

Session 3

May 8, 2022

WATCH FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

Matthew 24:23-31

The Old Testament prophets spoke of the *Day of the Lord*, a time of reckoning and judgment that signaled what the disciples here called “the end of the age.” Forewarned by Jesus (and no doubt intensified by the events of the week leading to Passover), the disciples asked the Lord, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” While the emphasis of Scripture is always on being prepared for that day, Jesus nevertheless revealed the major events that surrounded His coming. In the focal passage, Jesus points out three additional signs to watch for.

Deception (vv. 23-28). The Bible has always warned of false prophets and false teachers, especially in the End Times (see Matt. 7:15; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1; et al.). Here, Jesus is speaking not of false teachers per se, but rather of false *Messiahs*; those who will claim to be divine. With the Great Tribulation in full force, the people will be anxious to find their deliverance, and there will be a great proliferation of imposters. Moreover, these charlatans will attract unprecedented acceptance by performing unprecedented signs and wonders. So great will be their wonders, that even true believers will be tempted to follow them (v. 24). Verse 25 is emphatic: I have given you fair warning...do not believe them! With so many false claims of Christ's return (v. 26), how are true Christ-followers supposed to know the real return is happening? It will be in the *manner* of His return. Jesus used the metaphor of lightning to explain it. His return will not be demonstrated by a barrage of miracles, or by His lingering in the desert, or hiding inside a room. Rather, like a flash of lightning, He will come quickly, powerfully, publicly, and visibly. At His ascension, the angels told the disciples, “This (same) Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11). And Revelation 1:7 declares, “Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him....” Verse 28 is generally considered to be a proverb (or *saying*) in that day. The statement is clear, but its application is not. Taken at face value, the saying likely means, “You'll know it when it happens because the evidence will be unmistakable.” For reflection: *What other innuendos might Christ be inferring by the use of the “vulture” saying in verse 28?*

Reaction (v. 29). While the Lord Himself will not return performing signs and wonders, the event itself will be replete with signs. Just as creation reacted to Christ's resurrection (see Matt. 28:2) so it will react to His return. Verse 29 refers specifically to the time immediately following the seven years of tribulation and just before the coming of the Lord. Many of these same cosmic calamities were foretold by the Old Testament prophets in relation to the oft mentioned *Day of the Lord* (see Is. 13:6-16; 34:4; Joel 2:10; Hag. 2:6. See also Rev. 6:12-14). We cannot begin to imagine the cosmic consequences of these events, much less the ramifications for those alive on planet Earth when all this takes place. For reflection: *What do you think will be happening on earth as a result of these cosmic calamities? What do you think peoples' reaction will be to them?*

Reception (vv. 30-31). This chapter began with the disciples asking a question. Here, Jesus gives the answer. While some have grappled with what spectacular sign might accompany Him (v. 30), it seems the appearance of Christ Himself *is* the sign itself. At this event everything will change. The end of the age will have arrived in a display of divine power and glory. And as in every case when Christ appears, division immediately takes place. The *peoples of the earth* are the unbelievers, and they will *mourn* (v. 30). The idea is more emphatic than it sounds. The verb indicates the feeling of being cut off and is associated with the beating of the chest and great anguish (see also Zech. 12:10ff). *His elect*, on the other hand, are the saved, who His angels will gather to Him from the four corners of the globe. Though unstated, the clear implication is that the lost will be gathered for damnation and the elect for Glory. For reflection: *Why do you think Jesus revealed all of these details to His disciples? What should our attitude be as we consider them?*