

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

END TIMES – THE END OF TIMES

Read Matthew 24:26-51

The Public Event

“Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” (vv26-28)

One who believes the prophetic Scripture will have no difficulty identifying the second coming of Christ, because it will be a public event. Apparently, the heavens will be ablaze with the glory of God. According to Revelation 1:7, *“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”*

This declaration is supported by a cryptic statement in v28, *“For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”* The meaning is that the glorious coming of Christ is the natural sequence to blasphemy and unbelief, which characterizes the preceding period. Just as when an animal dies, the vultures gather, so when there is moral corruption, there must be divine judgment. There will be a knowing that Christ is here!

The Coming of the Son of Man

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (vv29-31)

The frightening display of divine disruption of the heavens, which precedes the second coming described graphically in Revelation 6:12-14 and in many other of the judgments of God described in the book of Revelation, will be climaxed by the glorious appearing of Christ in heaven (Rev 19:11-16). This will be a coming of the Lord to judge and subdue the earth and to bring in His earthly kingdom and contrasts with the rapture of the church, which is an entirely different event and with a different purpose.

His second coming to the earth is nevertheless a gathering of all “his elect” as stated in Matthew 24:31. Some believe this has a particular reference to the nation Israel as an elect nation. Probably the reference is to all those who are chosen, that is, the saints of all ages, whether in heaven or on earth, for all these will converge upon the millennial kingdom scene. While Matthew mentions only the elect of heaven, Mark 13:27 also mentions those on earth.

Taken as a whole, the second coming of Christ is a majestic event, not instantaneous like the rapture, but extending over many hours. This perhaps explains why everyone can see it, because in the course of a day, the earth will rotate and the entire world will be able to see the approach of Christ accompanied by the hosts of heaven, which will descend to the earth in the area of the Mount of Olives.

Parable of the Fig Tree

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So, you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the

doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” (vv32-35)

The fig tree has a regular pattern. The leaves appear, and then summer follows. When you see the leaves, you know summer is near. The fig tree was a common fruit tree in Israel. It is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, especially as a description of the abundance of the land. Sometimes figs or fig trees are also used as symbols or pictures. In passages like Jeremiah 24:1-10 and Hosea 9:10, figs or fig trees are used as a representation of Israel.

However, most Old Testament references to the fig tree use it as simply an example of agricultural blessing. It seems that Jesus’ reference here is not so much on the “figness” of the fig tree, but on the way that the fig tree follows reliable growth cycles related to the seasons. This is especially evident when this passage is compared with Luke 21:29-31 *“Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So, you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.”*

Jesus assured that when these signs appeared as He foretold (the abomination of desolation, followed by great tribulation, followed by signs in the heavens), His return to the earth would follow. When a fig tree buds, there is an inevitable result – summer is near, and fruit is coming. In the same way, when these signs are seen, the coming of Jesus in glory with His church to this world will inevitably follow.

When Jesus mentioned in v35 that this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place, the word “generation” has been suggested could also be translated “race,” and is a promise that the Jewish race would not be extinguished and would survive to the end. This is a major source of debate by many bible commentators. The translation as “race” would make sense to me.

Warning to be READY!

Here, Jesus refers back to the original question of Matthew 24:3 (what will be the sign of Your coming?). His answer is somewhat unexpected, saying of that day and hour no one knows. Jesus claimed that this knowledge was reserved for His Father only.

The best illustration Jesus came up with was to compare His coming with the days of Noah. Jesus explained what He meant by the days of Noah. It means life centred around the normal things: eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. In other words, life will be business as usual, reprobate perhaps, but usual. Those in the days of Noah were warned, and judgment eventually came. To those who had ignored the warnings, it came suddenly and unexpectedly.

“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.” (vv40-41)

Like the days of Noah, the time of the second coming will be a period of judgment on the earth. Just as the flood came “and took them all away,” referring to the judgment of unbelievers, so at the second coming, some will be taken away. According to Matthew 24:40-41, *“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”* Because at the rapture believers will be taken out of the world, some have confused this with the rapture of the church.

Here, however, the situation is the reverse. The one who is left, is left to enter the kingdom; the one who is taken, is taken in judgment. This is in keeping with the illustration of the time of Noah when the ones taken away are the unbelievers. The word for “shall be taken” in verses 40-41 uses the same word found in John 19:16, where Christ was taken away to the judgment of the cross. Accordingly, no one can know

the day nor the hour, but they can know that when the second coming occurs, it will be a time of separation of the saved from the unsaved.

Emphasizing the necessity of watchfulness for the Lord's return, He used the illustration of the good man of the house who, anticipating the possibility that a thief would come, kept careful watch. Just as one cannot know when a thief may come, so the servants of God who live in the great tribulation should expect Christ to come.

Parable of the Faithful & Unfaithful Servant

In addition to watchfulness, however, there should be careful service and preparation. This is illustrated in the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servant, beginning in Matthew 24:45. Having been left in charge of his master's household in the absence of the master, the servant was challenged to do his duty well and not to live carelessly, thinking that the lord would not be coming soon. The careless servant will be severely judged as an unbeliever, in contrast to the good servant who will be rewarded by his Lord. An unfaithful servant could be put to death and punished severely. So will Christ judge a wicked world that does not look for His return.

While these two parables, beginning in verse 32, have as their primary interpretation and exhortation the situation immediately preceding the second coming of Christ, there are parallels to those living today in expectation of the rapture.

Believers today also need to be faithful, to be recognizing the signs of the times, and to be living in such a way that they are ready for the Lord's return. Even among those who differ in their basic interpretation of prophecy, there is this constant unifying note of being ready for the Lord's return

So today, even though we may not understand all the prophetic Word and may not interpret it alike, believers should be looking for the coming of the Lord. As stated in 1 John 3:3, *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

