

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN: FIVE EVENTS MATHEW 24:29–31

Introduction: Jesus Christ, Return — Distress — Tribulation — Israel:

Christ revealed exactly when He was to return — “immediately after the distress [tribulation] of those days.” The great distress [tribulation] occurs, then our Lord returns — “immediately.” (See notes Mt. 24:1-28 for background to this passage.)

1. Now note: Christ did not return immediately after the downfall of Jerusalem; therefore, what did He mean? Luke explains:

Luke 21:23-24 “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Very simply, Christ said that the fall of Jerusalem was only the beginning of the distress or tribulation of the Jews. Their distress or tribulation continues until “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” The accuracy of the Lord’s words is clearly seen by simply breaking down the verses of Luke and thinking through world history since Christ.

- => There is still “great distress in the land” of Israel.
- => There is still “great wrath against this people.”
- => Many Jews still “fall by the sword.”
- => Many are still “prisoners [dispersed] in all nations.”
- => Jerusalem is still “trampled on by the Gentiles.”

No people have ever gone through such great distress or tribulation as the Jews. They are still suffering at the hands of the Gentiles (for example, World War II, where over 5,000,000 were slaughtered in less than eight years); and they shall suffer great distress or tribulation “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” It is *immediately after the great distress or tribulation of the Jews* and *after the great distress or tribulation* coming at the end of the world that the coming of Christ shall take place.

Note a very significant fact: Luke’s prophecy definitely points toward the double meaning of Christ’s words. Since the *great distress or tribulation* of the Jews in 70 A.D. (see v. 20), they have continued to suffer *great distress [tribulation]* through the present age, and they shall suffer right on through the great distress [tribulation] that is to occur at the end of the world.

2. Also note it is immediately after the “*great distress [tribulation]*” of the world (v. 21) that Christ returns (see *End Time*, Mt. 24:1-31; notes, 24:1-14; 24:15-28).
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- I. He comes immediately after the tribulation or distress (v. 29).
- II. Event 1: there will be astronomical happenings (v. 29).
- III. Event 2: the sign of Christ will appear (v. 30).
- IV. Event 3: all the nations will see Christ coming in the clouds (v. 30).
- V. Event 4: all the nations of the earth will mourn (v. 30).
- VI. Event 5: the angels will be sent forth to gather the elect (v. 31).

I. *Mathew 24:29 Return of Jesus Christ after the Distress or Tribulation*

The scene is immediately after the distress or tribulation (see note, Mt. 24:29-31).

Thought 1. There are several lessons in the words “after the distress [tribulation]” — lessons for us as well as for those who will follow Christ through the tribulation.

- 1) God is in control. He can, does and will end the trials. Note the word “*after* the distress [tribulation].” There *shall* be an end to all the trials of the distress or tribulation.
- 2) God’s people are to look to Him and hope in Him. The end of all trials is coming.
- 3) God’s people are always to be waiting and watching for the Lord’s return.

II. *Mathew 24:29 Jesus Christ and Astronomical Happenings*

The very first event to occur when Christ returns in glory will be astronomical happenings. The heavenly bodies — the sun, moon, stars and “the heavenly bodies” — will be affected.

Note the exact words of the astronomical happenings.

- => “The sun will be darkened.”
- => “The moon will not give its light.”
- => “The stars will fall from heaven.”
- => “The heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Very practically, such astronomical happenings occur now. The earth is sometimes darkened by dust from earthly catastrophes such as volcanic eruptions, wind storms, and smoke from huge fires. Of course, whatever darkens the sun hides the light of the moon from earth. Stars or meteorites of varying sizes fall throughout space often. “The heavenly bodies” being shaken could be the heavenly bodies outside our solar system that are called by the Bible “all the heavenly array” (Deu 4:19).

Is this what Christ meant? There is no way to know for sure; however, it is likely that this is the meaning. *But note:* His coming is going to trigger astronomical happenings worldwide and universally. The whole universe is going to be affected, or to word it in a much more meaningful way: the whole universe is going to open up and receive

Him, including the astronomical bodies; and every man is going to know beyond any doubt that He is coming in all the power and the glory of God Himself. Christ says He is coming “with power and great glory.” He is coming that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph 2:10-11).

He is coming, and “all the nations of the earth will [know it] and mourn [for] they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” The words “power and great glory” convey the idea that He is coming to subject all men, to rule and reign over all the nations or nations of the earth.

Scripture definitely reveals that astronomical happenings will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord.

Isa 13:10-13 *The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.*

Isa 24:17-22 *Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder; the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls — never to rise again. In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.*

Joel 2:30-31 *I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*

Joel 3:15-16 *The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.*

Mark 13:24-25 *“But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”*

Luke 17:29-30 *But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”*

Luke 21:25-26 *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*

Acts 2:19-20 *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

Rev 6:12-17 *I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair; the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (See notes, Rev. 6:12-17)*

Note the exact words of the verses in Revelation above, for they are referring to the same event as Christ (v. 30; see Rev 6:17). Christ triggers a great earthquake on earth and astronomical happenings in the heavens above (v. 12-14). Men, great and small, are terrified and hide themselves (v. 15) and cry for immediate death instead of having to face Christ (v. 16). Why? Because they know something: “The great day of God’s wrath has come; and who can stand?” (v. 17).

The disciples had asked, “What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” And Christ is answering them. Terrifying astronomical happenings will be a sign.

Thought 1. Happenings in nature should cause us to turn our attention toward God. They are reminders of the *stressful* events that are to occur in the end time. As Christ said: “Stand up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk. 21:28). If we look up and trust Him *now*, catastrophes and circumstances can be borne much better. His presence with us assures us of strength and endurance and victory (Heb 12:3; see 1 Cor 10:13; Mt. 28:20; see Heb 13:5-6).

III. **Mathew 24:30** *The Sign of the Return of Jesus Christ*

When Christ returns, there will be a second event to occur — there will be *the* sign of Christ’s appearing in the heavens. What is the sign? Christ does not specifically say. There are four different thoughts.

=> Some say the sign will be a star, just like the star that proclaimed His birth.

=> Others say it will be the Shekinah glory, His glory shining forth in all the splendour and brightness of God Himself. His glory will, of course, shine forth as described; but again, Christ does not say specifically that this is the sign.

- => Some, including many of the early church fathers, believe the sign will be the cross of Christ. There is no question that seeing the cross appear in the sky universally would attract attention and signal that something is about to happen. The cross is the symbol of Christianity and points toward the purpose of God in the world more than any other single thing.
- => Many believe the sign to be simply the appearance of the Son of Man Himself (Mt. 26:64; Dan 7:13-14).

Note four points.

1. When the sign appears, “all the nations of the earth will mourn.” They know exactly what the sign is and what it means: the judgment and rule and reign of Christ. The nations (people) do not have to guess and interpret what it means.
2. When the sign appears, “all the nations of the earth mourn...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.”
3. The Lord says that His coming will be as lightning, quick and sudden (v. 27). Will there be time for a sign other than His personal appearance?
4. The disciples had asked about the *sign*: “What will be the sign of your coming...?” (v. 3). Christ gives them a number of signs. Perhaps He is simply saying, “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear.” This would, of course, be a fulfilment of Daniel’s well-known sign of the Son of Man and His coming (Dan 7:13-14).

Whatever the sign, there is one important thing to note: everyone knows exactly what it means. God’s Son is coming to judge and to rule and reign over all the earth.

Mat 25:31-32 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

2 Pet 3:7 *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*

Jude 1:14-15 *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

Rev 20:11-15 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book*

was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Thought 1. There will be a sign that triggers the coming of the Son of Man. Whatever the sign is, four things are certain.

- 1) *Now the stars point toward the eternal power and Godhead and love of God in a beautiful creation. Then the stars shall point toward the wrath of God.*
- 2) *Now the Shekinah glory, the glory of God, shines before men calling them to righteousness. Then the Shekinah glory shall shine before men consuming them for their unrighteousness.*
- 3) *Now the cross stands before the world attracting the world to God. Then the cross shall stand before the world condemning the world.*
- 4) *Now Christ stands before the world as its Saviour. Then Christ shall stand before the world as its Judge.*

Thought 2. There are sign(s) of Christ's presence *now*. There are also signs that His return is ever so near. How much better to *mourn* and repent now than to be left with nothing but *mourning* then. The day is coming when it will be too late to turn to Christ.

Thought 3. Today, every man is without excuse. There are sign(s) and evidence(s) that He is the Saviour of the world, God's very own Son. Much better to have the Son of Man appear now, in a person's heart and life by faith, than to have Him appear in the skies as a person's Judge (Heb 9:27; see Jn. 3:18).

IV. *Mathew 24:30 All Men will See the Return of Jesus Christ*

The third event of the Lord's return is that it will be visible to all — all the nations of the earth will see Christ's coming in the clouds with power and great glory. There are four things said in this brief prophecy.

1. It is the Son of Man who will come. Christ claims He is the Son of Man, God's very own Son, the Ideal Man, the Perfect Man, the Son of God incarnate in human flesh (see *Jesus, the Son of Man*, Mt. 8:20). In that day, there will be no doubt about who He is (see Mk. 14:61-62). Right now, He is recognized only by believers, but then He will be recognized by all men. It will be unmistakable: He is the Son of Man.
2. All the nations of the earth will see His coming — visibly. How will everyone on earth, a round planet, see Him all at once? It is useless to speculate how God's power *works* (effects) any miracle. The point Christ is making is that His return will be

visible and that every man on earth will see Him and acknowledge Him to be the Son of Man (see Rev 1:7). (Note: the light — the great splendour and brightness — of the Lord's glory can easily be manifested throughout the universe and surround the earth when He returns.)

3. Christ will come in the clouds of the sky. In Scripture, clouds are often associated with God.

Psa 18:10-12 *He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning.*

Psa 104:3 *And lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.*

Isa 19:1 *An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.*

Dan 7:13 *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence."*

When Jesus departed this earth after His resurrection, He departed in a cloud, and it was foretold that He would return in a cloud (Acts 1:9-11). Christ clearly says that He is going to return in a cloud and every eye will see Him come in the clouds of heaven. There is a strong claim here, a claim to be the God of the clouds.

4. Christ will come with power and great glory. There are at least two points being stressed in this fact.
 - a. Christ will come in the full dignity of His person. He will not come as a babe in a manger who lives through the stages of life to secure salvation for man. He will come with power and great glory. He will come in all the omnipotence and glory of God, revealing just who He is.
 - b. Christ will come as a Judge to execute justice upon the earth. He will come to rule and reign in His rightful position as Sovereign Lord over the earth.

Thought 1. Every man will acknowledge Christ to be the Son of Man. There will not be a single exception.

=> Now, there is *voluntary* acknowledgement; then, there will be *involuntary* acknowledgement.

=> Now, there is *wilful* confession; then, there will be *enforced* confession.

=> Now, there is a *loving* appeal; then, there will be the *condemning* judgment.

Acts 17:31 *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Phil 2:9-11 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

1 Pet 1:17 *Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

V. Mathew 24:30 Mourning at the Return of Jesus Christ

The fourth event is that all the nations of the earth will mourn when Christ returns in power and great glory. Why? Because they will see beyond any question that Christ is the Son of Man. They will realize that they ignored, neglected, rejected, abused and cursed Him. They will know that they have missed His salvation and that they are now to be judged. There is a picture of this great mourning in Revelation where “all the peoples of the earth...will mourn because of Him” (Rev 1:7). They wail and mourn because of the terrible judgment which is to be inflicted upon them.

Very simply, Christ is going to return, and every eye will see Him and know beyond any question that He is the Son of Man. The worldly will mourn because He comes as Judge; the elect will rejoice because they are to be gathered together with Him.

Thought 1. Every man has a choice. He mourns now, or he shall mourn when Christ returns. A man experiences a godly sorrow that leads to repentance now, or he shall experience a worldly sorrow that leads to eternal sorrow when Christ returns (see *Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow*, 2 Cor 7:10).

Acts 2:38 *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 8:22 *Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.*

2 Cor 7:10 *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Ezek 18:31 *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?*

VI. *Mathew 24:31 Angels at the Return of Jesus Christ*

The fifth event of the Lord's coming is that the angels will be sent forth to gather the elect. There are four points made in this verse.

1. Christ will send forth *His* angels. He is God, the Lord of the angels. They are His; He is over them. They are at His beck and call to carry out His sovereign will. This' again is a claim to deity.
2. Christ will send forth His angels with "a loud trumpet call." The trumpet was used to call an assembly of the people together. This is probably the meaning here. (See 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Th. 4:16.)
3. The angels will gather together the Lord's elect. Only the elect will be gathered at this point. The elect may be but a few when compared to the mass of humanity. But there will be a remnant of genuine believers scattered all over the earth, a remnant who will have endured to the end. They will be saved (v. 13. See Mt. 20:16; 22:14.)

As Christ said:

Luke 17:34-35 "I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." (see Mt. 24:40-41)

4. The elect will be gathered from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. The meaning is this: the elect will be scattered all over the world; they will be everywhere, in all nations of the world (see Deu 4:32; Rev 7:9). As Christ had just said:

Mat 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony unto all nations; and then the end will come."

Thought 1. There is one glorious hope for every believer, whatever his generation and the trials of it:

Titus 2:13-14 While we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Thought 2. The angels are subject to Christ; we, too, should be subject to Him. The angels do His sovereign will; we, too, should do His sovereign will. If we administer His will now, we shall be in that select company in that glorious day.

Thought 3. Not a single believer will be missed when Jesus returns. No matter where we are or how isolated and lonely and forgotten, we may feel, He is coming for us. ■

THE TIME OF THE LORD'S RETURN

MATHEW 24:32–41

Introduction: End of the World or the Judgement Day

The disciples had asked, “When will this happen?” At this point of His discussion, Christ said, “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as....” He was beginning to discuss the end time and His return. It should be noted that the first part of His discussion can apply to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as well as to the end time (vv. 32-35). However, Christ definitely said this passage had to do with the end time only, with the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 37, 39). When will Christ return? He revealed four significant points.

- I. The time can be generally discerned (vv. 32-35).
- II. The actual day and hour are known only by God (v. 36).
- III. The day will come suddenly — unexpectedly — shattering to the world of unbelievers (vv. 37-39).
- IV. The day will be a time of separation and judgment (vv. 40-41).

I. Mathew 24:32–35 The Return of Jesus Christ

Christ said that the time of His return can be generally discerned.

1. The events (signs) that point to His return are compared to a fig tree. When the fig tree begins to put forth its leaves, it is clear that summer is near. So when we see “all these things,” the signs He has been sharing, “know that it [His coming] is near, right at the door.” His coming is at the very threshold; He is about to enter into the world again (see Jas. 5:9).

Christ said:

- a. When the leaves are seen on a fig tree, summer is not yet. But we *know* summer is near, at hand.
 - b. “Even so, when *you see* all these things you *know* that it [His coming, His kingdom] is near.” He definitely says we can “know that it is near.”
2. The events (signs) will be witnessed within one generation. The disciples had asked two questions — one about Jerusalem’s destruction and the other about the end of the world. In answering their questions, Christ nowhere drew a definite line between the two questions. The signs and events that precede one shall precede the other. The implication is clear: just as the signs and destruction of Jerusalem took place within a generation, the signs and destruction of the world will also occur within a generation.

Remembering that Jesus is dealing with two questions will also help in understanding what is being said. He is answering the questions: When will the temple be destroyed and what shall be the sign of His return and the end of the world?

Christ is dealing with the end of the temple and the end of the world, the destruction of the temple and the destruction of the world. He is covering the signs, the events that both cause the judgment and occur during the judgment of the temple and the world. In short, the Scripture teaches that the same signs and events cause the judgment of anything.

That is, the events (sins) that cause judgment upon one thing are the same events that will bring judgment upon everything else. Thus, the signs that surround the destruction of Jerusalem are much the same as the signs that shall surround the end of the world. Therefore, what Christ is saying has a double meaning and application.

Several things need to be noted as this passage is studied.

- 1) Christ is answering three very specific questions. When will the temple be destroyed? What shall be the sign of Christ's return and of the end of the world?
- 2) The signs given by Christ are to some extent present in every generation. A quick review of world history reveals this. In light of this fact, a question has to be asked: why, then, is Christ spelling out every day happenings as signs of the last days?
- 3) There is to be an intensification of the signs right before the fall of Jerusalem and right before the end of the world. The intensification of the signs is clearly seen by the following.

- a. The emphasis upon the possibility of being deceived.

Mat 24:4 *"Watch out that no one deceives you."*

Mat 24:5 *"For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."*

Mat 24:11 *"And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."*

- b. Christ uses both the word and the idea of "many" time and again, indicating an increase over what had been.
- c. Christ makes three significant statements that definitely point toward an intensification of the signs.

Mat 24:8 *"All these are the beginning of birth pains [sorrows]."*

Mat 24:13 *"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."*

Mat 24:14 *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony unto all nations; and then the end will come."*

- d. Other Scriptures say there is to be an intensification of evil in the last days.

2 Tim 3:1 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.*

2 Pet 3:3 *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.*

Jude 1:18 *They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires."*

- 4) The present age is considered by God to be "the age of the last days" or "the last time." According to God's time-table, the history of the church, its presence on earth, takes place in "the last days" or during "the last times."

Acts 2:16-17 *No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."*

Heb 1:2 *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

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

- 5) Christ gives these signs for a very specific purpose. He is preparing His disciples to endure and to keep their hope for His return alive. He is strengthening their faith in God and in the world to come, the new heavens and earth, the three things that help in understanding the passage.

The Lord's words apply both to the disciples of His day and to all disciples who were to follow in succeeding generations. As long as the earth stands, the disciples of "the last days" (or ages) will face many of the same signs faced by those who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem. But there is to be one difference. At the end of the world the signs will increase and intensify. So terrible a day is coming that it can be called, "the beginning of birth pains [sorrows]" (Mt.24:8) and "the great distress [tribulation]".

3. The events (signs) are certain. Christ was definite about what He had said. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Note two things.
- Heaven and earth will pass away. Christ was saying they are actually going to be done away with (2 Pet. 3:10-11).
 - All that He had said about the great distress (tribulation) and His return will happen. The great distress (tribulation) and His return are more sure than heaven and earth.

Thought 1. *Expectation* is a key word when dealing with the Lord's return. When we see a fig tree putting forth its leaves, we *expect* summer to be near. "Even so" we should expect two things.

- 1) We should expect the signs, "all these things" that Christ has been mentioning (v. 33a).
- 2) We should expect and "know that it [His coming] is near" (v. 33b).

Thought 2. In the eyes of men, it has been a long time since Christ spoke these words, and an innumerable list of events have happened. Therefore, men assume that the second coming is a fable, the figment of hopeful imagination. God knew this would happen.

2 Pet 3:3-4, 8-13 *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Thought 3. Three things are certain to happen in human history: "the beginning of birth pains [sorrows]" (v. 8); "the great distress [tribulation], unequalled from the beginning of the world" (v. 21); and "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (v. 30). Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not the words He spoke, not what He said would happen. What He said would happen will happen. These three events are certain.

MATHEW 24:33–34 RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

Note the time involved in these two verses — they agree. "When you see all these things...it is near" (v. 33). All will happen in "one generation" (v. 34). □

II. **Mathew 24:36** *The End of the World*

The actual day and hour that Christ will return are known only by God. Note two things.

1. The return of Christ is a real event that is yet to happen. There is "that day or hour." There is *a fixed day and a fixed hour* when Christ will return. It is an actual event.
2. The return of Christ is confidential. "No one knows...but only the Father." Some have thought they knew, but Christ is explicit: "No one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but only the Father."

Rev 5:3 *But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.*

Deu 29:29 *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever; that we may follow all the words of this law.*

Thought 1. Some things are to be left entirely in God's hands. The exact day and hour of the Lord's return is one of these things. *Watchful* believers will be sensitive

to the season (fig tree, vv. 32-33) and know the generation (v. 34), but the exact hour and day are hid from men, even from the wisest and most spiritual men. *Only* God Himself knows when Christ will return. If a man claims to know the hour and day, he is the man from which we should flee. That man's word conflicts with the Lord's Word.

III. *Mathew 24:37–39 Return of Jesus Christ*

The coming of the Lord will be sudden — unexpected — shattering to the world of unbelievers. Christ says three things.

1. When will Christ return? His coming finds its counterpart in Noah's day. He will come when the world is living just as it was living in Noah's day:
 - => Living sensual lives, eating, drinking, marrying, divorcing and remarrying time after time.
 - => Refusing to heed Noah's message of righteousness and coming judgment (2 Pet. 2:5).
 - a. Eating, drinking (water), and marriage are all necessary to maintain life. It is the excessiveness, the lust for more and more, the extravagance that is sinful. It is setting one's mind upon the pleasure of the flesh and of the world and lusting for more and more.
 - b. What is it that Christ says will characterize the age? Not stealing and murder and immorality, but eating and drinking and marrying time after time. When the earth was destroyed the first time, it was because "the earth was corrupt...and... full of violence" (Gen. 6:11). However, the sins that bring the second destruction of the earth seem to be eating and drinking and marrying time after time. These are the sins stressed by Christ.
 - c. Note the words "*up to the day* that Noah entered the ark." While Noah was building the ark, he preached the righteousness of God and the coming judgment. The people had the testimony of Noah's life and his belief in God's Word as a warning, a warning that man was responsible to live righteously and that judgment was coming. They saw Noah building the ark. They saw the ark there, yet they rejected Noah's message and testimony. They went on living in worldliness, in their eating and drinking and in pursuing their own lustful desires, and they did so right up until the very day that "Noah entered into the ark." Then suddenly, unexpectedly, their world was shattered.
2. When will Christ come? He will come just as He came in Noah's day: at a shocking time. Just as they "knew nothing about" the end that was coming, so He will come again when the world does not know.
 - a. They "knew nothing" means this: they did not expect the coming judgment. They *did not believe* the fact, the word, the message. They were *close minded*: they did not bother too much about listening and studying the matter. Therefore, they *were ignorant* about the truth. They did not know the Word of God.
 - b. "They knew nothing" means this: they felt secure in themselves and in their world. As Scripture says in another place:

1 Th 5:3 *While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

- c. They "knew nothing" means that: they were living worldly and materialistic lives, eating and drinking when they should have been sensible and clear-minded, listening and turning to God.
- d. They "knew nothing" means this: their concern was "Let us eat and drink: for tomorrow we die" (Isa. 22:13); whereas their concern should have been *righteousness* (2 Cor. 5:21).
- 3. When will Christ come? He will come when people are living just as they were living in the days of Noah: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (vv. 37. 39). His coming is certain and assured.

Mat 24:38-39 *For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

Luke 21:34 *Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

James 4:4 *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Thought 1. Note the words "knew nothing." They knew nothing because they were steeped in sensual living. A person can eat, drink and be immoral until he is gripped and enslaved.

=> *Conscience* becomes dull, hardened and insensitive to right.

=> *Will* becomes more craving.

=> *Spirit* becomes more selfish.

=> *Life* becomes more worldly.

=> *Hope* becomes more materialistic.

=> *Death* becomes more final.

Thought 2. Christ's return will shatter the world of the person...

- who eats and eats
- who drinks and drinks
- who marries and marries
- who "knows nothing"
- who does not believe
- who is closed-minded
- who is ignorant

Thought 3. There are many genuine believers in the world. The testimony of righteousness should be right before the face of most people just as it was before the face of the people in Noah's day. We are without excuse. We should be prepared for His coming. His *sudden* coming should not catch us unexpectedly; it should not shock or shatter our world.

Thought 4. A man must not allow himself to be so immersed in worldliness that he forgets eternity (1 Jn. 2:15-16; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:17-18).

MATHEW 24:37 RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

It must be remembered that the righteous, that is, the only believers of Noah's day, were Noah himself and his family. They were not caught unaware. It was to the unbelieving world that the day came unexpectedly and with shattering suddenness. This is understandable: the true believer is ever looking "for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). When that day begins to approach, believers will see and discern the times through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be preparing the believer's heart for that day. But the unbelieving world will be mocking what it considers foolish belief. It will be going about its merry way and wantonness, paying no attention whatever to an event that it considers foolish. (Dan. 12:10.) □

IV. *Mathew 24:40–41 The Return of Jesus Christ*

The coming of the Lord will be a time of separation and judgment. Several things are seen in these two verses.

1. On the day when Jesus comes, no one knows He is coming, not even believers. All go about their affairs, their occupations as usual.
2. On the day when Jesus comes, while people are going about their affairs, all of a sudden one shall be taken and the other left.
3. On the day when Jesus comes, there will be separation from those nearest us — from those right by our side. The believer will be caught up to be with the Lord; the unbeliever will be left behind to face judgment (vv. 30-31, 50-51; see 2 Th. 1:7-10).

Mat 13:30 *Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."*

Mat 13:49 *"This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous."*

Mat 25:32 *"All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*

Mat 25:46 *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

Thought 1. The basis of separation and judgment is belief. In Noah's day no one believed the message of righteousness. Only the man who believes the message of righteousness and adheres to it will be taken (2 Cor. 5:21 see Jn. 3:16; Mt. 24:13). ■