

The Second Coming

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's turn to that chapter again this evening, the chapter we read, Matthew 24. I want us to look through the chapter and the various signs which Jesus tells his disciples will accompany or will appear to remind us of his coming again.

It's Matthew 24. I'll just read the opening verses. Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

But he answered them, you see all these things, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately saying, tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?

I'm sure that we've all seen postcards of Jerusalem or pictures of the old city of Jerusalem. And in modern times, the postcard would contain the great mosque that towers over the old city.

And that is today's landmark. Or perhaps it would be the Wailing Wall or the Western Wall. And that is the wall which is sacred to the Orthodox Jews.

[1 : 35] But if you were to see a postcard, of course, there weren't any postcards in Jesus' day. But if there had been, the towering figure which would have been on that picture, that photograph, would have been the temple which had been built by Herod.

Of course, it had been situated, it was located in the same location as the original temple was. But now it was a refurbished temple because it had been destroyed a couple of times.

And it was the great pride of the people of Jerusalem. They held it in great esteem. It was something which they believed in, not just as a building, as a piece of architecture, but for them it symbolized God's presence amongst them.

And the fact that they were God's people, that there was a covenant between them, a special relationship between them and God, which would never, ever be destroyed. And they truly believed that this temple would always be there because they believed that they had the promise of God, that God would always be their God and they would always be his people.

Well, that was a promise, but they understood it in the wrong way because when God fulfilled his promise and sent his son Jesus into the world, instead of recognizing him, despite the clear indications that there were the proof that Jesus was truly the Messiah, they rejected him, they hated him, and they crucified him.

[3 : 12] And they did so because they believed that somehow or other God was pledged to be their God and that they understood his promises in a particular way, which of course were fulfilled very differently to the way in which they expected.

So for them, the temple was always going to be there. And they believed that if somebody had gone there 50 years from now, the temple would be there. And 100 years from now, the temple would be there.

The temple would always be the towering feature of Jerusalem. Whatever else changes there might be, the temple would always be there. So you can imagine the shock when the disciples asked him and when they showed him the buildings, and Jesus made this promise, this shocking promise.

He says, you see all these, don't you? Verse 2, truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

I can just imagine the silence, the shattered silence in that conversation as they tried to come to terms with something that seemed utterly impossible to them.

[4 : 24] And that was the greatest monument that they held on to was in a matter of time going to be destroyed. Could he possibly be mistaken?

Well, no, he couldn't because they had already come to believe in him and trust in him as the Messiah and everything he did and said came true. They knew his power. They knew his knowledge. They knew where he had come from.

So he had to be telling the truth. But they couldn't grasp what he was talking about. And of course, if you read the history books, you will discover that that's exactly what happened.

Just 40 years after he said this, exactly what he said would happen, did happen. And the emperor Titus, the Roman army, surrounded the city.

They besieged the city because of a rebellion in the year 66. Four years later in the year 70 AD, the Roman army surrounded and besieged the city. And there was one of the greatest massacres in Jewish history.

[5 : 24] It's fearful if you read the history books. It's awful. The loss of life was massive. Thousands upon thousands of people were slaughtered because the Romans, basically because the Romans had, by that time, had had it up to here with the Jewish people and the rebellion.

And they marched into the, they broke down the walls. They set fire to the city. They set fire to the temple. And they just killed indiscriminately everyone they could find.

No one. It didn't matter if you pleaded for mercy, if you were young, if you were a baby. It didn't matter. They just slaughtered everyone. No one was left alive. What's more, they pulled down every one of the stones of the temple.

So they didn't just burn it. They systematically took down every single, in fact, you can see them today, apparently. Apparently, you can go to Jerusalem today and see the very stones that were knocked down as a fulfillment.

And Christians can see the fulfillment of this very chapter. Jesus promised that there will not be one stone left upon another that has not been destroyed. The whole temple, the foundation, one part of the foundation, of course, was left.

[6 : 39] And that is today the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall. And that, of course, is why the Jews go there and why they hold to it in such esteem and such reverence to the Wailing Wall that you've all seen pictures of.

Perhaps you've even been there. But that was what Jesus promised. And it came true. Now, tonight, I want us to look together at this chapter, at the way in which he answers the question that was put to them, to him, tell us, they said, when will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?

And the following prophecy, Jesus was a prophet, the following prophecy talks about two things. It talks first and foremost, immediately, about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the conditions that would be at that time.

I've just described them. But intermingled with that prophecy is a greater prophecy, a wider and more lengthy prophecy about the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Christ. That's what the Bible ultimately looks forward to. God has a purpose for this world. But he makes very clear that this world, the world that you and I live in, will come to an end.

[8 : 09] And not a moment too soon and not a moment too late. It won't come to an end because humankind will determine it will come to an end. It will come to an end because God has determined that it will come to an end.

It was him who made it in the first place. It was against him that the world sinned and separated itself in the first place. And so therefore, God has every right to determine the moment in time history that it will come to an end.

And it's always useful to every so often remind ourselves of that great fact, that promise that Jesus made and that the Bible makes that this world will come to an end.

And what you have here in this passage is a somewhat confusing collection of promises. Now I say confusing, not in any way to criticize the passage in any way.

This is the word of God. And the fact that I have difficulty in understanding it doesn't change the fact that it is the word of God. because what it means is that very often in prophecy when God's word tells us about something that's going to happen in time, it's confusing to us.

[9 : 29] And it's deliberately confusing to us because God does not want us to predict with any kind of accuracy when the second coming will take place.

Now the Bible tells us that on the day that this world comes to an end, the Lord will come again in person, in glory, in majesty.

Jesus will come to this world again. And what I'd like to do is to see in what way this passage mingles or blends his promises about what was going to happen 40 years from then and what is going to happen much further on into the future, even further than the day in which we live tonight, in order to remind it not so that we will be able to predict.

That's one of the great mistakes that Christians make. They try and predict when the world will end. Some of them even try and hurry it on. That's not our job at all.

But it is our responsibility to be reminded that that event will happen because God has said it will happen. and the effect that that should have upon us is to waken us to the reality that this world is not going to continue the way it is today.

[10 : 51] But one day will come to an end and Jesus will come again to take his people to be with himself those who are prepared for his coming and to sit in judgment over every person that has ever lived in this world and that does live in the world on that day and they will all be gathered we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Now that affects every single one of us. Every single one of us is accountable to God. Now I want us to look at some of the signs there and some of the proofs or the indications of this happening. The first one I want us to look at is this that Jesus says in this chapter and chapter and verse 14 that the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

So that's one of the first thing the Bible promises that will take place before Jesus comes again. In other words Jesus will not come again before the gospel is proclaimed all over the world.

Now that doesn't mean that every last person in the world will be converted. It doesn't mean that every last person in the world even will hear the gospel.

[12 : 13] But what it does mean is that a day will come when the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world in general to every nation and tribe and tongue and language and culture.

And where that gospel is proclaimed people will hear the good news that Jesus came into the world to save sinners and they will respond to that gospel. That's why the gospel is that's what the gospel means.

The word gospel means good news. The greatest news in all the world is that Christ came into the world to save sinners like ourselves guilty people like ourselves so that by faith in him our lives can be changed by God and so that we could be made ready in faith for Jesus when he comes.

How often do you think about the second coming of Jesus? How much of our lives are oriented towards the second coming of Jesus?

How much time do we give it throughout our day? It's a very interesting question isn't it? Is it not true that we get so wrapped up in our own routines our busyness our stresses that we think that everything's going to continue the way it has done forever?

[13 : 29] Well that's why I believe that things happen in the world to waken us up and to show us how unstable this world is. Look at what's happening in the Middle East today.

A couple of months ago nothing was happening. All of a sudden there are these uprisings. Now you might say that'll all die down. Will it? It might do but it might not.

The newspapers are predicting anything could happen from the complete absence of any availability of oil to a massive uprising in the Middle East throughout all the countries of the Middle East and we have no idea what the outcome of such an uprising would be.

It will change the course of history forever. Now I am not you see what I think some Christians the mistake they make is they try and sort of take an event like that and they try and say well how does this fit into the predictions of the Bible and how does this help us to be able to predict when Jesus will come again.

That's the wrong way of doing it. However when you do see these things happening we should be reminded that Jesus will come again and that this world in its present form will not continue the way it has been all our lives and that anything could happen.

[14 : 45] We just don't know what is going to happen. That's why Jesus said there'll be wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes in various places to show us time and again the instability of this world and the fact that this world will know it.

But in any case the gospel will be preached to every nation of the world. You know what that tells me? It tells me that the Lord is merciful. It tells me that he wants his gospel is good news to go to

every person in the world because he wants them to have the opportunity to come to Christ to be saved.

It tells me something of the kindness of God, the mercy and the patience of God after all we have done to provoke him. All the awful things that this world does and yet God tolerates us and he leaves us to hear his gospel and he wants his gospel to go to every nation and tribe and culture so that everyone will have a chance of hearing, an opportunity I should say, of hearing the gospel. And you know what else that tells me? It tells me that what have we done with that message? We've heard it. Most of you tonight have heard the message of the gospel and some of you tonight have not come to faith in Christ.

Now how do you think it will be when a person who hears the gospel for the first time and as soon as they hear it, they know it's the truth and they'll come to Christ right away. And you who have heard the gospel so many times in your life, how do you think, what are you going to say to the Lord?

[16:33] What are you going to say to him? When he has given you opportunity again, opportunity after opportunity and you've refused, you've consistently refused it.

To me that's a fearful thing. That is not a place I would like to be. After all that God has done to make his salvation available to you and to bring you into his kingdom, he has done everything possible.

He has shown you and demonstrated his love, his peculiar, extraordinary love for sinners like yourselves and even that you refuse. How can you do that? I can't understand that at all.

I can't understand how anybody could refuse the love of God in Jesus Christ. Where God says, I want to change your life. I can change your life. I will change your life if you seek and you will find. Knock on the door will be opened to you. That's what he promises. And even then you say, no, I don't want it. The gospel will be proclaimed to every nation before the coming of.

[17:37] And you know, when I suppose it must have been, it must have seemed so impossible to these disciples when they considered how big, how vast the world was.

And here was this collection of 12 disciples. And it was hard enough for them to take the gospel to Jerusalem or the areas around about Jerusalem, let alone the whole of Palestine and let alone the Roman Empire and all that was beyond the Roman Empire.

How could that possibly happen? And yet, today, that is what is happening. And especially through modern means, you know, we should be thankful for all the technology that's available to us, the communications that are available to us by way of radio and TV and the internet.

Do you know what's happening? I know that all of these are, they contain a whole lot of badness. Anything can be used for bad or good. But it's amazing, isn't it, that modern technology is and can be used so effectively to communicate Jesus Christ.

And the internet can bring the gospel to places where I can't go as a preacher. People can access Christian websites and they do.

[18:57] They can access the gospel from all, from different regions of the world. It's amazing. amazing. And it's one more indication that this promise is in fact coming true.

Now there's another sign given elsewhere in the Bible that reminds us of the coming of Jesus and that is the future of Israel. If you read Romans chapter 9 to 11, I'm not going to read it.

I'm going to leave it because there isn't time to even go into it. But if you read Romans chapter 9 and verse 11, particularly chapter 11 and verse 25 and 26, God still has a future for the people of Israel.

Now I'm not saying that they're justified in everything that they do. I don't believe that for a moment. I'm not saying that we should support Israel whatever they do. However, what I am saying is that the Bible does give an indication, verse 25, he says this, and in this way all Israel will be saved as it is written the deliverer will come from Zion.

He will banish ungodliness from Jacob and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. But I'm going to leave that just now. You can think about that at your leisure. But God has a plan for Israel and that plan we haven't quite seen yet but I believe it will come.

[20:21] And then again moving back to Matthew chapter 24, there's what we call tribulation. Or persecution or trouble. And we've read all about this in verses 9 and 10 for example where Jesus says they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake and then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

Now this is not the first time that Jesus mentioned the fact that his disciples would be persecuted. He says blessed in Matthew chapter 5 one of the Beatitudes says blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake.

So persecution was always a feature of the world in which Christians lived on one form or another. For example in the days following Jesus' ascension the disciples were hounded, they were hunted, they were jailed, they were persecuted, they were put to death.

death, not only the twelve apostles but also those who began to follow Jesus in various churches across the Roman empire and depending on who the emperor was at the time and what he thought about Christians then your life could be in great danger and many as a Christian was put to death to the lions and the gladiators and other forms of execution as well as being jailed.

[21 : 50] And from time to time in history, if you read the history books you will find that from time to time in various places Christians were hunted and they were put to death for various I suppose that's the most extreme form of persecution but there are other forms of persecution as well.

There's just a very basic fact that the world doesn't like Christians. Jesus said that if they persecuted me they will persecute you.

Blessed are you when you are persecuted for my name's sake. In other words that's what you expect. If any man comes to me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. I would be lying tonight if I said to you that if you become a Christian you will have an easy life. Everybody's going to love you. You will be accepted in every community. That would be a lie. It's an easy way of selling the gospel. It's a cheap way of selling the gospel. It's not true. What I would say to you tonight is if you're not prepared to suffer for your faith then don't become a Christian.

[22 : 58] It's as simple as that. That's what being a Christian is. A willingness to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ.

And that suffering can take place by the loss of your friends, by the suspicion of those around you when you are converted, by the kind of gossip that people talk, in which people talk about you as a Christian, the way in which they try and twist things, the way in which they might ostracize you.

I'm not saying everyone. Of course not. Thankfully we still live in an area where there is sympathy for the gospel but don't think for a moment that that reflects the rest of the world.

It doesn't. Or even the rest of the country. It doesn't. Who would have thought even ten years ago that a Christian couple would be refused fostering because they believe the Bible?

Did you imagine that that would happen? I didn't. I am utterly horrified that because a couple simply believe the biblical truth of human sexuality, they can't foster kids.

[24 : 26] They cannot give them the loving home that they have given to many, many other children. And please don't tell me, oh, that's the end of it.

And please don't tell me that's England. who would have thought? But that is a reality and that is the reality and these are the crucial issues which we face as Christians.

We shouldn't be surprised. Don't be surprised when the world hates you, said Jesus. And that can be expressed in various different ways.

Another sign is what they call apostasy. What does apostasy mean? It means when someone who professes to be a Christian, he turns away from following Christ.

Now I said professes to be a Christian because it's easy to profess to be a Christian without actually being a Christian himself. Kind of like Judas Iscariot.

[25 : 35] If you had asked Judas Iscariot while he was following Jesus, are you a believer in Jesus? He would have said yes. But he wasn't actually. There was a deep-seated resentment. His life had never been changed and yet, peculiarly, there was an outward connection to Jesus Christ, but it was only an outward connection.

Kind of like the people who would say to Jesus in Matthew chapter 6, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? We've preached your word. And at the end of the day, Jesus says, depart from me. I never knew you.

Now, these are people who had an outside connection. Tonight, make sure your connection to Jesus is from your heart. Having come to him in spirit and in truth and loving him as he first loved you, not being content with an outside connection.

That will get you nowhere. The Bible warns against that. And it was possible and it will happen. chapter 24 and verse 10 to 12.

Jesus says this, and many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Now, this, in connection with the tribulation, the persecution, he says, is going to be a sign of the kind of world that we live in.

[26 : 57] Now, we have to be careful here because when the Bible talks about the last days, it doesn't necessarily mean the days that immediately precede the coming of Jesus again.

When the New Testament talks about the last days, what it means is the period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. And when Jesus talks about tribulation in the last days and apostasy turning away in the last days, what he's saying is this, that throughout that period, however long it might be, there will always be a measure of tribulation and persecution and hatred against Christians from time to time in various places.

And there will always be apostasy, people turning after other beliefs, going off in the wrong direction, and refusing to believe in Jesus anymore.

That will always be a feature of the world that we live in. However, what he's saying also is that as time goes on and as his coming approaches, there will be a time of intense persecution and intense apostasy.

and in that time, because some have turned away from the truth, there will arise, in 2 Thessalonians and chapter 2, the man of sin or the man of lawlessness.

[28 : 37] And of course I'm not going to go into the various arguments that there are and the various suggestions that there might be about the man of sin, but we have every reason to suggest that in the future there will be a man, a particular person, who has a particular personality that will draw others to follow him.

He will deceive people. He will be an object of worship and awe and following. He'll be some kind of celebrity, but more than a celebrity, someone who people want to worship and want to give themselves to, and someone who deceives the world with all kinds of miracles and deceitfulness. I must say I'm at a loss as to what that might be somewhere in the future and yet happening even as we speak.

And then he goes on to talk about the signs that indicate judgment, the famines and the wars and the earthquakes, and not that people who are caught up in these things necessarily are more guilty than anyone else.

God is not saying to the people of Christ Church today, you are more guilty than the people of Auckland. But God is saying to the world that we live in a world where we cannot predict anything at all.

[30 : 09] We don't know what's going to happen in this world. And every time we hear something like that, we know that our end may be just around the corner. Who knows what is going to happen in five minutes?

We just don't know because we live in an unpredictable world. But we also know we are meant to be reminded by these signs that the end will come one day.

We may be alive when it comes or we may not. Now some people, some Christians believe in a two-stage coming. They believe that Christ will come the first time and that he will actually reign in Jerusalem, literally, personally, in Jerusalem for a thousand years.

And at that time during that thousand year reign, then the whole world will be stilled and they will be submissive to him and they will come and give him the honor and the respect and the obedience that they should do and nations will come to him and give him.

There will be a kind of a worldwide reign of the Lord Jesus Christ for a thousand years. That's what some Christians, in fact, a lot of Christians believe that. You might think that's quite strange but in actual fact, you'd be amazed at how many Christians all over the world believe that.

[31 : 28] I could quote to you some free church people who believe that. Not many of them today but in the past their forefathers. J.C. Ryle believed that. So it's not such a strange theory as we might think.

And then afterwards they say that the second stage of his coming will be after another period of time and that will be the final one. But I don't go along with that at all.

Again, I'll leave it to you to read your Bible to come up with how you read things and the prophets is very confusing but it's a fascinating subject. Don't spend too much time because there are more important things to think about rather than trying to predict and trying to pinpoint the end of the world.

But I believe and I think I would challenge you to show me where I'm wrong that the end of the world and the second coming will happen exactly the same time.

The world as we know it will come to an end by the Lord Jesus Christ who will come personally to this world once again in glory and in majesty and power and that will be the moment when the graves will open and when the dead in Christ shall rise as well as every other person who's died. [32 : 45] It's not just the dead in Christ that rise. Everyone, Jesus says in John chapter 5 that those who have done good by believing in the Lord Jesus will rise to go to be with the Lord. Those who have done evil by refusing the gospel they will rise to be judged and to be punished.

And let me say once again there is no injustice with God. Anyone he judges will be judged rightly and fairly and properly and perfectly. You can never blame God for injustice.

God is perfect in all that he does and every person who appears before him on that day will say his judgment is right and is good. But that's what I believe. I believe that the New Testament teaches that the end of the world and the second coming of Christ will be one and the same event and that will be the moment when we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Christ and when God will divide those who have believed and trusted in Jesus from those who haven't and those who have believed will go to be forever with the Lord.

When that will happen no one knows. Verse 36 No one knows concerning that day or hour not even the angels of heaven nor the sun but the father only.

[34 : 05] How can it be that the very son of God himself doesn't know something? That's an interesting question isn't it? Jesus confesses to his disciples that he doesn't know.

Well in his human nature he didn't know. The father alone. We have to just leave it there. I don't want to start complicating things. We have to just leave it there.

Here Christ is saying to us and there are times when you have to take the Bible as it sounds and as it looks. Whatever however this can possibly be concerning that day no one knows not even the angels of heaven nor the sun.

I was interested again I'm looking at the time but I'm really fascinated by this. I'm sure many of you are fascinated by this and I hope that you will think about this both in terms of what the Bible teaches but also both in terms of being ready that's the most important thing because the Lord could come at any time and our death will be for us the second coming right away and that's what we need to be ready for.

There's no use saying that well I don't believe that Israel has never been saved so the second coming won't go on. We don't know that we're wrong in our understanding of the scriptures and Jesus could come in five minutes time.

[35 : 22] We don't know. We need to be ready. That's what Jesus says in this very chapter. Be ready. And the only way we can be ready is by knowing him for ourselves and by trusting in him.

But I was really interested many many years ago we lived in America and I used to travel to work and I used to listen to a guy called Harold Camping on the radio. Of course in those days they had Christian radio and still do.

I used to listen to this and this guy was really good. I used to listen to his program at eight o'clock in the morning and he used to have a radio station called Family Radio.

And it's still there. And Camping was a reformed, he was reformed in his theology. And every time I listened to him I used to get so much from him. But sadly he went wrong.

I believe he went wrong because in 1994 he predicted the end of the world. And he said it is absolutely certain it's going to give a date and he gave a time and he said this is what's going to happen.

[36 : 21] All the newspapers in America were full of it. Especially the ones in California. They were full of it. And of course he was wrong. The date that he predicted came and went, nothing happened.

And now he's done it again. Same guy, he's 90 years old. And I can't help thinking what a waste. What a waste of a person who has been so useful in the cause of Christ.

And now his credibility has been blown. At least if he's wrong. He's predicted that the 21st of May this year will be judgment day. You can see it for yourself.

Familyradio.com if you want to go tonight and look at it. And he gives you his reasons and all because he's into the way in which the Bible uses numbers in prophecy.

He claims he's carefully worked out all of this by numbers. Well I can say I hope with confidence that he's wrong.

[37 : 20] The reason I can say he's wrong is because of this very verse. No one knows. No one knows. And the reason no one knows is because God doesn't want us to know.

No matter how much we understand the Bible or how clever we are at trying to sort of blend verses and passages together to try. No one knows.

And the reason no one knows is because we must be ready. Because at any time the Lord could come for us. This is a reality.

Oh it sounds so distant. It sounds so detached from our real lives. But our real lives are because God has given us our real lives.

we owe everything that we have and everything that we are to the Lord. And God demands, he asks, he commands every one of us tonight to surrender to him in faith and in repentance.

[38 : 33] And he promises us everlasting life. And that means that when he does come we'll be rejoicing. None of us will be saying oh I'm absolutely devastated that my life has come to an end.

Even though that might be the way we feel tonight. When it actually happens and when you see the glory of Christ, if you're ready for that, there isn't a greater sight in all the world.

Lord, I can't describe it, what it'll be like. I can only tell you that I truly believe that he will come in glory, that he will be visible, that he'll come personally, and that his coming is absolutely certain.

Why do I believe that? Because he said it. And that's enough for me. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will accompany your word tonight by the power of your spirit, and we pray that you will make it, that you will drive it home into our hearts, that it will not be just to us a mysterious collection of unfathomable promises, but that we will see your word, that we will receive the word in faith, believing in this great Jesus.

He came into the world to seek and to save, and he will come to the world to receive once again his people and to judge us for how we have responded to the gospel.

[40 : 09] We pray that you will follow with us now, and we pray that no one will be able to forget what they've heard tonight, that it will stick with us and stay with us, and that you will strive with us and open up our hearts.

And Lord, if we have never thought about these things before, we pray that you'll create an interest in us, that will not go away, but that will find rest in Jesus Christ. In his name we ask.

Amen. Amen.