

## Matthew 24:29-51 – “The Comeback King”

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There is nothing more thrilling than an exciting comeback.

- Whether it's the Vancouver Canucks in 1994 coming back against the Calgary Flames down 3 games to 1 and winning a game 7 in OT with a beauty of a goal by Pavel Bure.
- Or when the New England Patriots were trailing 28-3 in the third quarter of the Super Bowl against the Atlanta Falcons in 2017. Tom Brady rallied with 17 minutes remaining to close the 25-point defect and tie the game at the end of regulation. The game was decided in overtime where the Patriots prevailed. Amazing!
- Or more recently on Friday night when Riverside FC was down 3-1 in the second half of their soccer match and roared back to tie it up even with their star player on the sideline with an injury. Exciting times!

Well today we talk about a comeback of another kind. It's the second coming of Christ!

We're in Matthew 24 and this chapter has been a clarification for the disciples as to what will be the sign of Jesus' coming. They figured He would be returning in just a few days – in their lifetime at least. But Jesus' return will look much different than what they expected. And it will be on an entirely different timeline. So in Matthew 24 Jesus has been essentially sharing what things are going to look like before He returns, and He takes us through the Tribulation, this last 7 years marked out for God to refine Israel. It will be a time of upheaval and judgment, yet it's going to be a time where God mercifully is sharing the gospel and giving people an opportunity to repent and be saved.

So we've looked at the Beginning of the Tribulation – Matthew 24:4-14

The Middle of the Tribulation – Matthew 24:15-22

And now we pick things up at the End of the Tribulation – Matthew 24:23-44

### Summary Statement:

Despite the coming tribulation, we must live ready and watching because Jesus is coming back, and we will be rewarded for our faithfulness.

### 1. The Coming of the Christ – 24:29-31

**Coming** (*parousia*) is a word that appears in Matthew 24:3+27 for the first time. It becomes an important word for the apostle Paul, who used it to describe the second coming (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13). Other New Testament writers used it as well (e.g., Jas. 5:7–8; 2 Pet. 3:4; 1 John 2:28). <sup>1</sup>

**24:29 - *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.***

Jesus is going to be returning to this world very differently than how He came the first time. At His first advent He came humbly, born in a small town without any fanfare. He came in meekness, He was despised and rejected.

At the time of speaking this, He's just a couple days away from being unjustly condemned, mocked, beaten, and placed on a cross between two criminals.

Jesus came intentionally as a suffering servant and to give His life a ransom for many. Many turned on Him because this didn't fit the picture they had in view of the Messiah from their Old Testament Scriptures. But you see, they failed to see that many of those Scriptures would be fulfilled at His second coming.

This is what we see being described now in Matthew 24. And His return is really going to shake things up! We read that the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, stars will fall, the whole universe is going to be shaken.

- Jesus is returning no longer as a suffering servant but as the conquering King! And His return is going to be packed with a punch fitting of the warrior God He is. There's going to be a cataclysmic shaking in the cosmos that will surround the coming of Jesus Christ.
- This is similar to how many Old Testament prophets viewed these end days: **Isaiah 13:9–10**, *"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup> For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine."*  
**Isaiah 24:23**, *"Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the Lord of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously."*  
**Joel 2:10**, *"The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness."*

<sup>1</sup> Weber, S. K. (2000). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, p. 403). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

**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."*

**Zephaniah 1:14–15**, *"The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. <sup>15</sup> That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness,"*

Now you hear in their words the repeated phrase, *the day of the Lord*. This day of the Lord was not a singular day. It is a period of time where the Lord intervenes in human history to bring about His judgment and rule and reign. It begins when He removes His church at the rapture, continues through the Tribulation and ends at the conclusion of the millennium.

**24:30-31** - ***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.***

At the conclusion of the tribulation, the sign of Jesus' coming will be evident. What is the sign? I don't know. But everyone will know that this is Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. It will be evident. I mean, we saw in vs. 29 that the heavens will be shaken. So I don't think anyone is going to miss it or mistake who this is.

- **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."*

Everyone will see Him and all will **mourn**. We know from Zechariah 12:10-12 that Israel will mourn when they see Him and their mourning will lead them to repentance.

But the idea here is that many will mourn without a repentant attitude. They will see that their judgment has arrived.

...**coming on the clouds**... It could be that Jesus is literally coming on the clouds in the sky, but this could also have reference to the glory of the Lord that was often evident in the cloud.

- **Exodus 16:10**, *"Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud."*
- **Exodus 40:34–35**, *"Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."*
- This cloud could be speaking of the physical manifestation of the power and glory of the Lord.

When Jesus returns His angels will sound the trumpet call which was the instrument sounded to gather the tribes, to call to battle, or to announce the arrival of a king. All these are applicable here.

- "This is not the same trumpet that will call Christians to heaven at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). Other trumpets will sound announcing various other events in the future (cf. Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; 11:15; et al.). <sup>2</sup>

And these angels will gather ***His elect***. Again, that is speaking of all those that became believers during the tribulation. It's not speaking of the church, it's referencing believing Jews and Gentiles, and again, the primary focus is on the repentant Jews.

## 2. The Comparison of the Fig Tree – 24:32-35

**24:32-33** - ***"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!"***

The fig tree is often used as a symbol for Israel. Some have thought that the fig tree putting forth its leaves was fulfilled in 1948 when Israel became a nation and was given back their homeland. This is when they began to be fruitful again as an independent nation. And then they tie in the next couple of verses...

<sup>2</sup> Constable, Dr. Thomas L. <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>

**24:34-35 - *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.***

Now what generation is Jesus speaking of? People will say that the generation alive when Israel became a nation in 1948 will be the generation that will see ***all these things take place*** (ie. the Tribulation and the second coming of Christ). But it seems quite obscure that Jesus was speaking to His disciples about Israel becoming a nation again in 1948 (though all of that is true). And then how long is a generation exactly? Is it 40 years, 60 years, 80 years, or longer??

- Some who have taught this have initially thought Jesus was going to return in 1988. In fact a book was published and 4.5 million copies sold with the name, “88 Reason why the Rapture is in 1988”. When that didn’t happen, people began to question the length of a generation. Or they began to wonder if it was more centered around 1967 when Israel regained control of Jerusalem.

Though these are interesting theories I don’t think Jesus is tying in the birthdate of Israel. In fact in Luke’s parallel passage of this account, Luke says, “*Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.* <sup>30</sup> *When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near*” (**Luke 21:29–30**).

- I believe Jesus is simply stating that when you begin to see something like a tree budding, you know what season it is. You know what’s coming.
- And Jesus is stating in vs. 33, ***when you see all these things, know that it is near***... See what things? All of the events of the tribulation that we’ve seen in vv.4-28. What is near? The coming of Christ!
- The generation alive that witnesses all these things ***will by no means pass away till all these things take place***. In other words, it’s not going to be a drawn out time. Everything in the tribulation is going to unfold in a way where that generation will be the witnesses of the return of Christ.

\*Interestingly, this word ***generation*** can be translated as *race* (Gk = *gena*). Some believe Jesus could have been meaning that the Jewish race will by no means pass away until all these things are fulfilled. Though they will go through great persecution, they will not be cut off. It’s amazing that this nation has continued on through great adversity, being uprooted and dispersed from their homeland for centuries and yet have retained their historical language and identity. That’s a modern day miracle.

Jesus' words are so dependable that He says they will not pass away. Heaven and earth may, and Peter says in 2 Peter 3:10-13 that they will, but the words of Jesus are lasting and true and will never cease to be true.

### 3. The Complacency of the Day – 24:36-39

**24:36-39 - “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.* <sup>37</sup> *But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.* <sup>38</sup> *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,* <sup>39</sup> *and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*”**

Many are trying to look for dates when Jesus is going to come back. Now I believe in a pretribulation rapture where Jesus can come at anytime for His bride, the church. He will rapture us up where we will meet Him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) and we will return to heaven with Him while the tribulation period unfolds here on the earth. This rapture can come at any time. But this passage is about His return, and nobody knows the ***day and hour***.

Those alive during the tribulation can know the seasons and know it's at hand, but Jesus shows that many will just go through this period with a complacent attitude. And He likens it to the ***days of Noah***.

- The days of Noah were marked by evil. **Genesis 6:5** says “*that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”
- But Jesus isn't comparing the *corruptness* of the day, He's comparing the *complacency* of the day. Though Noah is building a huge ship there in the desert plains, nobody is worried about the ramifications of it. They're not thinking they better get on Noah's good side and get a seat on that ship. They were just going on with life as normal – eating and drinking and partying.
- Noah is preaching to the people (2 Peter 2:5) and yet everyone is thinking he's a nut job (they haven't seen rain up until this point).
- The people had no idea what was coming until the flood happened and ***took them all away***.

Jesus uses this example to show that despite there being many warning signs during the tribulation, many will ignore them and just keep going on in the state they're in – right to their own judgment.

**24:40-41 - *Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.***

This passage has some strong rapture language. In fact, a popular song back in the Jesus People days was written by Larry Norman based on this passage:

“A man and wife asleep in bed. She hears a noise and turns her head, he's gone.

I wish we'd all been ready.

Two men walking up a hill. One disappears and one's left standing still.

I wish we'd all been ready.

There's no time to change your mind, the Son has come and you've been left behind.”

And though it's fun to sing songs about the Rapture, is this passage dealing with that?

The word used for **took** is interesting. In vs. 39 the Greek word *airo* is used, but in vs. 40+41 it's the Greek word *paralambano*.

*Airo* is what's used in **John 15:2**, “*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*”

*Paralambano* is used in **John 14:3**, “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*”

- However, these words are not always used consistently in Scripture in this way.
- The context must always give the understanding for the use of that word.
- And the context is Jesus showing how there's going to be a judgment coming and some are going to be taken away into judgment (just as in Noah's day).

**24:42-44 - *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.***

I think it's God's heart that every generation lives with an expectancy of the Lord's return at any time. The soon return of the Lord has been preached for centuries, and because of that, people have become calloused or disillusioned. They don't want to hear talk about prophecy or the end days.

But I wouldn't want to live any other way than to wake up each day thinking, this may be the day!! You see, God's heart is for us to be keeping watch. When we're living ready to meet the Lord, we live pure and holy, the very things He's called us too.

- There is no waste when we live life with an expectancy of Jesus' return.

#### 4. The Challenge of the Times – 24:45-51

**24:45-51 - “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. <sup>47</sup> Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. <sup>48</sup> But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, <sup>50</sup> 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, <sup>51</sup> and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

This parable illustrates two attitudes to the Lord's return and the two outcomes from those attitudes.

We see first of all the faithful servant who has continued to do what was required of him even while the master was away. When the master returns and finds that servant carrying out his duties with faithfulness, he will be rewarded with greater responsibility.

The other servant however has a wrong attitude. He thinks his master is delaying his return. This makes this evil servant think he can just take it easy and mistreat his fellow servants. He begins to party it up and thinks he can just do what he wants since his master isn't around.

But the master will return at a time this wicked servant is not expecting him. This servant will face sharp judgment for his actions and attitudes.

What servant are you most resembling? Are you living with an expectation and excitement for the Lord's return?



“There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and ruin men and women. The first said: ‘I will tell them there is no God.’ Satan said: ‘That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God.’ The second said: ‘I will tell them there is no hell.’ Satan answered: ‘You will deceive no one that way; they know even now that there is a hell for sin.’ The third said: ‘I will tell them there is no hurry.’ ‘Go,’ said Satan, ‘and you will ruin them by the thousand.’ The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. The most dangerous day of our lives is when we learn that there is such a word as *tomorrow*. There are things which must not be put off, for none of us knows if for us tomorrow will ever come.”<sup>3</sup>

We’re told over and over to watch and be ready. Is that true for you today?

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Are you living with an understanding that Jesus can come at any time? If so, how is that affecting the way you’re living today?
2. What should being ‘watchful’ look like in the life of a Christian today?

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 370). Saint Andrew Press.