

WATCH FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

Leader pages on pp. 144-147

THE POINT:
WHEN CHRIST RETURNS, EVERYONE WILL KNOW IT.

MATTHEW 24:23-31

²³ "If anyone tells you then, 'See, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Over here!' do not believe it.

²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

²⁵ Take note: I have told you in advance.

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²⁶ So if they tell you, 'See, he's in the wilderness!' don't go out; or, 'See, he's in the storerooms!' do not believe it.

²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

²⁸ Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹ Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

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MEMORY VERSE

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³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

³¹ He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

KEYWORDS

False messiahs (v. 24)—Refers to imposters who claim to be the Jewish messiah. Jesus associated them with the fall of Jerusalem, but they still appear occasionally in history.

False prophets (v. 24)—Those who falsely claim to be speaking a word from God. In the New

Testament, Jesus and the apostles often warned against counterfeit prophets.

Son of Man (v. 27)—An Old Testament messianic term (Dan. 7:13) used as a divine title by Jesus, applying it to Himself.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WHILE WE WAIT FOR CHRIST TO RETURN?

I have an awesome toddler at home, he is four-years old. When he was a baby I remember older mothers telling me that in a room full of babies, you will always know your baby's cry. It was not until I was in the mall shopping with my husband that I experienced this. He was in a different store and I lost track of them while I was looking for some summer clothes. I heard a few babies cry, but I knew when my baby cried. I looked up and lo and behold, my husband and son were entering the store. No matter how many babies were around me, I knew my child's voice.

Today as we continue in Matthew 24, we are going to see how Jesus continued to explain His second coming. When He comes back, the signs of His return will be clear and unmistakable. They will be obvious! While we will not be privy to any advance warning, Christ's return will be a powerful, can't-miss event. I'll gladly welcome that moment to "go home" and be with Him. In Matthew 24, Jesus told us what that day will be like.

Deceivers, Don't Believe Them

// Matthew 24:23-25

Matthew gave us a great reminder that the true Messiah's coming will not be secret or hidden. His coming will not be seen by only a select group; it will be visible to all. That's why we should never take seriously someone who says, "See, here is the Messiah!" or, "Over here!" (v. 23). Christ taught us to beware of all the claims about His identity and His whereabouts.

WHAT ARE WAYS TO GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHINGS OR SPIRITUAL DECEPTION?

Jesus warned of both "false messiahs" and "false prophets" (v. 24). (See more in Digging Deeper.) In spite of these groups, Jesus encouraged His disciples. The false messiahs and false prophets will not be able to pull off deceiving Christ's followers. They will attempt "to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (v. 24). Satan has never been able to deceive true believers about the identity of their Lord. As Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, I know



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them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

Jesus said earlier in Matthew 24:13: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." And now we see that, while believers are not immune to the attacks of false messiahs, God will protect them from full-fledged apostasy. God's elect can be tempted and tortured. They may even be put to death, but they will not fall for the deadly bait of deceivers. Peter told us in 1 Peter 1:5 that, "You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." False deceivers are running rampant in our world, Jesus warns us about it so that we may guard our hearts and minds to stay focused on the work Jesus wants us to do. Be aware!

WHAT ATTRIBUTES DOES JESUS GIVE OF THESE FALSE LEADERS THAT WE SEE AT WORK TODAY?

Liars. Cheaters. Rolling Stones. That's who false prophets and messiahs were. Unfortunately these false leaders have cousins that live today's world. False leaders exist in seeking to idolize or sharing false narratives that fill their wallets.

Wait, Creation Will Reveal Him //

Matthew 24:26-29

When you hear thunder or see lightning in the sky, you do not usually wonder what it is. That's what Jesus wanted to make clear. We will not wonder what is happening when He returns. There will be no mistaking it! Jesus' return will be sudden and visible.

The Messiah is not found in the places false teachers and cult leaders suggest. We don't have to go somewhere; instead, He will be coming to us, returning in a way that will be obvious and memorable. Christ gave an unmistakable picture: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (v. 27).

Jesus then added a seemingly out-of-place statement: "Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will



DIGGING DEEPER FALSE MINISTERS

What and who are "false messiahs" and "false prophets?" False messiahs are those who claim to be Christ—the anointed One from God. False prophets are those who claim to have truth revealed to them by God. These false messiahs and prophets are convincingly deceptive because they back up their claims with great signs and wonders. These false leaders mimic their leader: the antichrist. Consider 1 John, "And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). Unfortunately, miracles are a part of their deception. Paul said, "The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders serving the lie, and with every wicked deception among those who are perishing" (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

What are ways you have seen false prophets deceive others?

gather” (v. 28). Many of us have driven past roadkill, and we’ve seen the buzzards or vultures waiting for us to pass so they could resume devouring the carcass. It’s not clear exactly what Jesus meant by this illustration, but perhaps it is simply that people will be drawn to see the return of Christ even as vultures are drawn to a carcass.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO REMAIN FOCUSED AND FEARLESS WHEN IT COMES TO AWAITING CHRIST’S RETURN?

Nature will call out the coming of Christ. “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (v. 29). The return of Christ will be accompanied by supernatural manipulations of celestial bodies—or at least manipulations of their appearance. These signs will be such that all people of earth can see them and realize the end is at hand and Christ is returning. If only one of these signs were given, someone might try to explain it away as an eclipse or a meteor shower. But all of them occurring together can only be caused by the hand of God. Old Testament prophets previously had foreseen these signs in connection with God’s final judgment (Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Ezek. 32:7-8).

These images and prophecies contain an unspoken lesson for us: we must not wait until the earth disintegrates to follow Christ. Follow Him now—and keep your eyes on Him.

Look, Every Eye Will See Him // Matthew 24:30-31

Imagine what it was like as a disciple to sit and listen to Jesus describe the glory of His second coming. So much so that it would present an overwhelming glorious presence. His righteous character will be so piercing that “all the peoples on the earth will mourn” (v. 30).

His arrival will be absolutely terrifying to all the people on earth, particularly for those who have rejected Him. They will mourn because Jesus’ coming implies their certain judgment. Imagine this! The glory of Christ’s return is a serious contrast between His first coming and second coming.



HOW WOULD YOU CONTRAST JESUS’ FIRST COMING WITH HIS SECOND?

Christ’s second coming will be marked “with power and great glory” (v. 30). This highlights the drastic contrast between His first coming and second coming. Christ came with frail humiliation in the incarnation in Bethlehem. At that time, only a few were aware of the significance of this birth to an unknown couple in an obscure village. But when Jesus comes the second time, He will appear with all the power and glory that are rightfully His.

God’s power will be necessary in His return, because His coming at that time will involve the defeat and conquering of all His enemies. “A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the

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Almighty” (Rev. 19:15). In His power, Christ will redeem His people and establish His rule on earth. With that power comes His glory. God’s glory is the manifestation of His perfection.

Jesus will mobilize a group of angels who will do the work of gathering believers to join Him in heaven. Christ refers to these messengers as “his angels” (v. 31), another fact that shows us Christ is God. Because the “good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations” (Matt. 24:14), Jesus will use the angels as “harvesters” of the faithful.

Trumpets were commonly used to herald the coming of the king, and the return of Jesus—the King of kings—will be announced “with a loud trumpet” (v. 31). We do not know when exactly the trumpet will sound announcing the return of Christ, but when it comes, we’ll know it. Everyone will know it. And for those who know Christ, that trumpet blast will be a welcome sound. Christ has come and we’re going home!

HOW DOES JESUS’ IMMINENT RETURN GIVE YOU HOPE?

DID YOU KNOW?

A few years ago our church added a trumpet player to our worship experience. One member said, “the sound was so regal.” While another proclaimed, “The church wants to sing the blues!” Trumpets have a beautiful story steeped in biblical history. Trumpets were commonly used to herald the coming of the king with great acclamation. In the return of Jesus, the King of kings, will be announced “with a loud trumpet.” This is likely a shophar trumpet made from a ram’s horn, which was used to signal Jewish Sabbaths and feasts.²⁹ It was also used to gather the Lord’s people together, as when Yahweh made His fearful appearance on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-20) and when the worshipers gathered on the mountain in Jerusalem (Isa. 27:13). Paul also referred to the blast of a trumpet to gather God’s people at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16).

What instrument would you love to play to welcome Jesus? Why?

LIVE IT

What areas of your spiritual life need reshaping so you can be ready for Jesus’ coming?

The second coming of Jesus is something worth your excitement. Jesus is coming just for you and other believers who trust and lean on Him. For centuries His second coming has been taught and preached with fear and trepidation. I want to challenge you to trust Jesus’ words about His coming. He is excited to come for you! As you wait for Christ’s return, shape your spiritual life by doing the following:

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- **Study the Word.** Read and study various translations on how Jesus described His second coming. Also take time to review commentaries to add depth to your study.
- **Talk to God.** Pray that Jesus gives you revelation for what He is expecting of you concretely so you can be ready for His coming.
- **Evaluate yourself.** Examine the areas of your heart that are reluctant to have hope and joy in Jesus’ coming. Work and check those spots and be ready!

DAILY READINGS

1. DON'T INGEST THE POISON // MATTHEW 7:15

In the late 1970's, Jim Jones and what was termed the Guyana tragedy gripped the headlines. This religious cult leader led many astray. Some 918 of his followers died in a mass murder-suicide by drinking cyanide in a flavored drink.³⁰ Sadly, these souls were fatally deceived. The tragedy in Guyana is an example of how cunning and convincing a leader can be as well as the power of his influence. Jesus warns that false Christs and prophets will surface and deceive many with their signs and wonders, even the elect (Matt. 24:24). Heed the warning from Christ and don't ingest the deadly poison.

Know God's Word and be on your guard against false prophets.

2. WAIT AND SEE // MATTHEW 24-26

When the COVID-19 vaccines rolled out, many were skeptical and when asked if they would take the shot, some responded, "I'll wait and see." We often take this approach with other matters, such as if we are going to go to an event or complete a task. That same "I'll wait and see" attitude is just what is needed when people proclaim to be the Messiah or spout false teachings and claims of His whereabouts. "So if they tell you, 'See, he's in the wilderness!' don't go out; or, 'See, he's in the storerooms!' do not believe it" (Matt. 24-26). God's Word assures us that when Christ appears all will know ... just wait and see.

Wait in the Word. Wait on the Lord. Wait and see His Glory!

3. THE BIG REVEAL // MATTHEW 24:29-30

Gender reveals have become increasingly popular with expectant parents. Excitement builds as family and friends wait for the sign of whether the new baby will be a girl or boy. Colored balloons and dessert filling or confetti cannons precede the

big reveal. These showings shrink to minuscule in comparison to Christ's glorious appearing. "The sun will be darkened ... the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matt. 24:29). Christ will come on "the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 24:30-31) announced by a loud trumpet. His big reveal will be like none other.

No need to guess. When Jesus returns, it will be the big, divine reveal of the day.

4. WAIT FOR THE LORD! // PSALM 27:14

Often on family trips the anxious child can be heard asking, "are we there yet?" Or when the evening meal is being prepared, the question becomes "is dinner ready?" We try to identify an event's precise moment of arrival or occurrence. Waiting with patience and relinquishing the need to know exactly when is an art in itself. With patience and expectancy we wait for the return of Christ. There is expectancy, which centers on God's will and timing, as opposed to expectations, which are based on our own will and desires. Expectation can bring disappointment while expectancy maintains the hope of things to come.

"Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the LORD."

5. SIGNS OF THE SEASON // ECCLESIASTES 3:1

Mathew 24:32 calls our attention to the fig tree spouting leaves which alerts us that summer is near. In the same way, the changing leaves signal fall has arrived and winter is soon to follow. Each season has its unique identifiers and purpose in God's divine design. This is significant because just as we can see the signs of the coming seasons, so shall we see the signs of our coming Savior. Trust the Word of God that reveals the signs. Trust the signs from God that reveal His plan. And trust the living God who will bring all that is written to pass.

"There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven."