

Teen Bible Study Notes: Friday, January 25, 2019

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The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ – Lecture #23

Book and Chapter – Matthew – Chapter 24 (verses 21- all)

MATTHEW 24 (continued...)

V21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

V22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Matthew 24:22

Question: What is meant by “saved’ in this verse? Spiritual salvation? Or simply, the preservation of physical human life?

Answer: If this verse refers to the *spiritual* condition of individual human beings during a certain period of history, then the whole prophetic significance would be lost. The original Greek can go either way. The answer must be determined from the context.

And the context is very physical. The entire twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew deals with the basic problem of *staying alive* during wars (**verse 6**), famines, pestilences and earthquakes (**verse 7**), religious persecution (**verse 9**), etc.

Many modern translations emphasize that **Matthew 24:22** refers to the fact human life could literally be on the verge of total annihilation. For instance:

“If that time of trouble were not cut short,” begins *The New English Bible*, “not a soul would be saved alive.”

The *Moffatt* translation reads: “not a mortal would survive.”

The *Berkeley Version* of the New Testament states: “no living thing would have escaped.”

The *Phillips* translation reads: “no human being would survive.”

Christ said “...unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved.” That must have sounded utterly absurd to that small audience over 1900 years ago. It sounded just as absurd to an audience in 1934 when Herbert W. Armstrong first began to preach it to the world.

Yet suddenly, some 11 years later, in the year 1945, it began to make sense. Today it makes full sense. Today everybody knows. Today, it is being repeated around the world. Scientists and heads of governments alike are proclaiming it.

Those words could never have begun to be understood in correct context until 1945 when the first Atomic Bomb burst upon an unsuspecting world. At that time, we began to become aware of the vast potential of science and technology to erase human, animal, and plant life from the face of this earth.

By the early 1970's the world nuclear stockpile was equivalent to 50,000 megatons of TNT. By the mid 70's there were 500,000 megatons in the world nuclear stockpile. That amounted to 150 tons of TNT for every person on earth! The world's nuclear stockpile continued to rise until it peaked in 1986.

The number of nuclear weapons in the world stockpile has declined significantly, and is down from a peak of approximately 70,300 in 1986 (at its peak) to an estimated 14,485 in mid-2018. The overwhelming portion of the reduction happened in the 1990's.

However comparing today's inventory with that of the 1940's and 50's is like comparing apples to oranges – today's weapons are vastly more capable! The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II – code-named “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” respectively – caused widespread destruction, leveled cities and killed somewhere between 150 and 250 thousand people!

Nuclear weapons produce enormous amounts of energy. Their significance may best be appreciated by the coining of the words kiloton (1,000 tons) and megatons (1,000,000 tons) to describe their blast energy in equivalent weights of the conventional chemical explosive TNT.

“Little Boy” – released about 15 kilotons of energy – equivalent to 15,000 tons of TNT – and sent a mushroom cloud up to 25,000 feet. By contrast – the largest nuclear weapon ever detonated the “Tsar Bomba” was detonated, in a test, by the Soviet Union just 16 years later in 1961. This bomb produced a 50 megaton blast – about 3,333 times more powerful than the “Little Boy.” This bomb produced a mushroom cloud up to more than 130,000 feet in altitude – about 4½ times the height of Mount Everest and sent shockwaves around the world three times over. We now have the scientific knowledge to produce even more destructive weapons!

In the world today – the military commander of a single nuclear submarine wields the power to obliterate over 150 large cities!

We indeed live at the end of the age – where the destruction of “all life” hangs in the balance. It has never been this way before in all human history! This is the end-time generation.

V23 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe *it*.

V24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

V25 See, I have told you beforehand.

V26 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*.

Three Common Ideas of Professing Christians – Regarding the Second Coming of Christ:

Among the millions of professing Christians who still expect the second coming of Christ, there are hundreds of differing concepts about the time and manner of His return. **The three principal ideas** are the “Post-millennial Coming,” the “Secret Rapture,” and the “Spiritual Coming.”

(1) *The Post-millennial Coming* – It was not until about A.D. 1700 that an English clergy man put forward the idea that Christ’s second coming would follow the Millennium – the time during which His Kingdom was prophesied to rule the earth. But those who maintain *this* idea are finding it increasingly difficult to believe that modern man can *ever* achieve worldwide peace and prosperity without the intervention of Christ’s strong hand (**Isaiah 40:10**).

(2) *The “Secret Rapture”* – The second common idea accepted by millions of professing Christians is the “Secret Rapture.” According to this belief, Jesus will return to this earth in two phases. First, He will return *secretly* to whisk away all true Christians to heaven to protect them from the time of the “great tribulation” Jesus foretold. Therefore, it is believed that the Church’s promised place of safety is not on this earth, but up in heaven. The second phase is believed to be His “public” coming at which time all will be able to see and hear Him.

But the rapture theory is actually an even more modern invention than the post-millennial theory. The early New Testament Church of God never heard of the “rapture.” Nor indeed had anyone else until about 1830, when it was espoused by a few people in Britain and later popularized in the famous *Scofield Reference Bible*.

Those first few advocates of the rapture theory fervently believed that they were living in the last three and one half years of earth’s history. When that length of time was exceeded and Christ had still not “caught them away,” they were forced to alter their doctrine to a general expectancy that Christ *might* return – unannounced – at any moment!

Thus from those few people the doctrine of the “Secret Rapture” has spread to most of Protestantism today.

(3) *Christ Has Already Returned* – The third common idea is that Christ has *already* returned. Many assume that Jesus came the second time as the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection (**Acts 2**). His Kingdom was the Church founded at that time, say the proponents of this theory, and therefore today all the churches together constitute the “Kingdom of God.”

But such a kingdom would not fulfill dozens of plain prophecies. Also, this theory ignores the fact that the Apostle Paul and other early true Christians *still* looked forward to the second coming of Christ and His Kingdom long after that particular Pentecost!

The churches of this world cannot constitute God's Kingdom, as so many professing Christians seem to think. The "world" or system (Greek *kosmos*) encompasses all that is characteristic of the age of man. And certainly, as history reveals, *the churches* are a PART of this world! They have engaged in political struggles, ruled empires and caused the shedding of much blood, especially in the Middle Ages.

What scriptures prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Christ returns *before*, and *not after*, peace and harmony fill the earth for a thousand years!

Jesus warned that some would claim He had already come before His true return would take place (*see Matthew 24:23 & 26 above*).

False teachers were proclaiming that very idea soon after His resurrection (**II Thessalonians 2:1-2**).

II Thessalonians 2:1-2: V1 "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,
V2 Not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come."

The Apostle Paul emphatically refuted this false assumption. And went on to warn that there must yet come a further falling into error – an apostasy from the truth – before the return of Jesus Christ in the next verse – **II Thessalonians 2:3**.

The Second Coming

V27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

When Christ returns He will be **VISIBLE** to everyone!

The Greek word *astrape* may mean the lightning of thunderstorms, or any brilliant illumination. Now what brilliant light "comes out of the east and shines even unto the west"? Why, the **SUN**, of course! You can see the sun. Christ's presence will be "like the sun shining in its strength" (**Revelation 1:16**).

Revelation 1:16 "...His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength."

Christ's return will be obvious – nobody will be able to miss it.

V28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Notice – **Luke 17:37-38: V37** “And they answered and said to Him, ‘Where, Lord?’ So He said to them, ‘Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.’”

When the disciples asked *where* Jesus’ return would take place. Jesus did not answer their question directly. Rather He said – “Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered...”

The eagles will be gathered together – The term for eagles here refers to vultures that gather over dead animals. When the judgment comes, it will be final and terrible, with the stench of death and the presence of vultures everywhere. Not one will need to look for the place of judgment, the presence of the birds will reveal where the *carcasses are*.

V29 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.

The heavenly signs in the sun, moon and stars occur (**Joel 2:31**) – immediately AFTER the GREAT TRIBULATION!

Joel 2:31 “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.”

Question: What follows the GREAT TRIBULATION?

Answer: The Great Day of God’s Wrath! The Day of the LORD! The Great Tribulation is NOT the wrath of God – just the opposite. This the wrath of Satan the Devil. The Great Tribulation is Satan’s last persecution and martyrdom against the true begotten sons of God whom he can’t deceive. The plagues which lead up to, and occur at the time of Christ’s return to earth – cannot come until their fellow-servants and their brethren [*other Spirit-begotten Christians*] – should be killed as they were!

Revelation 6:9-11: V9 “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

V10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’

V11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.”

Here is the Great Tribulation – another martyrdom of God’s people! The heavenly signs FOLLOW these first five seals.

V30 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.

Verses 29 & 30 – Show that problems of unequalled severity will trouble the whole world, but Christ will *not* return until AFTER this tribulation and AFTER great heavenly signs occur!

V31 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.

A tremendous noise will rend the air at Christ's coming! Christ's return from heaven will also be accompanied by a tremendous "shout!"

I Thessalonians 4:16 "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

This is the time when the saints are "caught up" to be with Him.

I Thessalonians 4:17 "Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

I Corinthians 15:51-52: V51 "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed –

V52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

The trumpet mentioned in **I Thessalonians 4:16** and **I Corinthians 15:52** – is the same as the one blown in **Revelation 11:15** and **Revelation 11:18**.

Revelation 11:15 "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Revelation 11:18 "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged. And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

The events described by John could only apply to the time of the resurrection when the last trumpet is blown! John is describing the same momentous event Paul did in **I Thessalonians 4** and **I Corinthians 15**. Thus we see that Christ will return and the saints will be resurrected at the mighty blast of a great trumpet which will be heard by everyone on earth!

Parable of the Fig Tree

V32 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.

Matthew 24:32

Many have asked whether there is a verse in the Bible which states, “You can’t tell winter from summer except by the budding of the trees.

There is not scripture which makes this statement. However, the idea may stem from a misapplication of **Matthew 24:32**: “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.” This verse does *not* mean that the seasons would become indistinguishable. Christ simply used the budding of the fig tree to illustrate a point about His Second Coming.

Just as we know spring is here and summer is near when the trees put out new leaves, so we will know Christ’s return is near when we see the events he mentioned occur. Notice **verse 33**: “So you also, when you see all these things [*those described in verses 4-29*], know that it [*the day of Christ’s return*] is near – at the doors!”

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V33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!

V34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Question: What did Jesus mean when He said, “This generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (Matthew 24:34)? Was He referring to His own generation - or ours?

Answer: Jesus was NOT speaking of His own day and age. He was answering a question His disciples posed about the last days of Satan’s rule on this earth: “...what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3.)

In this important prophecy of **Matthew 24**, Jesus gave the disciples a point-by-point description of what would occur in these last days before His Second Coming. He prophesied that, before his coming, wars, famines, disease epidemics and great earthquakes would ravage the world (**verse 7**).

Then Jesus foretold a final persecution on His true followers (**verses 9-11**), with the rise of false ministers who would deceive the world. He foretold an age of lawlessness – rampant iniquity – a wholesale break-down in morality (**verse 12**). But, Jesus said, in the midst of this travail and

grief, the Gospel – Good News – of the Kingdom of God would be thundered to all nations, “...and then the end will come” (**verse 14**).

Jesus was speaking of the close of this age – the age of Satan’s rule – over the earth! He was speaking of the crisis facing this very generation.

He said – “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (**verses 21-22**).

Not until RECENT TIMES has the entire population of the earth faced stark annihilation. This is the end time of which Jesus Christ spoke! This is the generation He had in mind when He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will be no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (**verse 34**).

We are living in the prophesied generation immediately preceding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Notice that Jesus did not tell His disciples “your generation.” He spoke of “this generation” – the generation He had just described.

He earlier told Peter: **Luke 12:41-43: V41** “Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to us, or to all *people*?’

V42 And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, who *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season?

V43 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.’”

Jesus prophecy was directed toward his true disciples in the end-time generation [our generation] who would be doing God’s Work when Jesus comes the second time to take over the reins of world government.

V35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

The words of Jesus Christ are more certain than the very existence of the universe!

Psalms 102:25-27: V25 “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.

V26 They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed.

V27 But You *are* the same, and Your years will have no end.”

Peter in **I Peter 1:24-25** quotes from the writings of Isaiah the prophet, stating: **V24** “...*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away. V25 But the word of the LORD endures forever.*” (**Isaiah 40:6-8.**)

Illustration of the Days of Noah

V36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Some have thought that the apostles would not know the day or the hour, but that we in these last days *would* know it. This is emphatically NOT true!

Peter asked Jesus if He meant only the apostles would be unable to know the day or the hour, or if He meant all – even those of us today – would not know. Notice Christ’s response:

Luke 12:40-43: V40 “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

V41 Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to us, or to all *people*?’

V42 And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season?’

V43 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”

Verse 43 – makes it plain that Jesus’ warning was especially for the generation of those alive “when He comes.”

How plain that *none* of Jesus’ servants – not even of this generation just prior to His second coming – would know the day or the hour!

Nevertheless, Jesus gave us the signs that would precede His second coming. We are to be *watching* the fulfillment of those signs (**Luke 21:36**).

Luke 21:36 “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

V37 But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

V38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

Jesus was referring to the indifference of the people of that time to the coming disaster. There is nothing sinful about *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*. However, the people of the end times will be doing these things without any thought of God or the coming punishment. It will catch them unaware.

V39 And did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

V40 Then [*at the time of Christ’s return*] two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

V41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Matthew 24:40-41

To be properly understood, these verses must be read in context. Starting in **verse 21**, Christ described the Great Tribulation and the end-time events which would lead up to His return. In **verses 37 and 38**, He referred to the time of Noah. Just before the Flood, people were going about their daily business when disaster came upon them suddenly. Jesus said that the end time will be like the days of Noah in this respect (**verse 39**).

People will be living their usual lives, working in the fields, grinding at the mill, and so forth (**verses 40 and 41**) when the Great Tribulation falls upon them unexpectedly.

This passage can be applied in principle to another future event. At the beginning of **Matthew 24**, Christ told His disciples about *His return* to this earth. In this light, **verses 40-41** can be taken to mean that at Christ's return there is to be a *separation* made between those who attain to the first resurrection and those who do not (**John 3:3-8; I Corinthians 15:50-53; Revelation 20:6**).

Matthew 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-36 do not refer to a "Secret Rapture" as some teach.

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When the saints rise to meet Christ in the air (**I Thessalonians 4:13-17**), they will have been changed into spirit beings (**I Corinthians 15:52-53**). They will also descend with Christ to the Mount of Olives (**Zechariah 14:4**) where they will begin to rule the entire world with Him (**Revelation 5:9-10**).

Those who are not "taken" and made immortal will live on into the Millennium as physical human beings, awaiting their "change" at a later time.

V42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

V43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

When Christ returns He is coming as a "thief in the night." Does this mean He will come silently and invisibly?

The Bible gives us clear, precise answers to these questions.

I Thessalonians 5:2-3: V2 "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

V3 For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."

Are Christians to be vigilant so this period of upheaval – the “day of the Lord” doesn’t catch them unawares?

I Thessalonians 5:4-6: V4 “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

V5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

V6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober.”

Christ is picture as coming as a “thief: in **Revelation 16:15** too: “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

This does NOT mean that Christ will return secretly or invisibly!

Thieves or burglars do not come invisibly. A thief, however, usually comes at night when the household is away or asleep. He catches them *unawares*, off their guard – surprises them! You never know when a thief is coming. If you did, you’d be prepared.

So it is with Christ. He will not come invisibly – any more than a thief comes invisibly. But He will come UNEXPECTEDLY! No one will know exactly when He is going to come.

V44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Illustration of the Two Servants

V45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?

V46 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

V47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.

V48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’

V49 And begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards,

V50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of,

V51 And will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The *faithful and wise servant* – will be given great responsibility in the coming Kingdom. The *evil servant* will be *cut in two*.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth – indicates the remorse of those who have suffered great loss.

Jesus Christ warned Christians not to lose sight of the significance of these sure prophecies. His warning is also found in the book of Luke.

Luke 21:34-35: V34 “But take heed to ourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.
V35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.”