

Stay Alert

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[0 : 0 0] um i'm going to pray for us um and then we'll look at that passage together almighty god i praise you this morning and i thank you for your word the bible i thank you that you've given this as this amazing book where you've ordained that this is how you want to speak to us that the god who made us wants to speak to us and that we can hear from you um and so i pray for our hearts now as we turn and we want to we want to communicate we want you to communicate with us in a powerful way and so i ask that you do that because um i pray that you do that through me as i speak and so we ask for that in the name of christ amen the world we live in our age the the way the world we live in has come to be known you might have heard this pod there's lots of podcasts and books and things written about it is that we it said that we now live in the age of distraction the age of distraction um maybe you've noticed this in your own life i've certainly noticed it in mind i i'm increasingly um unable to concentrate for long periods of time um loose focus attention um just one example that got to my attention is um when was the last time and i've struggled to answer this question when was the last time you watched a whole film um or even just like a like an episode of a series without checking your phone when was the last time you were able to do that i think i don't i can't actually remember i normally through a film will check it at least once um if it's next to you you will look at it you will check your messages you'll check whatsapp social media uh just to see just to see uh what's been going on in in the world because we're distracted constantly when we're distracted it is harder isn't it you know that you know this um it is harder to stay aware of what else is going on in your world particularly with your phones you can get in like a like a tunnel vision where all you see is the thing that's going on as you scroll in front of you you're distracted you miss things that's going on around um and that that's kind of what happens we just we just sort of miss things uh because we're distracted that's what if there's lots of podcasts and things written about that we live in the age of distraction in our bible reading this morning you may have noticed how often jesus talks about staying being alert being alert being alert is the opposite of being distracted and you'll have noticed that's what he says be on guard watch out be alert jesus is warning here in this passage about why we must why we must stay alert spiritually we must be on our guard spiritually and watch out for what is going on in our lives and in our world and there are basically um there's basically only two things that he's actually saying there's lots said but he's actually only in this whole passage only saying is to be alert on two things he's saying stay alert to spiritual frauds tricksters false teachers staying stay alert to spiritual frauds and the other one is stay alert to jesus return stay alert to spiritual frauds and stay alert to jesus return and my my hope and prayer for us this morning is as we consider uh those two things we'll we'll realize it's so important um why we need to stay alert spiritually and hopefully how we do that as distracted people in a distracted world before we jump into it all we do need to consider um the context as to what's going on first thing um that we

notice um jesus here in this passage he is taught he is talking about two events um sometimes we think it's all about when jesus is coming back when it's actually two events at the time when jesus is speaking to the disciples both of these two events were were in the future the first one um was the that comes up that he's answering is the destruction of the city of jerusalem and the temple that's the event that we're going to look at first and it fits in the as you read the passage that jesus is talking about that makes sense of the conversation that he's having with his disciples you look with me in verse one what do we see the disciples are impressed with the temple building it's got massive stone it's magnificent um it's the building it's the place where jews went to worship god but jesus tells them verse two do you see all these great buildings not one stone here will be left on another everyone every single stone will be thrown down and so the questions that come back at jesus they're kind of obvious aren't they if you were told that an amazing massive uh building you

you think it's something like the houses of parliament if somebody says you know this every stone here is good is this this whole building is going to be rubble you're going to think how how possibly is that going to happen you'd have questions and they do verse four tell us when these things will happen and what be the sign that they're about to be fulfilled it's worth remembering just as a as a sort of as an aside jewish life the temple was the center of everything not just the center of kind of spiritual life and worship it was the center of jerusalem the center of society everything was centered around the temple the thought of this happening would have been left lots of unanswered questions a confusion they would have been perplexed they wanted to know of course they wanted to know uh when the center of their society would just be a heap of rubble it goes without saying we live in a different age and jerusalem being destroyed is not future for us it is history and it happened in ad 70 about 40 years after jesus died so jesus is telling something will happen and then it happened within the lifetime of a lot of the people that he's speaking to if you look back at the history records it's the roman emperor nero with his army burnt the temple down to the ground thousands of jews were slaughtered thousands of christians were persecuted it was a savage bloody horrible time uh what went on was very disturbing it is 40 around 40 years before that jesus is explaining about this future event he's explaining what to look out for with great accuracy however what we learn from jesus the main reason oh yeah the main reason israel at this point is going to go through what happened 40 years later the destruction of their city the main reason the main problem is not the romans but the main problem for israel is israel the main problem is themselves that their main problem will be fakes false fake spiritual leaders frauds who have rejected jesus reject those who follow him and live because of they follow the fakes that is the first thing we're going to have three things we're going to think about connected with it first thing is stay alert to spiritual frauds stay alert to spiritual frauds just look with me verse five you'll see what does jesus say he says watch out that no one

deceives you many will come in my name claiming i am he and will deceive many but if you look look with me at verse 21 you'll see he kind of repeats himself and says the same idea at that time if anyone says look to you says says to you look here's the messiah or look there he is do not believe it for false messiahs and false prophets will appear from signs and wonders to deceive if possible even the elect so be on your guard i've told you everything when you see that in the bible it's just a kind of another aside when you see that in the bible when you see two ideas that this is the same idea that bookend what's being said at the beginning and the end it's a technical term for when you see that it's called an inclusio what all it means is that everything that's included between these two statements is related to that the the thing that the the beginning the end is the main idea and everything that's included is about that which means everything in about everything in between is about what will what will happen um by the sort of influence of spiritual frauds what will happen because israel is hoodwinked by fakes that's what that's what that's what's being said and there are three things that fakes that spiritual frauds will bring about they'll bring about deception they'll bring about opposition and they'll bring about judgment deception opposition and judgment the first thing deception we've talked about being distracted deception distracts from truth destruction distracts from truth that the kind of main point of the first thing um i don't know if you've ever um seen you know if you've been seen police horses and police horses they put blinkers on them don't they the reason they put blinkers on them is because so that they don't get startled and jolted by they don't get distracted by things that are happening if they're policing like an event they don't get startled by things that are happening they can be they can sort of remain focused on what they need to do what we need is spiritual blinkers we need spiritual blinkers to keep our eyes focused on the right direction so that we don't get startled or spooked by things that are distracting we need spiritual blinkers with our eyes on the truth of who jesus is we so that we can stick with the life transforming gospel in the second letter within this time frame of when jesus is speaking in 70 a.d um it's when paul did most of his ministry paul writes to the corinthian church he warns that this is happening in the church that there are teachers in corinth who present a different jesus to the one that paul does that's not in jerusalem given but he warns that this kind of thing happens that they present a different gospel to paul uh paul tells uh very they've got very gifted speakers convincing charismatic speakers they draw great crowds jesus is warning that not just in is not just in jerusalem but in the church there are there are people who come in to to be spiritual frauds who say they come in the name of god but talk about g but in reality they talk about a different jesus and don't know him deception distracts from truth it distracts us from jesus and we need to be able to have tunnel vision ourselves to block it out this deception it often works by appealing to

our desires we must be alert we must be alert to those whose aim is to deceive the church now at least to my knowledge today i haven't heard it on the news there's no one claiming to be a messiah or the messiah however there are those who come in jesus name with ulterior motives just want to talk about one of a perversion perhaps a distraction of the true gospel perhaps what you might heard it's coming it's today often come to known as the prosperity gospel or the health and wealth gospel the name it and claim it gospel um what that is what you realize is that is basically a christianized version of the kind of cult that is manifesting he manifesting um the famous ufc guy is famous of doing it like just imagines of receiving and just believes that if he imagines it enough he'll just get what he receives the christian version is if you if you name it and claim it with faith then you will get what you want if you it's the idea that if you think and want something with enough faith in jesus you'll receive what you desire and if you don't it's your fault you didn't have enough faith why does it work because it plays on people's insecurities offers them money and hope it hoodwinks christians who are poor or sick finally they think some teaching that presents something i can do to save myself from the situation i'm in the poverty and the illness i just need more faith at least i know what to do now that is not the gospel is it because the gospel is not about what you do for yourself it's not about whether you can muster up enough faith it's about what jesus has already done and that in eternity heavenly riches and a sin-free sick-free existence is promised yes we get four tastes of heaven and jesus does heal and provide in this life and we pray and we see those prayers answered but it's not a guarantee and it's certainly not connected to how much faith you have it's certainly not connected to how much you give to the church he doesn't bless you according to how much you do but because of what he's done for you you can't buy your healing it's not the gospel and it's just an example in our world of how it deceives it distracts and it takes our eyes off jesus and leads people away from him be alert be on guard look to jesus be alert watch out for those who are trying to receive so that's the first thing is that fakes cause deception the second thing that fakes cause is opposition it is a natural almost logical consequence that if somebody is if a fraud is followed um that the followers of the frauds almost become frauds themselves and they oppose those who um who disagree with their sort of leader verse 9 you must be on your guard jesus mentions three groups that will oppose the authorities you see that you'll be handed over the councils and flogged you've got the disciples then the not just the authorities but their families brother will betray a brother to death and verse 13 just in case we've missed anyone he says everyone will hate you jesus is warning them be on your guards to those who oppose you because they've been hoodwinked by a fraud and the way to stay on guard the way to keep alert to keep those spiritual blinkers that keep you from being distracted by other influences is to remember two things verse 11 the end of the verse when you're opposed so just say whatever verse 11 just say whatever is given to you at the time for it's not you speaking but the holy spirit it is quite surprising here that um the right response here the promise given is not physical protection the promise is not physical protection but you'll have the right words to say and that they will be given to you you'll receive the right words as a gift like as a deposit from your heavenly father we see that in the book of acts don't we multiple countless example examples from the disciples paul beaten and flogged arrested taken to the authorities brought into court and he speaks and we're told by the power of the holy spirit in essence it follows the path that jesus took a download of exactly what to say from the master speaker presidents and politicians have speech writers who prepare what needs to be said in a particular way that's persuaded the right rhetoric that will have the biggest impact we have the holy spirit god himself preparing what we will say when threatened or feeling under the cosh we have the best speech writer when threatened now in the passage the direct application is when we're threatened and we're not threatened in this country at the moment in the same way that is being described here um we're not being betrayed to death or flogged or pulled not at the moment being pulled up in court um but there's no reason that this can't be applied when challenged maybe with an awkward question or maybe um it's suggested about what we believe things that we don't believe um or maybe there's an awkward moment that in those months we kind of you know that feeling when you feel kind of threatened there's a new story and people ask you about it we feel that way but here we can rely on the holy spirit the best speech writer to say what is needed to that particular to the person through us where the conduit of god's grace speaking truth into somebody's life that they need to hear and especially it's true when we feel under the cosh that's the first thing to remember how to be alert the sethican thing to remember when you're here face feel when it feels hard you're facing opposition verse 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved i don't know if

you've ever seen the famous giant trees in yosemite the giant redwoods there's that perhaps famous picture of where um there's like a car going through one it's so big uh there's massive trees they look unmovable don't they they look that they'd always stand firm that no matter what the weather through whether there was a hurricane or you know whatever storms it looks like those trees would always stand firm standing firm is the evidence that you're rooted in christ that your roots go deep down into jesus and nothing will uproot you from him is it is evidence that you will be saved that you are saved that

[20 : 22] when the wind and the rain and the storms and the opposition come like a giant redwood you will not be moved because you are standing firm because you have your roots in christ the distractions of opposition come but you stand firm because you're connected to jesus staying alert to opposition remember these two promises god will speak through you and if you're standing firm is an assurance that you that you are saved and nothing can change no matter what opposition you face that will not change in other countries physical persecution is a reality imprisonment um normal life violence of following jesus for us is unlikely and as a it is illegal still here however asserting our beliefs and values can still be costly we read in the news don't we people who've lost their jobs and perhaps there's just a general feeling that we might feel of being threatened into silence some of us i know in this room have experienced that the marginalization in the workplace perhaps gossiped about by our colleagues maybe even in the community we know of parents perhaps who once found out once they found out maybe ignored us or gave us the cold shoulder at the school gate now we do have to be careful about how we think about this the worry is that this could stop us about being open about our faith out of fear our default always is to think isn't it that everyone who doesn't go to church is anti everything we believe and so we stop talking about it altogether it's worth just pausing and just reminding ourselves that is not the case the point here is to be alert to those who are oppositional and if someone um but if someone is we don't need to be fearful because jesus is with us and he's speaking through us because the living god is always right there with you he gives you the words to say and you're rooted in him and he'll make you stand tall so that's the third thing we've had deception we've had opposition the final thing that frauds spiritual fakes bring about is judgment that's the final thing the destruction of jerusalem was god's judgment on israel they had failed to acknowledge jesus as god's son and and the jews themselves um were killing christians god sent the romans to judge israel that's hard for us to take on it's hard for us to stand and in turn the romans themselves were judged themselves the empire didn't last much longer the jews believed that their ancestry their family heritage gave them security because of their direct family lineage they were god's people by blood they could trace their family tree right back to the ancestors of the faith and they thought this new sect of jesus followers was a cult a revolt that needed to be squashed the strange phrase that we have in verse 14 the abomination that causes desolation we don't know exactly precisely what that corresponds to that but it we know that it relates to the destruction of jerusalem of the temple when it becomes um it becomes very clear when this will happen um either we know now either the romans as when they entered the temple or they started being involved in the temple um and now we know that that was the sign when something happens in the temple with another nation uh for the disciples they had to recognize that and stay alert to when that would happen here we get different advice see what he says when you see that what does he tell them to do verse 14

flee to the mountains don't look back don't go back for anything get out of jerusalem as quick as you can because it's going to get really bad we get real bad real quick we're god's family we're his people and yet today unfortunately we're infiltrated as a wide church with fakes and frauds you'll have seen it gets boring doesn't it countless scandals involving church leaders there's parts of the church that have moved away from the true gospel leading people away there's even parts of the church that will persecute part of the the church at large that persecute people who who speak the true gospel even in the church god will not let his people suffer indefinitely if there is harm happening to the body through bad teaching through bad leaders that are bringing spiritual harm and leading people away or even leading them to a lifestyle that god doesn't approve of he will judge the leaders and he'll judge the church and he'll judge those who've been hoodwinked who've become complicit jesus says to his disciples what does he say he says flee from the judgment get as far away as possible you don't want to get caught out you don't want to get caught up and i think it's worth acknowledging that there is a time if there is a church or a ministry if there is an institution that is led by a fake there comes a point where you just need to leave flee because god will judge it

three things we've learned about this event in history the destruction of jerusalem stay alert to spiritual fakes and frauds they deceive they breed opposition they will be judged keep those spiritual blinkers on keep committed to the true gospel so that we're not distracted what we can learn from this first event i mentioned however i mentioned at the beginning that jesus is not talking about one event but two in our reading the first one is the destruction of jerusalem the second is when jesus will return so stay alert to spiritual fakes but stay alert to as well stay alert because jesus could return any time the difference between these two events big difference the first one the destruction of of the temple there's lots of signs lots of things that jesus tells them to look out for the second event jesus coming back what we realize in this passage is that there aren't any signs i personally as i've gone through the passage so far i've purposefully not let i've perfectly not spoken about the signs up until this point the vast majority of in this passage of the signs are not about jesus coming back just quickly run through them we've got in verse 7 i think when you hear of wars and rumors of wars do not be alarmed such things must happen but the end is still to come he's talking about the end of jerusalem nation will rise against nation and kingdom and kingdom against kingdom there'll be earthquakes in various places and famines these are the beginning of the birth pains he's saying the the the event of jerusalem that is what he's talking about and he said that's not the end because the end is still to come earlier in verse 7 the end is still to come this is just the beginning it's not the end it's the beginning so he's not the signs that about jesus coming back verse 10 he says the

gospel must be preached to all nations that's also about the first event before the destruction of jerusalem the gospel in that time had been preached to all the known world the known world was you know rome and bits of europe at that time all the known world that had been discovered in that sense had been preached to so that's what that means up to verse 23 he's all about jerusalem jesus then moves in verse 24 um oh he talks it in a very strange way it's almost like that happens simultaneously but he's moving to when he'll talk about his return in those days in the days following that the distress the days following that have been almost 2 000 years in those days following that distress the sun will be dark and the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken that is poetic language explaining how the cold cosmos will be impacted that jesus is so powerful that it is like everything will be shaken and disturbed in the whole cosmos verse 26 at that time people will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory he'll send his angels gather up from the four corners of the earth we know because we live after jesus after the ascension jesus going back to heaven that the son of man coming in the clouds is talking about jesus returning when he when jesus said this they had no idea what he was talking about because he hadn't left they didn't even know they didn't really fully understand that he was going to die at that point or or be resurrected or go to heaven we have the advantage of knowing when jesus says this that he means him coming back um from heaven after he was raised which means in this passage here there is i don't think not one sign of jesus telling us what to look out for when he comes back not one it's a very important point because it means that we need to be careful of other maybe speakers or preachers or teachers that we've heard that are overly focused on what to look out for for the what sometimes becomes to know as the end times the end times is what is the time from jesus being raised to now it's it's a time it's about two thousand years we need to be careful really careful when people are predicting what to look out for and what to see just to confirm what i'm saying look what jesus said jesus could not be any clearer could he verse 32 about that day or hour no one knows not even the angels heaven nor the son but only the father be on guard be alert you do not know when that time will happen even jesus himself didn't know if he didn't know if he didn't know how could he give a sign of telling when it would happen because he didn't know himself so he didn't know what the signs would be when it when he would come back he didn't know himself he then gives a parable he said it's like a man going away like a imagine a wealthy man owns a mansion has to go away on a business trip doesn't know when he's going to get back he's got a lot of money and he's his house looking after and we know that the man here is jesus and so this this uh businessman he leaves his house he puts his servants in charge he says i don't know when i'm going to come back um but i really want you to look after uh my house don't have any parties keep everything clean water the flower water the flowers make sure everything is good when i come back he expects doesn't he that man who does that he pays his servants he expects them to look after his house to clean it to provide security to keep watch and make sure that none of

them get up to mischief and abuse uh what's been left to them the servants he's talking about are the church that's us the people who've been put in charge to look after his church which is all of us and then we couldn't be clearer verse 34 there's 35 therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back the evening midnight when the rooster crows or at dawn basically anytime the master could come back at any time at all the point don't take your eyes off the ball don't be partying when the owner of the house comes back don't be like that young teenager whose parents go for the way for the first time leave him in charge and he invites every man and his dog down for it round for a shindig don't be like that don't neglect your responsibilities he's saying look after the house he's saying look after the church look after one another watch out for one another care for one another bless one another pray for one another work together to make that house the church the most beautiful it could be for when i come back make it better than it was when i left that's how you stay ready for jesus by looking after his house so the point be ready keep watch stay alert be on guard because jesus could come back anytime keep those spiritual blinkers on keep yourself from being distracted by the world isn't that a wonderful thought whatever you've got going on at the minute some of us maybe we're feeling a bit beat up on life that jesus could return any moment could be this afternoon really could be this afternoon that all the struggle and the pain and the suffering the things that you're going through could be vanquished this afternoon it will be one day for sure but it really could be vanquished this afternoon for eternity and every day we live in the light that eternity is just around the corner so stay alert don't be distracted by fakes and frauds stay alert while you're here that's why we meet isn't it one of the ways that we keep ourselves from distracted is that's the reason we're here we're here on a sunday giving our time up they call it that it's the lord's day it's a day given for us to meet together as his family to concentrate on jesus that we sabbath that we take out the distractions that we focus on jesus we have a special time where we commit every part of us to singing and praising and hearing and listening to the lord jesus speak to us about himself and when we're doing that this morning it's a way that we're being alert and reminding ourselves of who jesus is what he's done and what he will do we're reminding ourselves of jesus character because as we look at jesus and we see his the truth of who he is it means we can instantly recognize be alert watch be encouraged stand tall jesus will speak through you when you're threatened jesus will always be with you and so pay attention to him let me pray almighty god

we so look forward to the day when you're coming back and we want you to come back as soon as possible we pray that you'd come back soon we ask you with great anticipation we thank you that all the things in our world that we see you are going to deal with there will be nothing left that you will leave on its own but you'll sort out the mess we thank you for these warnings that you give us and we pray that you would help us to be alert that you'd help us to fixate our attention on your son that you would help us to put those spiritual blinkers on that keep us from that block out the block out the distractions we're sorry for where we get distracted and we look at all the things that take our minds off of you we repent and turn away from that and ask us that you'd give us clarity on and great focus on jesus christ we thank you so much that you love us and that you're coming back we thank you that you grow us to be more like your son help us to stand tall we pray and so we ask for all this in the precious name of your son our saviour jesus christ our lord you