

# End Time Questions and Apocalyptic Answers

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 November 2019

Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 24, verses 1-35, passage which is headed in my Bible anyway, Signs of the End of the Age.

Evangelical Christians tend to disagree about two things, how this world began and how this world will end.

Over the years, Christian teachers, all of whom are basing their views upon their own reading of the Bible, have suggested many different ways in which this present age shall come to an end.

They all agree that Jesus shall return in the glory of his Father, but when this shall happen and under what circumstances, they disagree.

You may have heard labels like premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. You may also be aware of the left-behind franchise of books and a movie where a particular understanding of the last days is described.

[ 1 : 18 ] And frankly, it's all very confusing, leading many Christians, myself included, into what is called panmillennialism, which you'll know means it will all pan out in the end.

Many of these different views, especially that which is known as premillennialism, are derived from Jesus' words here in Matthew 24, where the disciples ask him, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

And Christians have used Jesus' response to point to a set of events which are signs of his imminent return. Great earthquakes and raptures, wars and rumors of wars, a new temple being built in Jerusalem, and so on.

However, without wishing to take any sides at all, it seems to me that in Matthew 24, Jesus is not filling out a calendar of events.

As much as he's calling his people to live in the awareness that having risen again from the dead, he shall, at some future point known only to his father, return in glory.

[ 2 : 37 ] Rather than engage in speculation, I want to remind you all that Matthew wrote this gospel to first century Christian Jews who were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Christ.

Their Jewish countrymen were deeply opposed to them and called them the heretics, the deceived. Well, it's to them and to us, Jesus directs these words in Matthew 24, his so-called Olivet Discourse, because it was delivered from the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple Mount of Jerusalem.

And again, rather than filling out a calendar of events, Matthew 24, verses 1 through 35, Jesus is calling his suffering people to four activities.

Four activities, very briefly. First of all, perseverance. He's calling them to persevere. As we'll go through this passage, we're going to be distressed by the repeated references to Christians who will suffer on account of the name of Christ, like Dusty Miller.

But Jesus' theme is encapsulated in verse 13. He who stands firm to the end will be saved. Persevere.

[ 3 : 58 ] Keep going. Stand firm, however painful these last days may be. Don't give up your profession of faith in Christ on account either of persecution or pleasure.

Persevere. Second, patience. Patience. In Matthew 24, Jesus does not, and I repeat, does not fill in a calendar of events which indicate his imminent coming.

Yes, he does set down conditions which must be fulfilled before he comes again. For example, in verse 14, we learn that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

But I hope we'll see that all these conditions in Matthew 24 were fulfilled before the end of the apostolic age.

Meaning that Jesus could come at any time. And he's calling us to be patient and not give up just because he's not returning according to our timescales.

[ 5 : 05 ] He will come again. Don't be impatient. And drain all your hope away. Third, Jesus talks of prospect.

Prospect. The outlook for many of the first century Christians to whom Matthew was writing looked very bleak. They were faced with the opposition of their own countrymen combined with the iron fist of the Roman Empire.

They looked around them and there was nothing good for them to see. Well, Matthew 24 calls them to look ahead. To raise their eyes upward. For as we read in verse 30, At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the nations of the earth will mourn.

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. All Christians everywhere at all times must look ahead.

Must raise their eyes heavenward. For at any time Christ may return in power and with great glory. What hope that brings.

[ 6 : 15 ] What hope that brings. And then fourth, permanence. Permanence. Permanence. It's all very well for Jesus to talk the way he does.

But given that these first century Jewish Christians and we also are staking our lives upon the truth of what Jesus says, we need more assurance. And that's why in verse 35 Jesus says, heaven and earth may pass away but my words never will.

The whole world may shake to its very foundation. Empires will rise and fall. The sun may be darkened by smoke blowing from the fires of burning cities.

But the words of Jesus will stand sure. They are more trustworthy than the great temple of Jerusalem which in some 40 years time from Jesus speaking these words will be destroyed.

More permanent than the great buildings of Egypt and Babylon and Rome. All Christians everywhere must not look to the world around them for certainty as to what's going to happen in the future.

[ 7 : 24 ] They must trust the permanence of the words of Jesus. For even though the heavens and the earth may pass away, they never will. Now we're going to come back to these applications at the end of the sermon today and run over them one more time.

But I wanted to give them to you right at the beginning of the sermon. So that as we go through this rather complicated passage together, you'll be able to see the wood for the trees. And not become over confused by what Jesus says and means.

Remember these four applications. Perseverance, patience, prospect, permanence. Okay, so having laid the groundwork for how we are to apply Matthew 24, 1 through 35.

In its original first century Christian setting. And also for us today. I want us now to explore this passage under two headings. Three questions.

Three answers. Please keep your Bibles open in front of you today. Because if you want to understand what Jesus is saying in this passage. You're going to have to follow me closely.

[ 8 : 35 ] First of all, three questions. Three questions. The chapter begins with Jesus leaving the temple. And as he does so, saying of that temple, I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left in another.

Every one will be thrown down. From there Jesus retires to the Mount of Olives. A hill just outside Jerusalem. Overlooking the city and especially the temple.

And the disciples come to him privately with a question. Tell us, when will this happen? What will be the sound of your coming and of the end of the age?

The disciples ask him a question. Assuming that the destruction of the temple will coincide with both the end of the age and the second coming of the Lord.

It's not unlike them to misunderstand Jesus' teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God. What they suppose is one question.

[ 9 : 42 ] Is actually three questions. Read their question carefully. Their first question is, when will this happen?

This to which they are referring is what Jesus has spoken about in verse 2. The destruction of the temple where not one stone will be left upon another and the temple will be destroyed.

That's one question. A question Jesus deals with in verses 15 through 21. As we shall see the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Remember, the disciples thought that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would coincide with the second coming of Jesus.

They were confused, but Jesus was not. Their second question, which they mistakenly thought was closely linked with the first was, what will be the sign of your coming?

What will be the sign of your coming? That's an easier question to understand. Because all the way through the Gospels and the Old Testament, God has prophesied the second coming of his Messiah. God has prophesied the second coming of his Messiah.

[10:49] God has prophesied the second coming of his Messiah. He is not prophesied the second coming of his Messiah. But in glory. To judge the living and the dead. And Jesus answers this question, as we'll see in verses 29 through 31.

And points to a time in the future. When there shall be cataclysmic events. And he shall appear. Riding upon the clouds of heaven.

With great power. And great glory. But for Jesus, the time of his second coming does not coincide with the destruction of the temple.

They are two separate events altogether, even though the disciples don't understand this at the time. Their third question, which again they thought closely corresponded to the previous two, was, what will be the sign of the end of the age?

What will be the sign of the end of the age? Now it's easy for us to think that this is the same question as before, that for Jesus the end of the age is the time of his second coming, that it's a point in time when he shall return.

[12:06] But actually for Jesus, the end of the age is not a point in time. It is a line that stretches from his resurrection and his ascension into heaven right until the day of his second coming.

In other words, these first century Jewish Christians and us have this in common. We are both living in the end of the age.

And Jesus will go on to answer this question in verses 4 through 14, 22 through 28, and 32 through 35. Now I know this all sounds very complicated.

It really does. And this took me ages to study for and write this sermon today. But unless we realize that although the disciples thought they were asking one question, in reality they were asking three questions, we're going to get mixed up about what events Jesus is referring to in Matthew 24.

And we're going to end up in all kinds of speculations and find ourselves scrambling about in dispensational understandings of raptures and thousand year reigns and new temples.

[13:20] Remember, Jesus' primary message resolves down into these four applications, perseverance, patience, prospect, and permanence.

If you miss these, you miss the meaning of the passage and these three questions. When will the temple be destroyed? What will be the sign of your coming?

And what will it be like in the end of the ages to help us to reach our goal? There's not one question here. There's three questions here.

It's just the disciples are a bit confused. And we're so thankful that even though they were confused, and sometimes were confused, Jesus sees right into the heart of the matter and reminds us of these four things which we are to have in the forefront of our minds as we think about what we call eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, perseverance, patience, prospect, and permanence. Three questions. Now, three answers. Three answers. Having established that the disciples unknowingly ask three questions, not one, Jesus proceeds to present them with three answers.

[14:41] To the question of the temple's destruction, Jesus talks of an end-time catastrophe in verses 15 through 21. To the question of his return in glory, Jesus talks of an end-time coming in verses 29 through 31.

And to the question of the end of the age, Jesus talks of end-time conditions in verses 4 through 14, 22 through 28, and 32 through 35.

First of all, then, we have the end-time catastrophe. Verses 15 through 21. In these verses, Jesus is not describing the construction and destruction of a future temple in Jerusalem, nor is he advocating what has been called the rapture.

Rather, he is answering the disciples' question regarding the destruction of the temple of his day.

That temple of which he said in verse 2, not one stone here will be left in another, every one will be thrown down.

Now, we know from historical record that in 67 AD, in response to a rising Jewish nationalism, the Roman legions under the future emperor Vespasian besieged Jerusalem.

[16:06] The conditions in Jerusalem over the course of that three-year siege became inhuman. Jesus spoke the truth when in verse 21, he said, For at that time there will be great affliction.

Things got so bad for the people of Jerusalem during that siege that according to the Jewish historian Josephus, parents resorted to killing and eating their own children.

And then in 70 AD, the Roman legions broke through Jerusalem's walls. It's estimated they slaughtered 200,000 of Jerusalem's people.

A contemporary writer records that the streets ran with blood. The Romans sacked the city. They burned the temple to the ground. All that's left of that temple is the western wall.

No wonder Jesus spoke so passionately to those in Judea, urging them to flee to the mountains.

This abomination of desolation in verse 15, a reference to an Old Testament event, is in all likelihood pointing to the standards of the Roman legions, massed around the city of Jerusalem.

[17:31] When the people of the city of Jerusalem see the standards of the legions of Rome surrounding them, they should flee from the city.

In fact, most of the Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem fled to the east as the siege began to a region called Perea. And they have the Lord to thank for their warning, for if they'd stayed, they would have been massacred.

So here we have in Matthew 24, verses 15 through 21, with Jesus prophesying the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in AD 70, the temple being burned with fire, not one stone being left on another.

Now, bear in mind, this destruction had not yet happened when the first readers of Matthew 24 received this warning. Matthew wrote this letter probably in the early 60s AD. These first century Jewish Christians were being taunted by their countrymen to return to the sacrificial, political, and religious system of Judaism centered as it was in the temple in Jerusalem.

In Matthew 24, Jesus is challenging these Christians. Why would you want to return to something that's doomed to destruction?

[18:48] The end time catastrophe prophesied by Jesus in these verses reinforces the first century Jewish Christians' need and our need also for perseverance, for patience, for prospect, and for permanence.

End time catastrophe. Second, end time coming in verses 29 through 31. 29 through 31. In these verses, Jesus is speaking of the second coming.

We know the date of the end time catastrophe. That was AD 70 when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the legions of Vespasian and Titus. We do not know the date of Jesus' second coming, a theme which Jesus will deal with in the remainder of this chapter and into chapter 25.

But we know that his second coming will be a time of cataclysmic and unmistakable turbulence. No one here on earth will be left under any illusion that Christ in all his glory has appeared because the skies will be changed.

It will be a time of great cosmic sign. And then Christ shall appear. The Christ who will come on the clouds with great power and glory.

[20:15] The whole earth will see him whenever we are on this globe and mourn because of its unbelief. There shall be the sound of a great trumpet blast and Christ shall send forth the angels of heaven to gather all his people to himself.

This is the day of his second coming. The day of cosmic upheaval and the appearance of the Son of God himself. There shall be light.

There shall be noise. There shall be upheaval and turmoil. And Christ shall appear, not this time, in the form of his crucified body, but in power and great glory.

What an encouragement for those first century Jewish Christians struggling to survive and being constantly told that Jesus is no Christ at all. Yes, he is.

And the day shall come when the whole universe shall see him in power and glory. Again, this end time coming prophesied by Jesus in verses 29 through 31 at a time we do not yet know is more than enough to fill us with perseverance, patience, prospect, purpose.

[21:34] And then third, we have end time conditions. End time conditions. Verses 4 through 14, 22 through 28, and 32 through 35. So Jesus has answered the first two questions his disciples asked him, that of the temple's destruction and that of his second coming.

What remains for him is to describe to the disciples the conditions of the end times. The way of the world in the days between the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming.

What will it be like for Christians in this last age of the world as we await the glorious reappearing of our Lord from the heavens in power and great glory?

Because our time is running short this morning, I want to summarize the teaching of Jesus in these verses by saying, first of all, the last ages shall be a time of great suffering for God's people.

There shall be a time of great suffering for God's people. There shall be betrayal and tribulation.

There shall be wars and there shall be persecution.

[ 22 : 52 ] Make no mistake, if you think that being a Christian in the end times is easy, you have not reckoned with Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 24. It was never meant to be easy.

It wasn't easy for the disciples of Jesus. It wasn't easy for the first century Jewish Christians to whom Matthew was writing. The early Christians suffered at the hands of Rome.

Medieval Christians were burned at the stake. Cambodian Christians were murdered in their millions and today, more Christians die on account of their faith than anyone else.

this is the end age. Secondly, the last ages shall be a time of great religious upheaval according to this passage.

Many will claim to take the place of Christ as Lord. There will be reports of his coming and some deceitful and sinful men will take his place. New religions will rise and perhaps even some who call themselves Christian will be led astray.

[ 24 : 04 ] Many of those who continue to call themselves Christian will live in an immoral way. Does this sound familiar? It should. It's been the history of the Christian church in the world for the last 2,000 years.

Whether it's emperor worship in the days of Rome or false religion today, many have claimed to be king of the universe and lord of the world and even some who call themselves Christians have been led astray.

Third, the last ages shall be a time of great gospel expansion. Great gospel expansion. One of the features of premillennialism I find fairly unattractive is its constant pessimism.

That the end times are characterized only by the negatives, by the sufferings, by the apostasies of the church. But in verse 14, Jesus places a block upon our negativity and tells us about this end age.

The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Jesus. That good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, it shall be proclaimed to all people everywhere, to Jews and to Gentiles and together they shall worship the Messiah and long for his coming.

[ 25 : 38 ] The ends of the earth in Jesus' day probably refer to the limits of the Roman Empire. In our day, of course, it means the whole world. Yet the same truth applies.

The last days are a time of unprecedented gospel expansion. Today, we celebrate the presence of believing Christians among every nation and tribe on earth.

Here in Europe, we worship alongside our Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ alongside Africans, Americans, Asians, and Australasians.

Christ is named by his people all over the earth. But then, even in New Testament days, Paul could say in Romans 15 verse 18 of the gospel of Christ, its voice has gone out into the whole earth. their voice to the ends of the world. Even in Paul's day, before the destruction of Jerusalem, just 30 years after Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 24, every nation in the known world of Paul's day had Christians present.

[ 27 : 04 ] Spain, France, North Africa, Asia Minor, Gaul, and so on. the end age is not a time of unmitigated disaster.

It is a time of unprecedented evangelistic endeavor and Christ's blessing of his gospel. These are the conditions under which the first century Christian church operated.

Great suffering, religious upheaval, and gospel expansion. And these are the conditions under which we're operating today as the Christian church. And when I say conditions, I mean conditions. According to Jesus, it is not, according to Jesus in this chapter, it is when all these things are true, he shall return.

It's when all these things are true, he shall return. That's what he says in this chapter. But you say, if what you say, Colin, is right, then all these things have been true of the Christian church since the

days of the apostles.

[ 28 : 11 ] To which I reply, that's the point. Jesus is telling each and all of us here today that there are no more conditions which need to be met before he returns.

Everything is now ready for his return. And has been since the days of the apostles. This means Jesus could come back at any time.

Any time. I hope we get Jesus' point from this passage. Contra those who place a calendar of events in Jesus' way as if to say, well, you can't reappear before the construction of a new state called Israel, 1948, or the construction of a new temple in Jerusalem.

You can't return until after the rapture. And so on. Jesus says in verses 32 and 33, from the fig tree learn this lesson. As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know the summer is near.

Even so, when you see all these things, you know that he's near. He's right at the door. over the last few months we've been subjected to Brexit fiasco.

[ 29 : 30 ] We've been continually confused by the number of steps our politicians need to take in order to leave the European Union, whatever your views on this matter are.

The thing is, as far as Jesus' second coming is concerned, all the steps have been taken, which means he could reappear at any time. He's near, he says.

I am right at the door. How does that make you feel? To know that even before the service is over, the Son of Man may appear in the heavens with power and great glory and you'll hear the cosmic trumpet call.

That's why to go back to the very beginning of our sermon today, rather than argue about times and events, Christians must focus on the four pillars of Jesus' application in this passage.

Perseverance, patience, prospect, permanence. Keep your eyes focused forward and upward.

[ 30 : 41 ] For though this world may pass away, it shall only be when Jesus himself in the power and the majesty of his Father appears in the heavens with infinite glory.

Let us pray. Lord, members, we want to listen to him, and then go into theations.