

# Sermons on Matthew

## A Judgment of Victory

*Matthew 24:27-35*

*With Study Questions*

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For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>-28-</sup> \_\_ For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

<sup>-29-</sup> \_\_ “ 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. <sup>-30-</sup> \_\_ 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. <sup>-31-</sup> \_\_ 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.

<sup>-32-</sup> “ 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. <sup>-33-</sup> So you also, when you see all these things, know \_\_ that \_\_ it is near – at the doors! <sup>-34-</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, \_\_ this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>-35-</sup> \_\_ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away (Matthew 24:27-35).

## Introduction

A few weeks ago I received this e-mail:

Dear Friends in Christ: 1. The USA and the UK will be wiped off the world map, losing their names. 2. The West will be shattered like an earthenware jar dashed to a stone and then disappear like a stone cast down into the ocean (Jer.19:1-12; Rev.18:21-23). 3. There is only way to escape the above calamity: the miracle of Jonah (Matt.16:4). That is a summary of the entire Bible Prophecy. Please open the Attachment.

Seems like a crackpot. I then read these words from a very reputable Bible teacher:

By the end of the Great Tribulation, the world will have filled up its full measure of sin and will have spiritually decayed into a wretched and virtually lifeless carcass. As it lies like a dead animal in the wilderness, Christ will appear to make final disposition of that corpse through His righteous and terrible judgment.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand...

There was a promise made to Abraham that in him **“all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3)**. The most quoted verse in the New Testament from the Old Testament promises that Christ will reign **“till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25; Psalm 110:1)**.

The Psalmist writes of a great worldwide conversion where **“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before (Him). For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27, 28)**. Isaiah writes of a Child being born (Jesus) who will begin a government (a kingdom) that will grow and grow. It is a kingdom of judgment and justice that will begin with the Child and have no end (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Isaiah continues to express the power, glory and magnitude of that kingdom just a couple of chapters later where he writes **“For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9)**. Jesus also gave the astonishingly optimistic promise regarding the growth of the kingdom of God telling Peter, **“\_the gates of Hades shall not \_\_prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)**.

So, which is it?

Is Christ redeeming the world? Should we expect that as a result of the gospel and the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men, women and children, bringing them to faith and obedience, the world will become a better place? Or do the bad guys win and the entire world become a rotting carcass?

The rotting carcass theory, in large part comes from the passage before us this morning. I intend to show that not only is that not what this passage teaches, but also that it teaches just the opposite. This passage teaches not that evil will have unquenched progress, but that God judges evil, not only in eternity but in history as well. God stops evil. Evil may have decades (like

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, (*New Testament Commentary*, Moody Press. 1989) p. 48

Communism), it may even have centuries (like Rome), but it is eventually brought down.

**For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:27). –**

## **The Coming of the Son of Man**

What is this event – this particular “**coming of the Son of Man**”? Is it the end of the world? If so, it is certainly out of the flow of the context of the gospel of Matthew.

## **The Context of Matthew**

The gospel begins with John the Baptist speaking of an imminent judgment: “**even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees... (God’s) winnowing fan is in His hand (Matthew 3:10, 12)**. Jesus told His disciples that they would not make it through the cities of Israel “**before the Son of Man comes**” (Matthew 10:23). Jesus chastises the Pharisees and Sadducees for their dimness in discerning the signs of the times in which they lived (Matthew 16:1-4). Jesus then taught that He would come in judgment in His glory with His angels (Matthew 16:27). He then gave a time frame: “**Assuredly, I say to you, \_\_there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom**” (Matthew 16:28).

## **Parables of Exclusion and Judgment**

The parables of exclusion from the kingdom of God and judgment (the Parable of the Two Sons and the Parable of the Landowner in Matthew 21:28-46) that Jesus gave had to do, not with the end of the world, but with the judgment of the Pharisees. Matthew records:– “**Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they \_\_perceived that He was speaking of them**” (Matthew 21:45). These parables speak of a primary theme in Matthew that the kingdom of God will be taken from Israel and “**given to a nation bearing the fruits of it**” (Matthew 21:43), which is the New Covenant church. It was the moving from BC to AD, from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

## Chapter 23

The entire chapter (chapter 23) leading up to our current chapter contains denunciations against, not those who exist at the end of the world, but against the scribes and Pharisees. They threw **“heavy burdens”** (vs. 4) on the shoulders of men, proudly vaunted their religious stations and titles (vs. 5), **“devoured widows”** (vs. 14), were **“sons of hell”** (vs. 15), made false and frivolous vows (vs. 16-22), **“neglected... justice and mercy and faith”** (vs. 23).

Jesus called them **“whitewashed tombs”** (vs. 27), **“serpents”** (vs. 33), killer of prophets and wise men (vs. 34). It was that generation which had **“filled up its full measure of sin.”** Jesus concludes chapter 23 proclaiming that the justice of God **“from the blood of righteous Abel to \_\_the blood of Zechariah”** vs. 35) would fall upon the generation hearing His words: **“this generation”** or literally **“on the generation this”** (epi ten genean tauten, \_\_π\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_)². In today’s text Jesus repeats this with the emphatic verily or amen or **“Assuredly, I say to you, \_this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place”** (Matthew 24:34). (he genea haute, \_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_-----).

### A Judgment of Evil

It should be obvious. Jesus is straining to inform His listeners that a judgment of evil is about to come. It is not the Great White Throne Judgment of which He will speak in chapter 25. It is a judgment of the Old Covenant church which had become an abomination. Evil does not win. An evil church does not win. An evil kingdom and its evil doers will have its moment then be **“cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb”** (Psalm 37:1).

So far from viewing this as the end result of the affects of the New Covenant church, it is an example of how God puts a halt to evil. He stops evil in its tracks that His kingdom may prevail and His goodness cover the earth. The lawless one does not advance but the Lord **“will consume (him) with the breath of His mouth”** (2 Thessalonians 2:8). The promise of God is that the workers of iniquity **“will progress no further”** (2 Timothy 3:8).

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² I don’t mean to overstate this in the Greek. Suffice it to say that every time Matthew uses the word ‘generation’ he is using it to address his current audience.

## Lightning

What does Jesus mean when He announces He will come like lightning? How does the Bible use the imagery of lightning? Zechariah records God's promise of Israel's military victory over the surrounding nations when he writes of lightning:

**Then the Lord will be seen over them, And \_His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, And go \_\_with whirlwinds from the south (Zechariah 9:14).**

We should understand Jesus' use of lightning similarly.

**-For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together (Matthew 24:28).**

## A Carcass

Israel had become a dead religion and the armies of Rome would soon surround them like vultures over a corpse (Luke 21:20). In the Old Testament, Habakkuk records God's judgment of Israel by the powerful Chaldeans by saying they would come **"as the eagle hastens to eat"** (Habakkuk 1:8). The world is not a carcass. Jesus is speaking of Israel.

**\_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 (Matthew 24:29).**

## When Did This Happen?

I am often asked, when in the world did this happen? When did the moon fail to give light and the stars fall from heaven? Again, we see this language used of military conflicts, for example in Judges when the Canaanite kings fought so fiercely it was said that **"They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera"** (Judges 5:19, 20).

The exact details of this event, I wouldn't speculate to answer. But whatever it was, it happened then. Of the same event Peter spoke. At Pentecost when the people of God were accused of drunkenness, Peter corrects the mockers by informing them of the true nature of that which they were watching. Peter using the near demonstrative states **"this is"** (*touto estin*) **what**

**was spoken by the prophet Joel:... *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord (Acts 2:16, 20).***

The end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New would have an explosive component to it. The Old Covenantal system, with its corrupt priests and abominable sacrifices, was like a smoldering oil derrick which would be put out by an explosion.

**\_\_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 (Matthew 24:30).**

## **The Sign of the Son of Man**

This tricky verse is understood numerous ways: Some say the sign is Jesus coming on a cloud. But then He would be a sign of Himself, which would be unusual to say the least.

Others say we should look for some supernatural sign like lightning of a big cross in the sky, etc.

It could also be understood that the judgment of Israel was a sign that Jesus was in heaven, at the Father's right hand, exercising His judgment — it could be translated **"and then will shine the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."** The Expanded Translations renders it: **"And then shall be seen the attesting miracle of the Son of Man in heaven."**<sup>3</sup> The latter seems to flow with the text. Especially when we read later that Jesus informs His accusers that they **"will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven"** (Matthew 26:64).

## **All the Tribes**

**"All the tribes of the earth"** is literally **"all the tribes of the land"** (*ges* — which mean soil or territory, as opposed to *kosmos* which could have wider implications). This would most naturally be understood as the twelve tribes of Israel.

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<sup>3</sup>Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1961). *The New Testament : An expanded translation*. First published in 3 vols., 1956-59, under title: Expanded translation of the Greek New Testament. (Mt 24:29). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

## The Clouds

And what of the clouds? Again, in the Old Testament God used the imagery of clouds to describe military conquest: **“Behold, the Lord \_\_rides on a swift cloud, And will come into Egypt; \_The idols of Egypt will \_totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst (Isaiah 19:1).**

**\_\_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 (Matthew 24:31).-**

## A Trumpet

The sound of the trumpet is not to be understood as the sound of global darkness and defeat. The trumpets were blown to call God’s people together for worship (Numbers 10:1-10). The trumpets were used in the year of Jubilee (once every 50 years) when the world reverts to its original owners (Leviticus 25:28).

The despots, tyrants and persecutor would have their moment but Christ’s church needn’t despair. Their day would end, their oppression would cease and God’s messengers would trumpet the gospel, calling God’s people. And the land that had been usurped by the devil would once again fall under the loving power, guidance and goodness of God’s grace and mercy.

**\_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. <sup>-33-</sup> So you also, when you see all these things, know \_\_that \_\_it is near – at the doors! <sup>-34-</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, \_\_this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>-35-</sup> \_\_Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away (Matthew 24:32-35).**

## The Nearness of Judgment

Jesus once again speaks of the nearness of this judgment. His listeners were not to make the same mistake as the Pharisees in their failure to discern the season (Matthew 16:1-4). These things would happen in their lifetimes. If Jesus were speaking about the destruction of mankind at the end of the world, verse 34 would make that very confusing to His listeners.

## The Judgment of Evil – The Advancement of Good

No, the world is not going to become a dead animal or lifeless carcass. The promise of Christ is that that which is corrupt will be torn down and the kingdom of God will advance. Those who despise wisdom and instruction, those who reject goodness and truth and mercy and justice – or seek to deify themselves by defining these things on their own terms – will be broken with the Son's rod of iron (Psalm 2:9).

Christians find themselves continually surrounded by the philosophies and arguments of men – men who view their own opinions as high and exalted (2 Corinthians 10:5): whether it's judges determining who owns the right to educate our children, or courts deciding the components of a sanctioned household, or, most importantly, what it means to have peace with God or even whether there is a God.

It is easy to grow discouraged when seeking to cast down these arguments and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is easy to grow weary of **“doing good” (Galatians 6:9)**, to think our toil in the Lord is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is easy to fret because of the **“evil doers” (Psalm 37:1)**. But it is a huge mistake to consign history to the devil – any part of it. We are to rather recognize the eternal power of God's word, of the words of Christ. There is no power on heaven or earth that can stay God's redemptive hand – His gospel. There is no equivocation in the promise of God advancing His kingdom: **“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7)**.

## Questions for Study

1. Examine and discuss the assertions regarding the world getting better or getting worse (pages 2, 3).
2. What is the “coming of the Son of Man” in verse 27 in the context of Matthew’s gospel (pages 4, 5)?
3. Does chapter 24 of Matthew teach that evil will win or lose in the world (page 5)?
4. Discuss the references to “lightning,” “carcass,” “the sign of the Son of Man” “the tribes of the earth,” “clouds,” and “the trumpet,” (pages 5-8).
5. When did all this happen (page 6)?
6. Should we expect the victory of evil or goodness in this world (pages 8, 9)?