

# THE RETURN OF JESUS

Leader pages on pp. 128-131

**THE POINT:**  
JESUS WILL RETURN  
TO ESTABLISH HIS  
ETERNAL KINGDOM.

## MATTHEW 24:3-8, 29-31, 42-44

<sup>3</sup> While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus replied to them, "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these events are the beginning of labor pains.

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<sup>29</sup> "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. <sup>30</sup> **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.** <sup>31</sup> 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.

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<sup>42</sup> Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

### MEMORY VERSE

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### KEYWORDS

**Son of Man** (v. 30,44)—Implies the deity as well as the humanity of Christ. He always existed yet He was born of a virgin.

# HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE EVIDENCE OF CHRIST'S RETURN?

We experience major milestones in life that we often look forward to. For example, a graduation marks an accomplishment. The graduate has passed all the requirements and tests and is ready to step out into the real world!

The birth of a new baby is another such milestone. Parents embrace this joy with a touch of nervousness, hoping to make the right choices and to be good parents.

Retirement is yet another milestone. The thrill of "slowing down" to have more time for family, ministry, travel, and activities can be coupled with questions about finances and health.

Whether you experience all three of these milestones or none of them, one major milestone awaits humanity: one day Christ will return to earth to establish His eternal kingdom. Even followers of Christ can view this event with both excitement and trepidation. We might wonder, What will it be like? Life will definitely change, and for those with a relationship with Christ, it will only change for the better!

## Signs Point to Christ's Return // Matthew 24:3-8

Jesus' second coming probably gets argued about more than anything else in Christian circles. When will it happen? What will it look like? What are the details? Here's what we know for sure: Jesus died, Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus ascended to heaven, and Jesus is coming back. Matthew 24 helps us see a little more clearly what Christ's return means for us.

Jesus' teaching about His return was initiated by His disciples' questions. Jesus had just made a reference to His return (Matt. 23:39) and the destruction of the temple (24:2), two almost cryptic comments that piqued their curiosity. So they asked: "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (v. 3).

In the minds of the disciples, these two questions were probably the same, as if something as horrific as the destruction of the temple would surely be a part of the end of



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the age. Jesus' response, however, indicates these are two separate events. After all, the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., but Jesus has not returned yet. Jesus' response was full of unsettling things: wars, threats of war, natural disasters, political strife, and global strife. Jesus summed it all up with this: "All these events are the beginning of labor pains" (v. 8). In other words, it's going to get worse before it gets better.

### WHEN YOU READ MATTHEW 24:3-8, WHICH OF THESE THINGS DO YOU SEE IN THE WORLD TODAY?

Beginning in verse 9, Jesus also told of coming persecution, deceptive false prophets, and multiplying lawlessness. But through it all, the gospel will prevail! "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (v. 14).

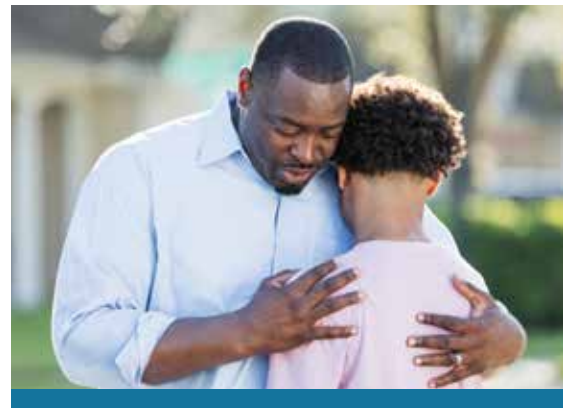
We rightly refer to these events as "the end times," but they also mark the beginning. Things like these wars and rumors of wars, the rise and fall of empires, the rumblings in the very belly of the earth also signal that dawn is coming. Yes, it is going to get worse, but it is also going to get better. As Christians read about the signs Jesus predicted, we should read them with hope because our salvation rests in Christ. We can do this because we know the One who is in control, who knew these things would happen, and who remains on the throne.

## Jesus Will Come Back Again //

### Matthew 24:29-31

When Jesus says what He does in verses 29-31, what He's saying is, "I'm going away, and things are going to look bad for a while. But trust me. I'm coming back." Jesus was not being facetious or speaking in metaphors. He wasn't even saying something new. The Messiah coming back to reign over creation had been talked about for thousands of years by that point, and His disciples would have known it.

In this passage, Jesus refers to Himself as "the Son of Man" (see "Digging Deeper" on this page for more on the Son of Man). The prophecies about the Son of Man returning in the flesh to establish His eternal kingdom on earth began in the Old Testament. Before Jesus was born, an angel told Mary



## DIGGING DEEPER SON OF MAN

In this passage, Jesus refers to Himself as "the Son of Man." This is a phrase that held a specific meaning in the disciples' minds: it would have reminded them of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. David, Ezekiel, and Daniel all wrote about the Son of Man and the kind of reign He would come to have. Daniel 7:14 is one noteworthy example of this. Daniel wrote that the Son of Man would be "Given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed."

**Based on these verses, how would you describe the kingdom and reign of the Son of man?**



that Jesus will “be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:33). It’s as if Jesus was saying, “Trust me. I’m going, but I’m coming back. And when I do, from that point on, everything will be better forever.”

### **BASED ON THESE VERSES, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE JESUS’ SECOND COMING TO SOMEONE?**

Living as believers means living with anticipation of Jesus’ return. Every generation has expected Jesus’ return in their lifetime. We can look around us and see that things aren’t going well, but that is not where we dwell because our hope is coming. He hasn’t come back yet, but He will—and when He does, it will be magnificent, unmistakable, and extremely real.

### **Be Ready for Christ’s Return //** **Matthew 24:42-44**

Jesus told His disciples that, from now on, they were to live ready for Him to come back, since nobody knows the exact day that will happen. Luke also recorded this sermon that Jesus

preached in Luke 12:35-40, and he explained four different word pictures that Jesus shared to help us know what living ready for His return looks like.

First, we should “be ready for service” (Luke 12:35), which literally means to “be dressed in readiness.” Think of firefighters on call in a fire station. They don’t wear their full gear all the time, but they prepare it in advance so that they can step into it, pull it up, and be out the door in record time. We should be alert, practicing what Jesus commanded, because we never know when He will appear.

### **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE ALERT AND READY FOR HIS RETURN?**

Second, we should have our lamps lit (Luke 12:35). Before there were switches to turn a porch light on, if you were expecting a midnight visitor, you would keep a lamp burning outside of your house. When you heard a knock on the door, you would be expecting it, and you could look out to see that they’d arrived. We should know He is coming for us and live with expectation of His arrival.

Third, we should be like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast

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(Luke 12:36). They wouldn't know exactly when he'd return, since weddings in that day tended to go on for days at a time. So they needed to be prepared to spring into action to aid him when he returned.

Finally, we should be like a homeowner who has heard that a thief is coming tonight (Luke 12:39). That way, we can be on guard and prepared to respond appropriately when he comes. Jesus has already told us that the enemy will be in tip-top shape, ready to snatch at God's people. Since we know our Master is returning, and we know the attacks will come, we can be prepared in advance for both.

### HOW CAN THESE VERSES GIVE US HOPE IN DARK TIMES?

Living as a people ready for Jesus' return affects everything we do, from the way we pray to the way we interact with those around us. Let us be a people who belong to a bigger kingdom, servants to the Master of Creation, always on our guard and ready at a moment's notice to enter into the glorious victory our King has promised He will bring.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Our slave ancestors looked forward to heaven and Christ's return. The slave experience in America was filled with unimaginable suffering, back-breaking labor, and ridiculously unfair treatment. But the slaves were resilient, finding strength to fight the good fight in hopes their children and grandchildren would experience better. Scriptures like John 14:2-3 assured them Jesus was preparing a heavenly home for them. A better life beyond this world gave them hope to face each day's challenges, making the present bearable. A heavenly home, victory, and a reward no human master could take away—that was good news! That is the message of the spiritual “Soon-a Will Be Done.”

Soon-a will be done a-with the troubles of the world

Troubles of the world, troubles of the world  
Soon-a will be done a-with the troubles of the world

Goin' home to live with God.<sup>14</sup>

**How would you describe the emotions of slaves who had hope in Christ's return?**

## LIVE IT

### How should believers live as we wait on the return of Christ?

Jesus told us that nobody knows the hour when He will return. He has, however, described some of the things that will take place as a warning of His impending arrival. So we had better get ready. The best time to begin preparing is today; now, right this second. Here are some practical steps we can take to begin living prepared for Christ's return.

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- **Prepare.** Thank Jesus for being trustworthy to return for us and for the Holy Spirit to help you live a life of wisdom and readiness.
- **Dress.** Read Ephesians 6:10-18 in your Bible. Underline each article of spiritual armor mentioned in the passage. For each of them, answer: What does it look like for me to put this on?
- **Equip.** If Jesus came back right this second, how pleased would He be with how you've represented His Kingdom? Identify someone in your life that you have tension with, seek them out, and resolve it. You may be the only example of God's Kingdom that they see.



## 1. IN THE MEANTIME // ISAIAH 43:1-3

When telling His disciples about His second coming, Jesus explained it would get worse before it gets better. Life challenges, suffering, hardships, obstacles, and difficulties are real, but the Bible gives us assurance we don't have to face anything alone. In fact, the Lord says, "Do not fear ... When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you ... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior." At times, it may seem that we are drowning in our circumstances, but God promises we won't go under because He is our Lord and Savior.

**Despite what you are facing in this crazy world in which we live, take courage and be confident because God is with you.**

## 2. IT'S TIME TO GO // MATTHEW 28:18-20

We know Jesus is coming back, and He has given us marching orders until He returns: "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations ... and remember I am with you always, to the end of the age." We must go, even if it means going by ourselves. We must go, even if the timing isn't convenient to our schedule. The world needs to hear the good news of all Jesus has done for us, and we must avoid the temptation to procrastinate, putting off for tomorrow what we know Christ wants us to prioritize for today. We have the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

**So let's quit stalling; it's time to go!**

## 3. GET OUT OF THE HOLY HUDDLE // ACTS 15:12-18

If all the people with whom we associate are just like us, then it's time to get out of the holy huddle. If we don't know anyone who is unsaved, it's time to get out of the holy huddle. Otherwise, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that God is always at work, and He wants to use us to take the gospel to the world. Becoming an educator in a large, diverse, urban district, changed my life. I have met, taught, and worked with people from around the world. I had no idea that my school would become my mission field.

Might the Holy Spirit be nudging you out of your circle of comfort?

**May we be empowered to discern what God is doing beyond our little bubble and join Him where He is working.**

## 4. HAVE YOU BEEN WITH JESUS? // ACTS 4:13

When we would go outside to play as kids, we would have a great time riding bikes, shooting basketball, picking honeysuckles and blackberries—whatever our hands could find to do. I remember my parents telling us to take a bath when we came inside. Why? Because they said we "smelled like the outdoors." No doubt, our body odor was evidence we had been outside. Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit, amazed the Jewish religious leaders, who could not deny one very apparent fact—"they had been with Jesus." Don't we all want this to spoken about us?

**Every Christian, by the way we live and interact with others, should prove to the unbelieving world we've been with Jesus.**

## 5. THROUGH IT ALL // 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-18

We have been studying core truths of Christian faith, discovering the character of God, the nature and work of Christ, who we are, and where we are going. The goal of this unit was to strengthen our faith so we will trust what God has revealed to us, regardless of what we face in life. Verse three and the chorus of "Through It All" by Andre Crouch sum it up well:

"I thank God for the mountains, and I thank Him for the valleys, I thank Him for the storms He brought me through. For if I'd never had a problem, I wouldn't know God could solve them, I'd never know what faith in God could do. Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God.

**Through it all, through it all, I've learned to depend upon His Word."<sup>15</sup>**



# STANDING ON TRUTHS: THE CASE FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

BY MICHAEL J. BROOKS

Our modern age has been called the age of relativity since so many deny absolute truth in favor of everything being relative to time, situation, or people.

The late Southern Baptist scholar, Lewis Drummond, noted, “... humanism manifests itself in forms such as the denial of external absolutes: ‘What suits me is okay’; ‘We are our own judges’; and so on. This humanistic spirit is integrated into all of life, including ethics, morals, religion, and one’s attitude toward the gospel.”<sup>16</sup>

Followers of Christ believe God’s Word must be the basis of our philosophy of life and practice.

Jesus insisted in a prayer to His Father that “your word is truth” (John 17:17). The apostle Paul exhorted young Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed,” and “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:14,16). The word “inspiration” means “God-breathed.” The Scripture Timothy learned as a child and revered as a disciple was transmitted by the Lord through ordinary human beings, using their unique education and personalities to record His Word. Christians insist the Bible reveals His truth for each generation. Situations change, of course. Our 21st century world is comparable to no other, but the human condition

remains the same. The truth of the Bible spans the centuries. The absolutes of His Word reveal God's exhortations, intended to bring fulfillment and abundance to those who are obedient, both to the original readers and to modern readers.

What are the most basic absolute truths in life as revealed in Scripture?

**First, all of us are broken.** The apostle Paul said it succinctly: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The God who made us gave us rules to follow, and these rules ensure our happiness. Alas, just like our first parents in Eden who rebelled against God, we believe God's commands are optional. Our wrong choices impact our fellowship with God and with one another. Playwright Eugene O'Neill said, "Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue."<sup>17</sup>

**Second, God's love for us is constant.** Though we've chosen to disobey Him, He continues to speak to us. The Scripture says He speaks to us by creation, by His prophets and by His Word. He speaks to us most clearly in His Son. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," Paul continued in Romans 5:8. In other words, God doesn't decree we "turn over a new leaf" or leave our evil behind; He seeks us in the midst of our disobedience to offer forgiveness and a change of nature.

**Third, God's way of salvation is solitary and unique.** Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). At probably no other point does the Christian gospel find itself in as much opposition to the tolerant society of today. Followers of Christ don't believe we're called to judge others—God is the judge of us all. But we're called to proclaim the truth Jesus revealed. And He claimed to be the Messiah, the anointed One sent from God (Mark 8:29), and the only way to God. C.S. Lewis wrote about Jesus, "Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."<sup>18</sup>

**Fourth, humanity is accountable.** When we accept God's forgiveness, we're instructed to live our lives in obedient service to God and others. He has given spiritual gifts to each believer for

ministry, and each gift is unique (1 Cor. 12:7,11). Christians should be on a quest to discover and use their spiritual gifts. We must avoid the tendency to compare what we can do with what somebody else can do, for this really plays no role in the principle of individual giftedness. Just as in inspiration, God does something divine through the uniqueness of individuals. There is work for all to fulfill. The old spiritual says, "If you can't pray like Peter / if you can't preach like Paul / You can tell the love of Jesus / and say He died for all."

A mentor said to our youth group many years ago, "God made only one Billy Graham since He needed only one. He made you, too, and you can make a difference."

Part of accountability is the promise that one day we'll stand before God when the judgment books will be opened. One Bible teacher insisted this reference to books is a metaphor since God doesn't need to write anything, as though He might forget! The teacher believed "books" refers simply to the mind of God. Whatever the case, on that day of accounting we want to hear words of commendation from the God that we've served with our whole heart.

It's absolutely true that living according to God's truth produces a wellspring of joy in our lives, and ensures joy in the lives of others because of the service we offer to them in the name of Christ.

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