

Signs of the Second Coming of Jesus: Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 24:29-36

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Second Coming

I. Introduction

This is a portion of a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples. He is discussing the *Signs of His Second Coming*. Today we'll consider part 1 (vs.29-36) and part 2 next week (vs.36-44).

It's Tuesday evening, just two days before the

betrayal and arrest of Jesus. He has just left the temple mount for the final time before his

crucifixion. He and his disciples have crossed the Kidron valley, and now arrived at Mt. Olivet, which overlooks Jerusalem.

Just a few hours earlier, the disciples had heard Jesus pronounce judgment upon the scribes and Pharisees by telling them that their rejection of him would result in their eternal condemnation¹ and even the destruction of the temple.²



Signs of the Second

Coming of Jesus

Part 1

Matthew 24:29-36

Hearing Jesus say that the temple would be destroyed was difficult for the disciples to comprehend. As they pondered all that Jesus had said, they pointed out to him how glorious the temple was, to which Jesus plainly told them that "*not one stone would be left upon another*" (Mt 24:2). This was, no doubt, very troubling to disciples, but it aroused their curiosity, which prompted them to seek a private conversation with Jesus.

¹ Matthew 23:33.

² Matthew 23:38.

After arriving on Mt. Olivet and sitting down, Jesus' disciples came to him privately and asked him two questions, "Tell us, when will these things be (i.e. the destruction of the temple), and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3). The disciples are curious to know when the temple will be destroyed and what will be the sign of his coming at the end of the age. The word '**coming**' here, is the Greek word *parousia* ($\pi\alpha\rhoou\sigma(\alpha)$), which means "to come, to be present at a particular place—'to arrive.'"³ "This term is used in theology to refer to Christ's second coming."⁴

Jesus then answers their two questions in what we refer to as **The Olivet Discourse**, which spans chapters 24-25.

Trials and Tribulations Must Come (vs.4-14)

Jesus begins answering their questions, with a broad overview of the time that leads up to his second coming. The second coming will be preceded by an increase in false teachers and false prophets claiming to represent Jesus, wartime disaster, natural disasters, apostasy of false believers, increasing lawlessness, lovelessness, and global hatred of Christians. Jesus encourages his listeners not to lose heart, because this is only just "*the beginning of birth pains*" (24:8). He calls for his followers to endure to the end and keep spreading the gospel, for Jesus promises that he will not return before the gospel is proclaimed to all nations (24:14).

The Abomination of Desolation (vs.15-22)

Jesus then goes into greater detail. The beginning of the end of the age started with the ascension of Jesus into heaven (Act 2:17⁵). A significant marker of the beginning of last days and the end of the age was the destruction of the temple (24:15-22). This is what Ben covered last week. In this section we see that Jesus has both a regional tribulation in mind (i.e. in Judea [v.16]) as well as, a wider global tribulation (i.e. "...no human being would be saved" [v.22]). Thus, we understand that the prophetic explanation that Jesus is offering entails *both a near fulfillment*, within the lifetime of the disciples, as seen in the destruction's of the temple in A.D. 70, but also in a *far future fulfillment*, stretching beyond the lifetime of the disciples, closer to the time of the actual second coming of Jesus.

The Great Deception (vs.23-28)

Jesus then again zooms out to a broad view (vs.23-28) explaining that the false Christs and false prophets will be exceedingly deceptive because they will also be granted the ability to "*great signs and wonders*" (v.24) that will lead many astray. They will also

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 192–193.

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 1092 Footnote 1.

⁵ See also Hebrews 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3.

falsely claim that Christ has returned in secret and solitary places, such as the *wilderness* or "*in the inner rooms*." Jesus clarifies that his second coming will not be secret, but rather it will be visible from east to west, just as *lightening* is visible all across the sky (vs.27) and as it's easy to tell where an exposed corpse is by the vultures in the sky (v.28).

The Coming of the Son of Man (vs.29-44)

In the next section, Jesus begins to give more information about the conditions that will surround his second coming. We'll consider this portion of Scripture both today (vs.29-36) and next Sunday (vs.36-44).

Our portion for this morning divides into two parts; 1) there will be signs in the heavens (vs.29-31) and there will be signs that point to the nearness of his coming.

II. Signs in the Heavens (vs.29-31)

Jesus now becomes more detailed in answering the disciples' question (v.3) about how to know "*the sign of your coming and the end of the age*." From the previous paragraph, the images of flashing *lightening* (v.27) and hovering *vultures* (v28) lifts our eyes to the heavens. It is signs in the heavens to which Jesus now turns. His second coming will not happen in private, as the false prophets claim (v.23), but rather in full public view. The *signs in the heavens* is the thought that leads us into this next paragraph.

²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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 with power and great glory. ³¹ 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.

Matthew 24:29-31 (ESV)

1. Cosmological Signs (v.29)

The first observation is that there will be cosmological signs pointing to the second coming of Jesus.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Matthew 24:29 (ESV)

Immediately after the tribulation of those days. "Those days" refers back to what Jesus just described in vs.15-28. The word "tribulation" (thlipsis $\theta \lambda \hat{\iota} \psi \iota \varsigma$) has already been used

by Matthew twice in this chapter (vs.9, 21) and means, "trouble involving direct suffering persecution,"⁶ "affliction; distress."⁷ Preterists see this tribulation as being fulfilled in the terrible siege of Jerusalem (i.e. France⁸) beginning in A.D. 67 and culminating in the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. However, this does not seem to fit with the language that Jesus uses. His language is global in scope ("...great tribulation, such as has not been 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." Mt 24:21-22) and transcends the trouble localized in Judea and Jerusalem in first century that attended the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Jesus speaks about danger to the life of every human being on earth. Though the Jerusalem destruction is certainly view, Jesus' words cannot be limited to that time alone. The "tribulation of those days" extends further into the future than merely the first century. Thus, the tribulation that begin in A.D. 70 will reverberate forward throughout time into the future and will greatly intensify before the second coming of Jesus.

Sun... darkened, ...moon will not give its light, ...stars will fall from heaven. This language reflects OT prophetic language⁹ and therefore many understand it to be merely figurative while others understand it to refer to more literal events since the NT does speak of cataclysmic events occurring at the end of the age (2 Ptr 3:10, 12-13 speaks of literal planetary catastrophe; Rev 6:12-14). There is a connection between the physical and spiritual realm. Paul points this out in his letter to the Romans when he says that "all creation groans" under the burden of the sin of man (Rom 8:20-22). A star pointed the wise men to the birthplace of Jesus and the sun went dark for three hours¹⁰ at this death. Thus, if some sort of cosmological phenomena was used by God to alert men to the first coming of Jesus and the atonement that he accomplished, then it should not surprise us if God would again use similar cosmological phenomena to draw

attention to the second coming of Jesus.

The powers of the heavens will be shaken. Note that this is "powers of the heavens," not of the earth. The second coming of Jesus will have its first effects in the heavens before it extends to the earth. Since Paul uses similar language to describe spiritual and demonic authorities (Eph 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16), it seems likely that Jesus is explaining that his second coming will be both earth-shaking and heaven-shaking. Both physical and spiritual realms

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 242.

⁷ Rick Brannan, ed., Lexham *Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

⁸ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 347.

⁹ See "Isa 13:9–10; 34:4; but also Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Rev 6:12." D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 505.

¹⁰ Matthew 27:45.

will be shaken when Jesus returns to earth. However, before the earth is shaken by his return, the heavens will first be be shaken.

2. Visible Signs to be Seen (v.30)

The second observation is that the second coming of Jesus will be a visible sign seen by all the inhabitants of earth. His first coming was not seen by all, but his second coming will be.

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 with power and great glory. Matthew 24:30 (ESV)

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man. This is clear response to the earlier question of the disciples (24:3). The debate on whether or not this refers to a sign pointing to the coming of the Son of Man or to Jesus himself as he comes, is lengthy. Chrysostom [A.D. 347-407] thought this would be a cross in the clouds. However, when Mark and Luke both¹¹ record this conversation, neither of the them mention a sign other than Jesus himself, so it seems best to conclude that the arrival of Jesus himself coming on the clouds is the very sign about which Jesus is speaking.

Then all tribes of the earth will mourn. The second coming of Jesus will be seen by "all the tribes of the earth." Long ago it may have been hard to imagine how this might have been accomplished, given that the physical return of Jesus would have happen at one time in one place, but now with cameras everywhere, this is not hard to imagine at all. When the second coming of Christ happens, the entire globe will see it.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. **Revelation 1:7** (ESV)

Not all be happy about the return of Christ. Many will *mourn*¹² at the second coming of Jesus. The arrival of him whom they have rejected will come with the certain knowledge that many have been wrong about Jesus. The one they rejected is the very one whom God has chosen and to whom He has handed over all judgment. As Paul said, "the times of ignorance is over" and the time to repent has now expired for the one whom God has chosen to judge the world has now arrived (Acts 17:30-31). Imagine the sorrow and sadness and mourning that will come upon those who thought that Jesus was only a fictional story book character but now realize he is the resurrected and reigning Son of God who has returned to judge the earth.

¹¹ Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27.

¹² This notion may be rooted in Zechariah 12:10.

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In the OT a cloud was often associated with the presence of God the Father.

- God led Israel out of Egypt in the form of a cloud (Ex 13:21).
- He descended upon the top of Mt. Sinai and spoke to the people in the form of a cloud (Ex 19:9, 16).
- When they set up and dedicated the tabernacle, God appeared to them in the form of a cloud (Ex 40:34-38).
- When Solomon dedicated the temple, the Lord appeared to them on that day in the temple in the form of a cloud (1 Kg 8:10-11).
- This image is the fulfillment of the vision given to Daniel.

Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

- In just a few days, after being arrested and as he is being questioned by the high priest, who demands that he tell them if he is the Christ, Jesus will say almost these exact words ("...I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" Mt 26:64).
- And at his ascension, as the disciples stood dumbstruck watching him ascend into heaven as "a cloud took him out of their sight," two angels said to them, "*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:9-10). The words of these angels accords exactly with the words Jesus spoke to his disciple here on Mt. Olivet.
- The point is that the second coming of Jesus with the clouds of heaven communicates that God is with him and that the two are coming together. "In other words Jesus' return "on the clouds" is the coming of Yahweh himself, both in the image of the Shekinah arriving and in the judgment image of the clouds..."¹³

¹³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 894

When Jesus returns a second time, he will come visibly, for all the world to see, and he will descend from heaven to earth "*on the clouds, with power and great glory*."

3. Loud Signs to be Heard (v.31)

The final observation about the second coming of Jesus is that it will not only be seen, but it will also be heard loud sounds that will mobilize angels.

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. Matthew 24:31 (ESV)

He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call. The second coming of Jesus will not be secret or silent, but very public and *loud.* Trumpets are rarely quiet. The whole purpose of the trumpet is be heard. Thus, the second coming of Jesus will not go unnoticed, but will be attended by loud sounds.

The first place we find a *trumpet* in the Bible is when all of Israel were called together at the base of Mt. Sinai to hear God speak the Ten Commandments to them. Ever since then the trumpet has been used to call together the people of God. As the people entered the Promised Land, the trumpet became a means of calling the people together for war against their enemies or to alert them of an attack.

Paul's description of "the coming of our Lord" (2 Thes 2:1) is so incredibly similar to what we find here, that there can be no doubt that Paul either read this gospel¹⁴ or was told of this discourse by the disciples (1 Thes 4:16; 5:2-6; 2 Thes 1:7-10; 1 Cor 15:52).

That Jesus "*will send out his angels*" points to both his authority and his divinity. They are "*his angels*," not God's angels. Jesus claims authority over the angels for *He sends* them out.

He has spoken this way before when he told The Parable of the Weeds (Mt 13:36-43). In that parable, at "the end of the age," the Son of Man "will send his angels" to remove from the world "all cause of sin and all law-breakers," and then cast them into the fiery furnace. This sounds very similar to what Jesus is teaching on Olivet. He taught the same in The Parable of the Net. In that parable, Jesus explained "at the end of the age, the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace" (Mt 13:49-50).

They will gather his elect from the four winds. The second coming of Jesus will be when he "gathers his elect" from across the face of the earth. The elect are those to whom, "before the foundation of the earth," God has chosen to be gracious and give the gift of salvation through their faith in Jesus (Eph 1:3-5). "From the four winds" means that Jesus will at this moment, gather "his elect" from all four points on the compass; north, south, east, and west. Jesus will not lose a single soul whom he and his Father have chosen to save. He will command his angels to assist him in gathering all of them.

¹⁴ Irenaeus (c. A.D. 175) claimed that Matthew's gospel was composed while Peter and Paul were both still living (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).

This passage says nothing of a rapture.

Summary: The second coming of Jesus will be marked by signs on earth (which we saw last week¹⁵) and signs in the heavens, such as the cosmological signs, such as in the dark sun, dimmed moon, and shaken stars. Then Jesus will come in the clouds with global visibility, in great power and glory, which will cause those who have not believed in him, to mourn with grief and sorrow as they know that judgment is coming. His second coming will not only be seen by all people, but it will also be heard by the loud sound of a divine trumpet from heaven along with the global activity of angels who gather the elect from across the earth.

III. Signs of Nearness (vs.32-35)

The final section finds Jesus teaching his disciples that there will be signs that point to the nearness of his second coming. If his words in this discourse are carefully considered, then his disciples will not be caught off guard.

³² "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. **Matthew 24:32-35** (ESV)

1. Physical world teaches spiritual lessons (v.32)

Jesus explains that there are lessons we can learn from paying attention to the physical world. One of God's purpose for the material world is to teach us spiritual lessons.

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near." **Matthew 24:32** (ESV)

Most of the trees in Palestine are evergreens, however the fig tree is not. It looses its large leaves in winter and then sprouts green leaves in the spring pointing to the delightful fact that summer is near. Jesus now commands his disciples to learn a spiritual lesson by having observed the physical world. Just as it can be know that summer is near by paying attention to the barren but now budding fig tree, so *it is possible to discern the nearness of the second coming of Jesus by paying attention to what he has just said*.

2. Signs are to be seen (v.33)

A second observation can be made from Jesus' teaching, signs are meant to be seen so that one can properly prepare.

¹⁵ See Matthew 24:5-14; 15-28.

"So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates." Matthew 24:33 (ESV)

When you see all these things. Jesus is saying all that he is saying so that his disciples can see what needs to be seen. Jesus expects his disciples to pay attention to all that is here teaching them.

"All these things" certainly refers, not to the second coming itself (v.30-31), but rather to everything Jesus has just said (vs.4-25) that will lead up to his second coming. He is referring to all the trouble and tribulation and grief that must take place before the gospel reaches all nations throughout the intensification of tribulation and global hatred of Christians.

The point seems to be that when you see things getting worse, don't lose heart for that is an indication that "*he is near*," even "at the very gates." The world may appear to be falling apart, but the tribulation and trouble that you are witnessing and experiencing are actually signs pointing to the nearness of the second coming of the Savior. The thought of seeing Jesus return and Christians being brought near to him, ought to give us encouragement. We cannot allow the apostasy of false believers, the hatred, and the increasing trouble to weaken our faith in Jesus, but rather as trouble intensifies, our faith also must intensify knowing that his appearing is drawing near.

3. Signs that wickedness will increase (v.34)

The third observation is that wickedness will increase, but that means that the time of Jesus' return is drawing nearer.

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Matthew 24:34 (ESV)

Truly I say to you. Some have stumbled over this sentence. Jesus is here calling attention to to the truthfulness of what he is saying, which he often does when saying something very important, but many have concluded that he lied. It may appear so because some take him to mean that all of these events will be completed within the lifetime of his apostles.

This generation will not pass away. By using this phrase, "*this generation*," it appears that Jesus may be saying that he will return within the lifetime of the disciples to whom he is speaking. If this is what Jesus meant, then he got it all wrong. The question is, what does Jesus mean by the phrase "*this generation*?" By saying this, is he referring to lifetime of his disciples? If he is, then we should expect his return to happen within their lifetime. Many have believed that this is what he means, and since he didn't return within their lifetime, then he was wrong in this prediction. Did Jesus get the timing of his return wrong?

I do not think so for several reasons, the least of which is that in the very next sentence Jesus declares, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of *heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only*" (v.36). So would Jesus make a prediction regarding a time of his return that even he—in his humanity—did not know? No, he would not. So what does Jesus mean by saying, "*This generation will not pass away until all these things take place*?"

Whenever you find a perplexing phrase in Scripture, it is always wise to look elsewhere in the context to see if the word or phrase is used and see how it is used there and ask if that can shed light on understanding it here. When we do this, we discover that Jesus had used almost the exact same phrase just a few hours earlier when he was concluding his condemnation of the rebellious scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 23:34-36 (ESV) ³⁴ Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, ³⁵ so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ³⁶ Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

There that phrase is, almost exactly as we find it in 24:34. Here, in 23:36, Jesus is using the phrase "this generation" to refer to the entire collection of wicked people¹⁶ who have opposed God and killed his people, from Abel to Zechariah. In fact, when we look at the other five times¹⁷ this phrase is used in Matthew, we discover that it is always found on the lips of Jesus and it always refers to an evil, rebellious people.

Given this fact, let's assume that Jesus is consistent in his usage of the phrase and is referring to the same group of people. Thus, we must conclude that Jesus, in saying "this generation," is not talking about the lifetime of his disciples, but rather those evil people who wickedly oppose him. Evil and wicked rebels will not pass away until all the plans of God the Father come to pass.

Thus, Jesus was not predicting his return within the lifetime of the disciples. He is explaining that things will get worse and worse, and evil people will go from bad to worse, and then Jesus will return in visible power and glory. When he returns the wicked of the world will mourn, but the elect will rejoice because Jesus will gather each and every one of them to himself. Of this fact we can be certain.

4. Signs that are certain (v.35)

The fourth and final observation is that Jesus' teaching will outlast the world.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Matthew 24:35 (ESV)

¹⁶ Clearly Jesus included those to whom he was speaking, i.e. the scribes and Pharisees, because he said, "Whom you killed," but obviously those presently standing before did not kill any of the righteous people he mentioned, "from Abel to Zechariah." And yet, Jesus includes them in "this generation."

¹⁷ Matthew 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36.

We count on the regularity of the time and seasons. The earth is pretty solid, and has endured for a long time. However, Jesus is here claiming that his words are more permanent than the the ground we stand on. One day the earth beneath our feet and the heavens above our heads will pass away. "The sky will vanish like a scroll being rolled up and every mountain and island will be removed from it's place" (Rev 6:14). But, even though the earth will pass away, every soul will see that the words of Jesus will never pass away. The words of Jesus are the words of God, therefore, His words will never come to an end.

Do you believe this? Will you put your faith in the man who spoke such amazing words?

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, consider these three observations.

Jesus promised that he would return. Are you ready to meet him? He claims that the fact of his return is more certain than the existence of planet earth. As you imagine what it will be like to meet him face to face, in that moment, do you see yourself rejoicing or mourning? Will you meet him as Savior or as Judge?

The world will be shaken. The very stability of the planet and our solar system will be shaken to the core by the return of Jesus, but your faith need not be shaken. If your faith is in Jesus, then you need not be unsteady even though the world around you is.

Jesus gives signs that point to the nearness of his second coming. Jesus intends for his people to be prepared for his return. Are you seeing the signs and making your heart ready for his return, or are you ignoring the lessons that Jesus intends to teach? Do not ignore the words of Jesus. Surrender to him today. Make ready your heart for his return.

V. Discussion Questions

- 1. What is the parousia?
- 2. What are the signs of Jesus' second coming?
- 3. Can you describe what you understand to be the near and far fulfillment aspects of biblical prophecy?
- 4. What from this portion of Scripture do you find most encouraging?
- 5. What do you find most challenging?
- 6. What questions do you still have?
- 7. What qualities of Jesus' personality do you see from this portion of Scripture?
- 8. What did you learn about the second coming of Jesus?
- 9. Do you believe Jesus will bodily return to earth?