

The return of Jesus (3)

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[0:00] So, when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

And alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days. Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath, for then there will be great tribulation such as has not been seen from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short. Then, if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it.

But false Christs and false prophets will arise, and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

[1:29] See, I have told you beforehand. So if they say to you, look, he is in the wilderness, do not go out. If they say, look, he is in the inner rooms, do not believe it.

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then will appear in heaven the sun, the sign of the Son of Man, 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.

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

[2:37] From the fig tree learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near.

So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Let me pray as we begin. Our loving Heavenly Father, we want to come before you now humbly, and to receive your word humbly.

And we ask that you would give us the right perspective on life and the future. We ask that you'd lift our eyes to Christ and his soon return.

And we ask, Father, that you might bring our lives more and more in line with reality. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

[3:50] Amen. Well, part two or part three of this series is the final part of our series on the return of Jesus.

And we saw last week the delay before the end. So you have a handout, and there's that terrible diagram that I've spent far too long trying to draw with a mouse on a computer that you've got there. And you'll see that we, it's the same diagram, but just added to from last week. And last week we were there looking at the delay before the end. Today our subject is the end.

That is the return of Jesus itself. And the reason for that is that that's because Jesus moves on to that in verse 15 in our passage and all the way through to verse 35.

At heart, we are going to see that Jesus wants his disciples to realise that we are living in the dying moments of this creation, this world, this age.

[5:02] That is, he is now at the very gates of the universe. We're living in the dying moments of this whole age, this world.

That is, the Messiah has come, Jesus. He's died on the cross. He's paid for sin. He's risen. But now, we are in the very last moments of this world before his return to rule.

And that is what he wants his disciples to realise in these verses. And so therefore, part of what it means to be a true Christian is to be waiting eagerly and faithfully for his soon return.

I'm sure you can see, if this is true, if it's true, it completely transforms everything we think we're living for.

Our priorities in life, for ourselves, for our children, for our families, our colleagues, neighbours, friends. Of course, all of this is completely contrary to the worldview around us, in your workplaces, neighbours, etc., in the newspapers, which is this.

[6:19] Something along the lines of, this world is going to continue indefinitely, so we better preserve it at all costs. Jesus says in this passage, these are its dying moments before it's all going to pass away.

Three points today on your sheets. Number one, 80-70 was the sign. Number two, Jesus' return will be the end of the universe. And then the conclusion, number one.

Well, this whole section starts with Jesus' prophecy that the temple will be destroyed. Just come back to verse 2. It's essential that we don't lose sight of where this conversation starts.

Okay, verse 2, Jesus says, you see all of these buildings, the temple that had been there for 500 years, there they are, looking at it from the Mount of Olives, they can see it.

He says, not one stone will be left upon another. Verse 3, the disciples asked the obvious question. Two parts to their question. Number one, tell us, when will these things be?

[7:28] That is, when will the temple be destroyed? And number two, what will be the sign of the end of the age? How will we know that the Christ is about to come and bring his kingdom? They seem to see a connection between those two things.

But they're not sure what it is. And I hope we will see that Jesus' answer to these questions is actually very straightforward. The first thing he says in verses 4 to 14 as we saw last week is that there is going to be a delay.

We need to realise that and what it's going to be like. In verse 15, he comes back to their question directly.

So that word so in verse 15 at the beginning of verse 15 in the original can mean now then back to your question. Now then back to what we were talking about. He comes back to their question and we get a timeline from verse 15 to 31 and verses 15 to 23 is the sign and then 29 sorry, 15 to 23 is the sign and then 29 to 31 is the end itself and then 32 to 35 is the conclusion.

You'll see I've tried to draw this on the diagram the sign there with that microscopic little picture that you'll need a magnifying glass to see.

[9:02] But we'll start there and just come with me to verse 15. So Jesus refers prophetically here to the destruction of the temple. So this idea of the abomination of desolation spoken by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place referring to the end of the temple.

He then says in verse 16 to 20 that's the call to get out of Jerusalem because destruction is coming and then verse 21 I take it that such great tribulation that has never been since the beginning of the world that is the destruction itself the destruction of the temple and it's never been rebuilt since.

Now we might be thinking and so in AD 70 on your diagram there in AD 70 the Romans came and they besieged and destroyed the temple they besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and all of this Jesus said will happen before the end.

In fact Jesus is more precise. He says in verse 34 just come to verse 34 sorry to work you hard just come to verse 34 truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

All these things there is the destruction of the temple and so Jesus said in AD 30 the temple will be destroyed within a generation and I don't know if you know your history in AD 70 the Romans came they besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and it's never been rebuilt and that is you'll see

on your picture there on your diagram a tiny picture of the temple mount and you'll know there's a mosque on it to this day.

[11:01] Now we might be thinking what do we do with all this? what's all this about? Well come now to verse 33 where we get the lesson that Jesus wants his disciples to draw from it.

Verse 33 he says so also when you see all these things that is when you see the destruction of the temple you know that he is near at the very gates in other words you know the son of man is about to return when you see the destruction of the temple you know the son of man is at the very gates. So the point is this now in this building there are fire alarms I've been looking you can see the red things over there that you can smash there's three of them in fact I've seen up there or probably all around the building you can smash them the alarm goes off on a cosmic level the alarm has been hit in AD 70 and the final countdown has begun now some of you won't be able to see this I've made very carefully made a paper temple here just if you can't see it just imagine what I'm about to do so this is the cosmic alarm this is the button no stone left upon another the alarm has been hit in AD 70 the siren is sounding the end is coming that's the point in fact it is more than that the destruction of the temple in AD 70 was the beginning of the end and you can see that in verse 22 this strange verse you see that in verse 22 if those days had not been cut short that is that the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 had not been cut short no human being would have been saved but for the sake of the elect those days would be cut short what's going on here what the Lord Jesus is saying I think is this he's saying AD 70 could have been in some sense should have been the end of the world God's hand was lifted to bring everything to an end then the floodgates of judgment were opened and if it had continued no human being would have been saved final judgment but he stopped the juggernaut he pressed pause why for the sake of the elect he pressed pause on the end of the world as he gathers in all his people from all the nations the only thing of substance that's happening in these last moments of history is God as the gospel is proclaimed and God gathers in his elect but as soon as you see AD 70 you know that he is near at the very gates and the end could come at any moment that's the point in other words the world is on borrowed time notice there will be a concerted effort after the sign verse 23 to 28 a concerted effort during this period of delay between the sign and the return of Jesus to distract the church from the unmissable return of

Jesus you see that people will say there he is don't believe it they'll say look he's in the wilderness look he's come to the inner rooms there'll be all kinds of movements and teachers arising in this age between the sign and the final day to spread whatever confusion they can if possible to lead astray the elect and their tactic will be to try to persuade the church that in some sense Christ has already come back and therefore that there is no great day yet to come that we're all waiting for so don't worry about it we can see that this kind of distraction is having great success not just out there but in our circles and churches so easy isn't it to lose sight of there's a no surprise there's a concerted effort to distract the church from the final coming of

[16:03] Jesus Jesus says to his disciples don't listen to them don't be distracted from the great day to come because when it comes it will be unmissable and so to move on to our second point what then will happen at the end itself and that is verses 29 to 31 and the point is when Jesus returns it will be the end of the universe in fact three things I'm going to expand the point it will be the end of the universe the moment of truth and the beginning of the new eternal age just look at verse 29 immediately after the tribulation of those days now I don't think that means immediately after the sign AD 70 but immediately after the general tribulation in other words the delay of unspecified length that we were talking about last week immediately after that tribulation then the end will come and verse 29 is picturing the end of this universe the sun will stop the moon will stop the stars will fall and if there are any doubts as to whether it's the end of the universe look at verse 35 heaven and earth will pass away as Jesus sums it up and so then the

God who made the universe in the first place will bring it to an end on that day it is completely illogical of course isn't it to believe that he can't do that if he made it in the first place he can bring it to an end and when Jesus returns he says it will be the end of this universe heaven and earth will

pass away completely second it will be the moment of truth verse 30 then will appear in heaven the sign of the son of man and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven this sign of the son of man we don't know what it is it'll be something that makes obvious to all at that moment that the end has finally come the game is up the curtain has fallen and then it will prompt the tribes of the earth to mourn that is all those who have opposed

Jesus and refused his call to that moment realize it will be the moment of truth why will they mourn you thought about that I think at least three reasons I think they will mourn the destruction of everything they've lived for and held dear this world they will mourn with deep regret the deep regret of people who knew about the forgiveness they could have had in the Lord Jesus and yet now realize it's too late they will mourn with deep regret most of all I take it they will mourn with despair knowing now the awful destiny that faces them notice there will be no more pretending on that day you know you hear you can have your truth and

I'll have mine we hear this don't we all around us and people will say well that's fine for you to believe in Jesus and all that stuff that's your truth it's true for you but I've got another truth and it's true for me there'll be no more of that on that day do you know why because verse 30 those words three words they will see they will see the son of man it will no longer be possible to pretend that Jesus isn't real because there he will be or that he isn't God because there he will be in all his glory just picture it for a second all other light in the universe has vanished only he will shine the son of man in all his glory and so it will be the moment of truth for the universe thirdly it will be the beginning for

God's people a new beginning verse 31 he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other just see what Jesus is immediate priority will be the first thing he will do is he will bring his long suffering people home from all corners of the universe those who've died those who are alive not one of them missing it will be the end of the universe but it will also be the beginning a new beginning for his people I imagine it a little bit like this if you think of a father coming home from a long work trip perhaps after three months away bursting into the doors and saying to his servants you probably have to go back a few years for this but saying to his servants the first thing go get my children bring them to me that will be

[22:06] Jesus his priority on that day it will be a wonderful day for the forgiven Christian the trumpet will sound it will be the sound of freedom for the Christian be a wonderful sound it will be the sound of relief you thought about that what a relief it was all true our hope was not in vain so when Jesus returns it will be the end of the universe it will be the moment of truth it will be the beginning of the new eternal age as God's king comes at last to claim his universal rule to bring his everlasting kingdom and to wrap up all of God's promises and plans from the beginning and can I say of course if this day is coming it changes absolutely everything doesn't it so to conclude what should we conclude drawing all this together well

Jesus gives us the conclusion in verses 32 to 35 the unmissable conclusion of this section verse 33 he is near at the very gates in other words disciples of Jesus need to realize this that we are living in the dying moments of this world this creation before he returns to bring the universe to an end and the beginning of his kingdom I just want to zero in on one thing for a moment because I think if we're really honest as Christians we doubt these things we say to each other oh yeah he's coming back but quietly often we don't really believe it I just want us to see some of the power of this section can you see that AD 70 is a sign given to us by the

Lord Jesus that is working in two ways it is about timing he is near but it's also about proof whether he's coming back because Jesus knows we're such doubters of his word and so he's given us a preview if we think he's bluffing about the end of the world which quietly we do very often Jesus says look at the temple just imagine his disciples for a moment they were looking at the buildings of the temple right there with him in AD 30 these great buildings they'd been there for 500 years Jesus said look at those they'll be gone within a generation disciples probably thought to themselves yeah right but lo and behold within 40 years destroyed never rebuilt just as he said it would be now in the same way we may look at this world this universe and think when Jesus talks about heaven and

earth passing away we think quietly to ourselves probably not well he wasn't bluffing about AD 70 and he's not bluffing about his return his words have been tested in history we can believe it so AD 70 is about proof but it's also about timing and in verse 32 Jesus uses this idea of seasons as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves you know that summer is near apparently there are only two seasons in Jerusalem winter and summer there is no spring to speak of maybe a couple of few days that people talk about but really there isn't a spring and so the point is that as the leaves come out they are the first signs of summer and the point Jesus is making therefore is that these are the last moments of spiritual winter the eternal summer of Jesus rule is almost upon us and it is really wonderful news for the

Christian summer is coming it should fill our hearts with hope you know how you feel about when your summer holiday is about to come so you've got a lovely three weeks summer holiday just coming it's the last week before you go away maybe the last two or three days at work and you're clearing the desk but you're really thinking of that summer holiday well Jesus is saying look where you are as a follower of me that's where we are in the very last moments before an eternal summer rest John Newton writing to one of his Christian friends said this he put it beautifully he said the troubles which every day bears away will return no more and see the end is at hand isn't that a wonderful attitude in light of these things it is the right one for the

[27:46] Christian think of this great city the houses of parliament the great buildings of the city where I spend a lot of my time everything that seems so vital so important Jesus says these are their dying moments dullage these are their dying moments before Christ our saviour returns he sums it up beautifully in verse 34 verse 35 the conclusion of this whole section heaven and earth is passing away you need to realise that disciple but my words will not pass away I wonder why do you think he concludes with those words the reason is I think because the Christian is to be someone who is investing no hope in this world it's passing away but all of our hope in the soon return of Jesus

Christ put it another way the Christian is someone who grasps this the Christian who grasps this will not be pursuing any dreams in this world any dreams at all in this world but waiting for Jesus to bring all of our dreams the summer that we long for that is really radical is this what you're living for to have this perspective on life I take it changes everything about our priorities in life absolutely everything and it may be for some of us this is just an encouragement to lift our eyes afresh to the soon return of Jesus and to keep going in the Christian life it may be that for others of us this means a radical change of direction in light of these things let's pray as I close father we thank you for the beautiful truth that christ our saviour will soon return and bring summer the summer of his kingdom the banquet the hope that we long for and father we do pray that we would lift our eyes that you would lift our eyes that we would place no hopes or dreams in this dying world but only in christ and that we would therefore be waiting eagerly for him and father how we long to be waiting faithfully for him show us what that looks like in our lives we pray in jesus name amen