

The True Nature of Christ's Second Coming **Matthew 24:23-31**

Let's open our Bibles please to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 24. We're going to be reading together verses 1 to 31. The particular subject of our study today is going to be verses 23 to 31, but in order to understand verses 23 to 31, we're going to read from the beginning of the chapter.

“¹ And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. ² And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

“³ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? ⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. ⁵ For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. ⁶ And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of sorrows.

“⁹ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. ¹³ But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

¹⁵ When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) ¹⁶ then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: ¹⁷ let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: ¹⁸ neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. ¹⁹ And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! ²⁰ But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: ²¹ for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

And now our passage for today: “²³ Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ²⁴ For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. ²⁵ Behold, I have told you before. ²⁶ Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. ²⁷ For as the lightning cometh out of the

east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ²⁸ For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

“²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: ³⁰ and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

In our previous studies of Matthew chapter 24, we have seen that Jesus has predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and this of course provoked three questions from the disciples. The questions were: number 1, When will the temple be destroyed; number 2, What will be the sign of your coming; and number 3, What will be the sign of the end of the world? And all those questions were in verse 3.

Now we saw in our previous studies that Jesus answered the last question first: What will be the sign of the end of the world? And so in verses 4 to 14, Jesus told His disciples that there would be a long period of great religious deception, great political turmoil, and great natural disasters. These would be the norm for a long period of time, and none of these things were signs of the end of the world. And this was all described in verses 4 to 8.

But He then told His disciples that there would be a much shorter period in the end time, in which Satan would be loosed. This loosing of Satan would begin the great tribulation, and would cause several events to occur and to be set into motion. Antichrist would arise and deceive many through his false prophets. This would result in a great apostasy from the Christian faith by those who claimed to be Christians, but who were really not. They would then begin to hate and betray the faithful Christians, and would lose any love they ever had for them.

The Antichrist will raise up a coordinated, unified, transnational program of persecution and murder of the faithful believers, who will still continue to preach the gospel until they are martyred or until Jesus comes. But when it seems all the believers are going to be wiped off the face of the earth by the Antichrist and this transnational, coordinated persecution of the believers, then the end comes. And all of this is spoken of in verses 9 to 14.

So from verses 4 to 14, we have the span of time from the time of Jesus until the end of the world. Jesus has set forth the signs of the end of the world in verses 4 to 14. He said, These things *are not* the signs; these other things *are* the signs. The things of verses 4 to 8 are not the signs. The things of verses 9 to 14 are the signs.

Then last week, we looked at verses 15 to 22, and in verses 15 to 22, Jesus answers the first question that was asked back in verse 3, and that was, When will the temple be destroyed? And He tells them in verses 15 to 22 that the sign they are to look for as to when the temple is going

to be destroyed is when the abomination of desolation comes and stands in the holy place; that is, when ungodly men come to defile the temple. That is the sign as to when the temple will be leveled to the ground.

We saw that this prophetic statement of Jesus in verse 15 about the coming abomination of desolation standing in the temple had a two-fold application. We saw that one application of what was stated in verse 15 was to the desecration of the temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman legions. But we saw that the second application of Matthew 24 in verse 15 was to the desecration of the New Covenant temple, which is the church, by the Antichrist in the end times. The Antichrist is the abomination of desolation that shall stand in the church, claiming to be God and demanding to be worshipped, and thus defiling it.

So in verses 15 to 22, we have a description both of the events of 70 A.D., *and also* the events of the end times. And the events of 70 A.D. simply foreshadow the events of the end times. So when the Antichrist sits as the head of the Christian church around the world, proclaiming himself to be God and demanding to be worshipped as God, as Second Thessalonians 2:4 says, he will then institute the severest persecution the world has ever known against the Christians who refuse to give him that worship that he demands. If that persecution that the Antichrist perpetrates against the true believers were allowed to go on for very long, all of God's elect all over the whole world would be completely killed. But God will not allow that, and will cut off that persecution by the second coming of Jesus Christ.

And that leads us now to our passage today in verses 23 to 31. Here in this section of verses 23 to 31, Jesus addresses and answers the second question the disciples ask in verse 3, which is, What will be the sign of thy coming? In verses 4 to 14, He answered the question, What will be the sign of the end of the world? In verses 15 to 22, He answered the question, What will be the sign of the leveling of the temple? And now in verses 23 to 31, He's going to answer the question, What will be the sign of your second coming?

Now in verses 23 to 31, Jesus answers this second question, What will be the sign of thy coming, and that is going to be the subject of our study today, and so we want to consider it together. In the first place then this morning, let us consider together the warning against false understandings regarding the second coming.

Now these warnings that Jesus gives against *false* understandings regarding the second coming are found in verses 23 to 28. Notice the warnings, verse 23: “²³ Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ²⁴ For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. ²⁵ Behold, I have told you” ahead of time, is the idea. “²⁶ Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. ²⁷ For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ²⁸ For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” And Jesus says, Let no man deceive you. So clearly, He's

talking about deceptions regarding the second coming that are going to be set forth, and He's warning the disciples against those deceptions.

We looked at the language of verses 21 and 22 last time. Remember verse 21 and 22: “²¹ for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

Now verses 21 and 22, we saw last time, spoke of a horrific and an unprecedented persecution and killing of Christians, at a level and to a degree the world has never seen before, since the day of creation. And that's why it's called “the *great* tribulation,” because it's greater than any tribulation that believers have ever experienced prior to this time.

This great persecution against believers will be perpetrated by the Antichrist, the one who is the abomination of desolation, standing at the head of the professing formal Christian church, who will be coordinating the united nations of the whole world in a transnational assault against the Christians. This assault against the Christians coordinated by the Antichrist will be so well-coordinated, so well-unified, and so comprehensive that verse 22 says that if it were allowed to go on very long, then no saved person—that is, none of God's elect—would be saved alive.

But that effort to kill all the Christians will be cut off and cut short by the second coming of Christ, so that Antichrist does not achieve his goal of total eradication of true Christians from off the face of the earth. We saw this in Revelation chapter 20. So turn please with me for a moment to Revelation chapter 20. You'll notice at the end of this long period of protection when Satan is bound, the section described in Matthew 24, verses 4 to 8, Satan is then loosed.

In verse 7 of Revelation 20, “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁸ and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and [surrounded] the camp of the saints.” For what purpose? Well, it wasn't to share lunch with them, it was to kill them, okay? They're going to battle, all right?

But notice what happens, verse 9: “And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” That's the cutting short that Matthew 24, verse 22, is talking about. Matthew 24:22: “Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened,” or ended, cut off. And what's going to cut them off? Well, this fire that comes down out of heaven's going to destroy Antichrist and all of his followers. Now what is this fire? Well, it's Christ returning in time to prevent such eradication of all the believers from the earth. Notice verse 9 of Revelation 20: “and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

Now turn to Second Thessalonians 1. In Second Thessalonians 1, notice verses 7 and 8: “⁷ and to you who are troubled rest with us,” now notice, “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels”—here it is—“⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s the fire of Revelation 20 and verse 9. Second Thessalonians 1, verse 9 says, “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”—that’s Revelation 20 and verse 10, when it says they’ll all be cast into the lake of fire.

Notice also Second Thessalonians 2 and verse 8: “And then shall that Wicked [One] be revealed,” that’s the Antichrist, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy”—notice—“with the brightness of his coming.” So we have this language of brightness and fire and Christ coming in all of His glory, and our text in Matthew does as well.

So the great tribulation of verse 21 in Matthew 24, and then the cutting short of it in Matthew 24 and verse 22, is brought to pass by the second coming of Christ bringing His flaming fire that’s going to just burn up these people who have surrounded the believers in order to finish the slaughter.

Now turn back to Matthew 24, please. I want you to notice verses 29 to 31. It says, “²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days.” Tribulation of what days? The tribulation of verse 21 and 22. Verse 21: for then shall be great tribulation, and those days will be cut short. How will they be cut short? Verse 29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: ³⁰ and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

So immediately at the end of the tribulation, when the time comes to cut it short, Jesus is going to return. Now the believers in that day who are going through this great tribulation are going to understand the sequence of events that we’re talking about. They will know they are in the great tribulation, because they will see the Antichrist. They will see and experience the great apostasy of those that they thought were their brethren. And they will experience the coordinated transnational persecution of Christians over the whole world from all nations.

Therefore, they will be looking for and expecting the second coming. The signs of the second coming will all be present for those that are in the great tribulation, and therefore they will know that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Now the second coming of Christ is not imminent today. We’re not in the great tribulation. Antichrist hasn’t been revealed. The great apostasy hasn’t happened. The coordinated worldwide persecution of Christians among all nations hasn’t occurred. So guess what? Jesus isn’t coming yet. But when all those things happen, all those signs occur, then they’ll know—He’s coming! He could be here any second.

However, there is a great danger at that point in time, and that is that the false prophets will try to lead them into believing that someone other than Christ is in fact Christ, and lead them to believe that these false Christs have already returned, when in fact the true Christ has not yet returned. And that's our passage under this heading in verses 23 to 28.

Notice verse 23: "*Then...*" Here you are. You're in the great tribulation, and it looks like all the Christians are going to get wiped off the face of the earth. Then people are going to show up and say, Oh, Jesus has come back! Verse 23: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not." So during the great tribulation, there will be those who say Christ has recently returned, His return is secret, and He's located in this or that place. And Jesus says, Don't believe those deceivers.

Notice verse 24: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." And so some of these deceivers will claim to be Christ, some of them will claim to be prophets of these false Christs, and these false Christs and these false prophets will be able to do tremendous signs and wonders—amazing miracles done by the power of Satan to attempt to validate their claims. So they will be like Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus chapter 7 and 8, who were able to do some pretty amazing miracles to try to deceive Pharaoh that they were the true prophets of the true God, rather than Moses.

So these amazing miracles and signs and wonders done by these false Christs and these false prophets will be so powerful, and they will be so persuasive, and they will be so convincing, that they would deceive even the elect, if that were possible. But it isn't. Verse 24: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, *if* it were possible," and the clear implication is that it isn't possible that they could deceive even the elect, who have continued to remain faithful, and have not yet gone after Antichrist.

But when somebody says that Jesus Christ *has* come back, and they're in the midst of tribulation, they're going to want to believe it, because they are getting hammered so hard that they are waiting for His coming, and when somebody says, Hey, He's here, they're going to go, Whew!, and want to run. But Jesus said, Nope, that is a false Christ, that is a false understanding of the nature of the second coming and the identity of myself when I do come.

And so Philippians 1:6 says, We are "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in [us] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." And therefore, Jesus isn't going to lose any of His disciples to the deception of these false prophets. I mean, these false prophets are going to be good. They're going to be able to do incredible miracles—*real* ones—just like Pharaoh's magicians did real ones by the power of Satan. And Jesus says, They're going to be so good, and so real, and so convincing, that if it were possible, the elect will be deceived. But they will not. And what an incredible comfort that is to us, to know that God will preserve us.

Listen to me—Satan loses his people to Christ, but Christ never loses any of His people to Satan. It says, And when He puts forth his own sheep, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (John 10, verses 4 to 5, and 27 to 29).

So it's not possible that any saved person would ever be deceived into following a false Christ, irrespective of the degree of persuasiveness of the messenger, because Jesus isn't going to let him go, and we're not going to hear that voice, because it doesn't sound like the voice of Jesus.

True Christians always listen to the voice of scripture, over the voice of signs and wonders.

Now Matthew 24, verse 25: "Behold, I have told you before [ahead of time]." Jesus warns of these false prophets and these false Christs ahead of time so that disciples would be forewarned. And Jesus was always doing this. In John 13 and in verse 19, Jesus says, "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he." He's telling them ahead of time about Judas's betrayal. And in John 14 and in verse 29, Jesus says, "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." And in John 16 and verse 4, He says, "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."

Jesus is saying, Look guys, this is what the future holds. I don't want you to be deceived. So when it happens, you'll remember that I forewarned you, I told you this was the way it was going to be, and when you realize that, then you'll believe that I really am the true Messiah. Your faith will be re-strengthened.

So when those who are going through the great tribulation are just getting hammered by Antichrist and his people, and these false prophets are showing up, pointing to these false Christs and doing these miracles, they're going to say, You know what? Jesus warned us about this. We're not going for this. And the fact that Jesus warned us about this, and this is exactly the way it is going to occur, just reaffirms our faith in Him even more.

And so instead of these false prophets actually pulling these people away from Christ, they actually make them believe in Christ even more. And that's why we don't have to worry about false prophets, even today. They never draw away true believers. It's not possible to deceive them. All it does is strengthen the real believers to investigate their faith a little more and become even more solidified in it. So the wicked only drive the righteous closer to Christ. That's why they're on the losing team.

So when the deception arises, the disciples going through the great tribulation are forewarned and forearmed, and therefore they will not be seduced. Notice verse 26: "Wherefore if they shall

say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.” Jesus will not be found, either in some desert wilderness, nor will He be hidden in some room in an inner city somewhere; rather, verse 27 says, “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Jesus tells them in verse 27, Not only will you not have to go somewhere to seek Christ, Christ will come in such a fashion that you can’t possibly avoid Him. You don’t need to go find Him, He’ll find you.

In Revelation 1 and verse 7, it says, “Every eye shall see him.” Now if you’ve ever been in a lightning storm, I don’t care if you have your eyes closed, when that thing goes off, it shines right through your eyelids. You can’t not see it, even if you want to not see it. And when it goes off and it flashes across the sky, everyone under that sky sees it. No one is going, Oh, you know, I didn’t see that. Everybody says, Oh, look at the lightning!

That’s how Jesus is going to come. Jesus is going to come in such a dramatic fashion that every single person, without exception, will know this is Jesus, and He has come. I’m going to talk about the nature of His coming in a minute under our second major point, but notice verse 28: “For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the”—and it says “eagles,” but we know it’s vultures, though eagles eat carrion too—“there will the eagles be gathered together.”

So just as vultures gather to consume the dead and corrupt animals, so God’s wrath is going to fall upon this spiritually dead and corrupt world. And God’s wrath, personified by these vultures, is going to come upon this spiritually dead and corrupt world and just consume it and destroy it.

Now there’s an expanded description of that event in verse 28, in Revelation 19. Turn there, please—Revelation 19, verse 11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” So we’ve got the second coming of Jesus here, right?

And it gives a bunch of descriptions of His second coming as we go down. But notice verse 17: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the”—remember—“fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; ¹⁸ that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. ¹⁹ And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.” They’re all gathered together against the Christians, Jesus comes back, they think they’re going to fight with Jesus. ²⁰ And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”—that’s Revelation 20 and verse 10—²¹ And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

So that's an extended description of Matthew 24:28. When Jesus comes back, there's going to be this huge slaughter, He's going to destroy them with fire, and whether these are literal birds or not, they are going to devour the wicked. And the idea here is that the wrath of God is going to fall on this spiritually dead carcass of this world. Remember how, when the iniquity of the Amorites was finally full, God sent Israel to come in and wipe them out? When the iniquity of this world finally becomes full by their final worldwide persecution of Christians, God's going to come and wipe them out.

That brings us to our second major point. Having seen the warning against false understandings regarding the second coming, notice secondly the declaration of the true nature of the second coming. Now Jesus just disabused His disciples of all the false notions of the second coming, and now He talks about the true nature of the second coming. He does that in verses 29 to 31. Notice verse 29a: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" Jesus is coming back.

So the timing of the second coming is clear. It follows immediately upon the termination of the great tribulation, which God finally cuts off and cuts short. And so when the earth is drenched with the blood of the saints in the most terrible tribulation and persecution of all time, then Christ will come. Notice He doesn't give us a date, He give us a sign. Now we don't know when that sign's going to happen, but when it does, then you know that it's very, very near. And we'll see that as we study in the future verses 32 and following.

Now notice what's going to attend the second coming, verse 29. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days"—now notice—the stellar heavens are going to be dismantled and destroyed. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

So here we are, it's time for Jesus to come back, and what starts happening is the universe starts literally, physically falling apart. The sun goes out, moon goes out, stars start just collapsing and falling. All the constellations—aren't there anymore. This is clearly spoken of in Second Peter chapter 3. Turn there please with me. Second Peter chapter 3, verses 3 to 13. He says:

³ knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, Where is the promise of his coming,?"—that is, the coming of Christ—"for since the fathers fell asleep,"—the fathers, of course, are the apostles—"all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"—that is, nothing's changed—" ⁵ For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: ⁶ whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."

In other words, there's been a worldwide judgment before. It used to be that the land stood out of the water, and the water stayed in the oceans, right? But then you remember, there was a

worldwide catastrophe. It was called the Flood. The whole world overflowed with water. So there is a precedent for the world being destroyed a second time, because the world was destroyed the first time by the Flood. It wasn't destroyed in the sense it was annihilated, but in the sense it was completely ruined, and then reemerged after the Flood in a different form than it had before—geographically, climatically, and a whole bunch of other ways.

Verse 6: “whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: ⁷ but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto”—now it's not going to be a flood, but it's going to be—“fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” So before it was water, now it's going to be fire.

Verse 8: “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” In other words, this millennial period is relative—it's not absolute. It's a fixed period, but it can't be measured literally. Verse 8 of Second Peter 3 is the other place the Millennium is spoken of.

Verse 9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;”—regarding His coming back—“but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any” of us; that is, any of us elect “should perish, but that all [of us] should come to repentance.” In other words, why hasn't Jesus come back for 2,000 years? He's saving His elect. It's not that He's slack concerning His promise about coming back. We're in this period of Matthew 24, verses 4 to 8, in which He's saving His elect. He's got Satan bound. The gospel is spreading through the world.

Verse 10: “But the day of the Lord will come”—it will come “as a thief in the night.” Now it will come as thief in the night to the unsaved, but not to us. We'll know when it's coming. For them, they won't know. The reason why we'll know is because we know the signs. And so it says in First Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 1 to 4, that day will not overtake you as a thief. He says it will overtake the world as a thief, but it won't overtake you that way. You'll know. And we'll see that as we go through Matthew 24, okay? We'll get there.

So He says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night [to the wicked]; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise,”—now here's our verse, Matthew 24:29, okay—“in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” Remember, Jesus is coming back with flaming fire to take vengeance.

“¹¹ Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved,”—and that dissolution is described in Matthew 24:29—“what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, ¹² looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

So when Jesus comes back, He's going to dismantle the stellar heavens, He's going to burn up the earth, and then He's going to recreate them, and there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth. It's all going to happen at the second coming. There's no place for some thousand-year period after the second coming. When the second coming occurs, everything's wrecked, everything's rebuilt, and we're in the eternal state of the new heavens and the new earth. And when is the thousand years spoken of? When the saving period is going on. A thousand years is as a day, and a day as a thousand years—when is that spoken of? It's spoken of *before* the day of the Lord, the time period during which God is patiently putting up with the wickedness of the world, in order to save His elect.

So turn back to Matthew 24. In Matthew 24, we saw in verse 29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:”—that's what's described in Second Peter chapter 3, verses 3 to 13 that we just finished looking at. Now notice the second thing that's going to happen, verse 30: “then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Now the sign of the Son of man in heaven is simply the brilliant self-manifestation of Christ Himself in His unveiled glory, coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, as is described in Revelation chapter 19 and other passages as well. You know, when Jesus was here, His glory was veiled. Remember when He was on the Mount of Transfiguration? Remember what He looked like? His face shone as the sun! The disciples had to fall on their faces, right? It was a preview of the second coming. The Mount of Transfiguration is a preview of the second coming and of the kingdom. Who was there? Moses and Elijah: Moses picturing those who died while they were on earth; Elijah picturing those who were caught up from the earth at the rapture, each representative of the two groups—those who had died in Christ, and those who didn't die in Christ but were caught up in the rapture.

Christ's brilliant self-manifestation in the sky will be the sign He is about to descend to meet His people, who arise to meet Him in the air. All who oppose Christ will see Him like a flash of lightning across the heaven, and knowing what's going to happen to them, will start weeping and wailing. Notice it says in verse 30, “then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn” when “they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Now turn to Revelation chapter 6, and you'll see an expansion on that too. Revelation chapter 6, verses 12 to 17: “¹² And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;”—Does this sound familiar? This is verse 29 of Matthew 24, right? “¹³ and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. ¹⁴ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man,”—

these are all the people who are gathered together to persecute the believers—“hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ¹⁷ for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

That’s the mourning that Matthew 24 and verse 30 is talking about. They’re mourning, right? Verse 30: “then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds.” Revelation 6:12 to 17 describes that mourning. Now verse 31—almost done. “³¹ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

So people wonder, Well, how’s the rapture going to happen? Is, like, anti-gravity going to suddenly happen and people are going to be repelled from the earth, instead of attracted to it? No, that isn’t how it’s going to happen. The angels are going to come and grab you and take you up. That’s how it’s going to happen. And so it is the angels who will come and carry us up to meet the Savior in the air when the trumpet sounds.

The second coming of Christ will not only be seen—this brilliant display in the heavens—it’ll also be heard. There will be this blast of this great trumpet. The sound is like the blast of the military. In the military, when the time came to charge, they would blow the trumpet and then all the troops would charge and enter into battle. And so this trumpet sound is this battle blast of Jesus coming to do His work of conquering and defeating the ungodly world, and Satan, and Antichrist, and their whole crowd.

So when you hear the blast, it’s like the cavalry’s coming. It even says that Jesus is on a white horse, like the cavalry, right? Now, I don’t think He’s going to be on a literal horse, but whatever—you get the picture, right? There’s a lot of metaphor here, okay, and I’m kind of switching back and forth from literal to metaphorical, but you understand what I’m saying. The cavalry’s coming! Jesus is coming! He’s bringing His angels. The world is done. And it’s like you have twenty guys that are being assaulted, and you have 4,000 guys that are assaulting them, and then suddenly, 800,000 show up to help the twenty. And the 4,000 go, Ahhh! We’re done! And that’s what’s going on here.

Now this verse 31—“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”—this is described in three other passages. First Thessalonians 4:13 to 17 is the famous rapture passage. Notice: “¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,”—do you believe that? Do you believe that? Okay. “even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” That’s our brethren who’ve died. They’re already in heaven with Jesus. He’s bringing them back.

“¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord”—we who have lived through that great tribulation shall not go ahead of those who have previously died. “¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:”—there it is, Matthew 24:31—“and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” And this catching up will be done by the angels.

So the trumpet’s going to sound and we’re going to be caught up, and these souls are going to come back from heaven, their bodies are going to rise from the grave, the souls will inhabit the bodies, and then we which are alive and remain will be transformed, and then transformed together will be caught up by the angels to be with Jesus, and accompany Him as He comes in His great cavalry charge to conquer the world.

It’s also spoken of in First Corinthians 15, verses 51 to 54. Notice First Corinthians 15:51. Paul says, “⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep,” that is, we’re not all going to die, but we will all be transformed. Verse 52: “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” notice, “at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

So when is death going to be swallowed up in victory? At the second coming. Right now, death still has the victory over the bodies of the saved, doesn’t it? They’re still rotting in the grave, aren’t they? But that is going to be defeated, and those bodies are going to rise, and victory over death will be fully applied. It’s been fully procured at the cross, but it will be fully applied when Jesus comes back.

Notice Second Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 1: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,”—that’s Matthew 24:30—“and by our gathering together unto him,”—that’s Matthew 24:31. Same sequence: Christ comes back, then we go to meet Him. Now there’s no trumpet in this text, but there’s a trumpet in Matthew 24:31; there’s a trumpet in First Thessalonians 4:13 to 17; and there’s a trumpet in First Corinthians 15:51 to 54.

So clearly, all of these passages are all talking about the same event, and that is that there’s going to be this long period of protection while Satan is bound. In the end times he’s going to be loosed, Antichrist is going to rise, he’s going to gather the nations and all the apostate believers and they are going to go to war against the Christians. And it looks like they’re going to completely wipe them out, but Jesus is going to come back to rescue them and destroy their enemies.

And when He comes back there's going to be this melting of the universe; there is going to be this appearance of Christ in heaven that no one will be able to deny. The people on the earth are going to go, O, no! and go into mourning, and try to hide from the face of the Lamb who's coming back. And then the angels are going to come and they're going to pick up the believers, and Christ with fire is just going to—*phoosh*—smoke them all in flaming fire, taking vengeance. It says they shall be destroyed with fire from heaven, Revelation 20 and verse 9.

The question is, Are you ready? Are you ready to meet Jesus when He comes back? Now, He's coming back at the end of the age, as we've described, but also He's coming back for every person when they die. And they will either meet Him as a Savior, or as a Judge.

And you know, it's imperative for us, if we're real believers, that we be faithful under persecution now, because the persecution you get now, it's like light affliction. It's like just the beginning of sorrows. The real persecution's coming when Satan is loosed and Antichrist appears. Now could that happen in our lifetime? You bet. Satan could be loosed today. Antichrist could show up tomorrow. The great tribulation could start next month. Or, it could be another 2,000 years down the road. I don't know, okay?

But the point is, is that you could be in the great tribulation. You could be alive when Jesus comes. Now some stuff has to happen before that's a possibility, but it could happen in your lifetime. Do you understand? Are you ready? Are you enduring persecution now, instead of compromising, so that when the real persecution comes, you're not going to fall away then? You know, if you can't stand the little bit of heat we're getting now, how are you going to stand a whole bunch of heat we're going to get then?

So stand firm for Christ now. When you're persecuted now, don't let it bow you, don't let it bend you, don't let it defeat you, don't let it discourage you, don't give up and quit in the midst of it. Stand up, press forward, fight on. As Paul says to Timothy, "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," because the hardness we have now isn't anything compared to what it's going to be.

But the good news is that when that real hardness comes, when the great tribulation does occur, God will be there to give us grace and strength to go through it. And not one of us will be lost in it, if we're truly saved people. And you know how to find out who the really saved people are? Just put them under severe persecution and you find out real quick who's going to turn back and turn away, and who's going to lay down their life for Him, who laid down His life for them.

So let's understand these things, let's prepare our hearts for them, so that when they occur and *if* they occur in our lifetimes, we will be ready. So when it comes, it's going to unfold pretty fast. I don't know how long it's going to last—certainly not more than a generation. Jesus says the generation that sees these signs of the great tribulation—that generation will not pass before Jesus comes back. So whether it's going to be a few years, or whether it's going to be 20 years, I don't know. But it will certainly be less than a generation, from start to finish. And a generation

in the Bible is 40 years. Whether it lasts that long, I don't know. Jesus says He's going to cut it short. I hope He cuts it real short, but that's up to Him. Let's pray together.

Father, thank you so much for your prophetic word and the truth it contains. Thank you for the clarity, that if we just take it as it comes, it unfolds quite nicely and quite clearly. Lord, help us not to be confused by those who present false views of the sequence of events and the nature of the events, especially the sensationalists that are trying to make huge amounts of money off of their twisted prophetic interpretations.

Lord, I just ask that we would be faithful Christians, and that we would stand firm and faithful in our persecutions now, and if you will, in the persecutions that shall come. Thank you that Jesus despised the shame and endured the cross. Help us, then, to be looking to Him. In Christ's name we ask it. Amen.