holy Spirit, the truth of your word that I have learned over these many years, settle my heart. I am claiming the wisdom that you have promised to provide. Bring it to my mind, bring it to my heart.

Maybe it'll be in the council of fellow believers who speak the truth in love, but I know that it is not right for me to have an unsettled heart. Settle my heart. Give me the wisdom I need.

I'm trusting you for it. The ball's in your court. I'm not going to worry about this until I get an answer from you.

If you don't give me any wisdom, then I don't need to perpetrate any wisdom at this moment. I just continue to march with what I know. Go with what you know.

If you need to take a new tack, if you need to make a provision, if you need to lay up in the summer because winter is coming, God will give us the knowledge in our heart. It's a promise. Look at it.

Do not let your heart be unsettled. Settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer. What is your answer to circumstance? What is your answer to persecution? You don't have to figure it out in your own wisdom ahead of time.

I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to

contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for my namesake, but not a hair of your head shall be lost.

Look at verse 16 and look at verse 18. They will put some of you to death, but not a hair of your head shall be lost. That is one of the coolest combination promises in the whole Bible.

Remember Job saying, though he slay me, yet will I trust him, because I know that even in death I will not lose a thing. I will not lose one hair, even if they kill me. Why would you fear a death that takes nothing away from you? If anything, it is a promotion.

It is a reunion. It is an express ticket to the rapture. Okay, fine.

If some of us are going to slay, yet not a hair of your head will be lost, wow. In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ has conquered death and taken away its sting and its power. Death has no hold over us, has no power over us. All it is going to do is transition us from this life to the next.

Not a hair will be lost. By your patience, look at verse 19. This is the answer when we look at the world around us, see it spiraling downward, see the cup of iniquity filling almost to the brim.

We have a cup that is a different cup. It is the cup David speaks of in Psalm 23. My cup runs over.

Not only do I not lose anything in the cup, but there is extra stuff. By your patience, possess your soul. Take charge of your soul and control it with patience.

Work of faith, labor of love. Remember the triad of Christian virtues and what Paul says about them. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope.

By patience, possess your soul. Hope is the fuel for patience. Hope is the foundation for patience.

This doesn't worry me because I know the future. This doesn't worry me because I have the confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise that He is going to give me whatever wisdom I need. And even if I am slain in the process of God refining and purifying me, not a hair is going to be lost.

God says it. I believe it. That settles it.

I'm going to possess my soul in that knowledge. I'm going to relax. I'm going to be

confident.

I will wait for whatever wisdom God gives me because I am looking to Him for it. This is the answer to why do the wicked prosper. This is the answer that is the theme of the book of Malachi.

God says be patient. Be patient. I will send Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord and you better have the heart that the fathers had.

They received the promise. Abraham dwelt in tents his entire life in hope, waiting for a city whose founder and builder is God. And his heart was settled in that.

He didn't say, well, you know, I've got lots of ancestors. I look back and all these guys built cities and created industries and skills. And what have I done? I'm just a nomad.

I'm wandering around. I dig a well. Uh, what's going to happen to my kids? What's going to happen in the future that God said that I'm going to possess the land.

I don't feel like I'm possessing it. I'm fairly prosperous, but, uh, look at my, uh, you know, look at my son Ishmael and how that all turned out. You look at Isaac and he says, uh, I know I've got these promises from God, but I dig a well and they take it away from me.

I dig another well, they take it away from me. I dig another well, they take it away from me. Look at my son Esau.

What a rascal he turned out to be. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob all the way down had a heart of patience and faith in God for the fulfillment of these promises, a fulfillment they did not see in this life, but they were confident of receiving in the next and not a hair of anything God promised them is lost. They are going to dwell in the land.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are going to get to see the millennial kingdom ruled over by the Lord Jesus Christ, their descendant. They are going to see all of their kids, grandkids, great grandkids, had however many greats you want to to the grandkids. They're going to see them all the faithful ones, the believing ones, the ones that share their heart, the children that turn their hearts to the fathers.

They've got a heart like the fathers. They're going to enjoy all these things. It is all about the patience of hope by your patience, possess your soul, take charge of your soul, grab the wheel and steer this thing in the right direction.

Fret not thyself because of evil men. This is the key. We have much more to say about this.

I got about 20% of the way through my notes for this morning. So we will see much more of this. We are going to look at the meaning of Jesus' prediction that this generation will not pass away.

I think you're beginning to get an inkling of what it means by this generation. It is the generation whose cup is filling with iniquity. Is this chronological or is it typological? Is this a generation limited to a space of time or is it a generation characterized by a kind of heart? This is what we'll see when we look at it in detail next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for your promises. Thank you for the confidence we have that not only do you sustain us, not only do you orchestrate the circumstances of our lives, not only do you allow measured amounts and carefully calibrated resistance and opposition to come into our lives, you do not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear, but you provide us your promises. You provide us wisdom when we need it.

We claim those promises and we pray that in these ever-darkening days you will give us wisdom, that you will bring to our minds those truths that will enable us to possess our souls and settle our hearts as we look to you for provision in this area as in all others so that we can continue to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives now and in the kingdoms to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.