

SESSION 7

The Return of Jesus



QUESTION 1:

When have you found yourself counting down to a big event?

THE POINT

Jesus will return to establish His eternal kingdom.

THE PASSAGES

Matthew 24:3-8,29-32,42-44

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We often look forward to major milestones in life with both excitement and trepidation.

- ▶ **Graduation.** Graduation marks a major accomplishment: the graduate has passed all the requirements and tests. The excitement that he or she has finished the work is accompanied by nervous anticipation: I now have to step out into the real world!
- ▶ **Marriage.** He has found the love of his life. He's excited to marry her because he's no longer on his own, but nervous about all the challenges and responsibilities that come with sharing a life together.
- ▶ **A birth.** Everyone loves a new baby, but life definitely is about to change for the parents! New parents embrace this joy with a touch of nervousness, hoping to do things well and bring their child up right.
- ▶ **Retirement.** The thrill of "slowing down" or having more time for hobbies and activities can be coupled with anxious questions about finances and health.

Whether you experience all of these milestones or none of them, one major milestone awaits humanity: one day Christ will return to earth. Even followers of Christ can view this event with both excitement and trepidation. What will it be like? Life will definitely change, and for those with a relationship with Christ, it will only change for the better!

Matthew 24:3-8

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

KEY WORDS: **Mount of Olives** (v. 3)—A hill just across the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem. The mount gave Jesus and His disciples an excellent view of the city, including the temple.

After a car accident, my doctor prescribed four heavy opioids to help me cope with the pain. I thought, “This is the worst it can get.” I was wrong. I soon discovered street drugs. My drug addiction meant I eventually ran out of money and had to live without electricity. I thought, “This is the worst it can get.” I was wrong. I soon began stealing from my family. When I was at the end of my rope and finally realized I’d had enough, I thought, “This is the worst it can get.” I was wrong. I still had to deal with painful withdrawal. The life cycle of a drug addict can be summed up like this: “It’s going to get worse before it gets better.” This is true of so many things in life, whether it’s our eating habits, health decisions, or the stock market. It was also something Jesus told His disciples when He spoke of His return.

People in Christian circles probably argue more about Jesus' second coming than anything else. *When will it happen? What will it look like? What are the details?* Here's what we know for sure: Jesus died, Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus ascended to heaven, and Jesus is coming back. Matthew 24 helps us see a little more clearly what Christ's return means for us.

Jesus had just made a reference to His return (Matt. 23:39) and the destruction of the temple (24:1), two almost cryptic comments that piqued Jesus' disciples curiosity. So they asked: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

In the minds of the disciples, these two questions were probably the same, as if something as horrific as the destruction of the temple would surely be a part of the end of the age. Jesus' response, however, indicates these are two separate events. After all, the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but Jesus has not returned yet. Jesus' response was full of unsettling things: wars, threats of war, natural disasters, political strife, and global conflict. Jesus summed it all up with this: "All these are the beginning of sorrows."

In other words, it's going to get worse before it gets better. And Jesus wasn't through. Beginning in verse 9, Jesus also told of coming persecution, deceptive false prophets, and increasing lawlessness. Through it all, however, the gospel will prevail! "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (v. 14).

We rightly refer to these events as "the end times," but they also mark the beginning. Things like wars and rumors of wars, the rise and fall of empires, and the rumblings in the very belly of the earth also signal that dawn is coming. Yes, it is going to get worse, but it is going to get better. As we read about the signs Jesus predicted about the end of days, we should read it with the hope of those whose salvation rests in Christ. We can do this because we know the One who is in control, who knew these things would happen, and who remains on the throne.

DIGGING DEEPER

HE'S COMING AGAIN!

The return of Christ is a captivating truth the New Testament frequently emphasized. Jesus testified He would come again; and biblical writers proclaimed His personal, visible, and bodily return (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 9:28; 2 Pet. 3:10; 1 John 3:2). Speculation about the second coming continues to be a topic of intense interest. The biblical writers did not speak of the promise of Christ's return to satisfy our curiosity about dates and events. Instead, they wrote of the promise to fortify the believer's confidence regarding Jesus' sovereignty and faithfulness.

Biblical writers communicated the Lord's return by using vivid images and striking metaphors that painted graphic portraits of stunning significance.

Hatred and Persecution—An aspect of Jesus' eschatological teaching is a "present and future" tension. His exhortation about mistreatment and violence toward those who followed Him carried specific relevance for first-century Christians and continued relevance for future generations (Matt. 24:9-10).

False Prophets—Deception and treachery will abound before Christ returns (v. 11). The early church battled distortions of the truth about Jesus. The church today must also stand valiantly against heresy.

Lawlessness and Lovelessness—When people abandon absolute standards of holiness and truth, the depth of depravity becomes limitless.

Endurance—Perseverance is a synonym for endurance and is an essential word picture in New Testament eschatology (v. 13). Believers will endure because of God's sustaining grace.

Gospel Goes to All the World—Jesus emphasized that the church's mission was to preach the gospel as a "testimony to all nations" (v. 14). He instructed His disciples to engage in world-wide evangelism.

Jesus second coming will be stunning, surprising, and spectacular. We cannot coerce all the adjectives to describe the details of His return, but we can live in faith and confidence that He will keep His promise. All the symbols, metaphors, and similes paint a triumphant picture that shouts "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!"

M. Dean Register, "He's Coming Again!" *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2012.

QUESTION 2:

What can encourage us amidst Jesus' warnings that things are going to get a lot worse?

Matthew 24:29-32

29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

KEY WORDS: **The Son of man** (v. 30)—Messianic reference taken from Daniel 7. Jesus adopted this title as His favorite personal designation that defined His ministry and mission on earth.

Earlier, Jesus told His disciples not to chase after alleged sightings and rumors about where the Messiah is (Matt. 24:23-25). When Jesus returns, we're going to know it. Everyone alive is going to know it. Jesus spoke plainly: "They will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Jesus referred to Himself as *the Son of Man*. This was a phrase that held a specific meaning to the Jews because it was a reference to the Messiah—the Christ. The most noteworthy use of the phrase in the Old Testament was Daniel 7:13-14:

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

The apostle John would later see Jesus in His full majesty as “the Son of man.”

“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle” (Rev. 1:12-13).

Living as believers means living with anticipation of Jesus’ return. Every generation has expected Jesus to return in their lifetime. Worldwide events—whether they are wars or pandemics—have caused Christians to wonder: Will Jesus be coming *now*?

Jesus compared the signs of His return to the blooming of a fig tree. The sprouting of leaves simply tells us summer is on its way. And the signs Jesus mentioned tell us (without giving a specific date and time) that His return is near. When Jesus does come back, it will be magnificent, unmistakable, and *extremely* real.

QUESTION 3:

Based on these verses, how would you describe Jesus’ return?

Matthew 24:42-44

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Jesus moved from prophecy to practical application. He had laid out things for us to know that point to His return, and now He told us what to do practically in light of that information: “Be ye also ready!”

QUESTION 4:

What are some obstacles to staying alert?

I have a friend whose band was on tour in Illinois in the dead of winter. All around them were snowy plains and long stretches of freezing road, and they suddenly realized they were running dangerously low on gas. By the time of this discovery, they only found closed stations. Eventually they found an open station and coasted their clunking, empty-tanked van up to a pump. Of course, had they been prepared for a situation like this—either by filling up frequently or coming prepared with extra fuel—they would have avoided the headache altogether.

In the same way, Jesus told His disciples that they were to live ready for Him to come back, since nobody knows the exact day that will happen.

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

We should be like a homeowner who heard that a thief was coming in the night. Such a homeowner was diligently on guard

and prepared to respond appropriately before the thief ever arrived. Living as a people ready for Jesus' return affects everything we do, from the way we pray to the way we interact with those around us. Let us be a people who belong to a bigger kingdom, servants to the Master of creation, always on our guard and ready at a moment's notice to enter into the glorious victory our King has promised He will bring.

QUESTION 5:

How can we be prepared for the end times?

ENGAGE***Lessons Learned from Coronavirus Pandemic***

Many of the ways people stayed prepared and protected during the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic can be applied to how believers can stay alert and faithful for Jesus' return. List specific ways seniors can apply the following disciplines to be ready for Christ's return:

Stay alert/informed

Stay protected

Stay pure/clean

Stay connected

LIVE IT OUT

Living prepared for Christ's return is something we can begin doing today.

- ▶ **Pray.** Thank Jesus for the promise of returning and setting up a kingdom that is infinitely greater than this world we live in. Ask Him to help you live a life of wisdom and readiness.
- ▶ **Prepare Yourself.** Review your plans and schedule for the week and consider steps you can take that show you are ready and prepared for Christ's return.
- ▶ **Prepare Others.** Identify those who are not ready for Christ's return. Pray and look for opportunities to either lead them into a relationship with Christ or encourage them to renew their walk with Him.

