

The Second Coming of Christ in Biblical Perspective
“The Essentials of the Second Coming of Christ”

Matthew 24

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

September 1, 2002 • Sunday Sermon

We are starting this series titled The Second Coming of Christ in Biblical Perspective. Many of us think of the second coming of Christ in various perspectives that have been established by various people, but we will try our best not to fall short of what the Bible says in this matter of the second coming, not to go beyond it, but to grasp it Biblically. In this study we will look at the essentials of the second coming. What essential truths do we need to affirm as we move forward into this?

This series will set up our study of the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse, but I really felt it was very important that we clear some of the clutter, that we establish some basics, in this matter of eschatology as we study the second coming of Christ. Eschatology is a big word but it means the study of the last things. Now, if we're going to study the last things, that automatically means we are studying prophecy because the only way for us to know what the last things are is if God has told us what the last things are. An elder in the first ministry I served in gave me the best definition of prophecy. He said prophecy is divinely given, prewritten history. It is something that God has told us will happen and He has declared the end from the beginning. So, God, instead of waiting for something to occur and let it be historically recorded, He has recorded what will occur before it has occurred.

We always have to be careful, in this matter of the study of last things that we don't fall short nor go beyond. There are indications the way that prophecy is given. Sometimes it is given with a shadow, a type, a symbol, or a hint and we can't over define, but we must properly define. The Lord has given us much information about the second coming so we don't have a shortage of information, but we still must not go beyond it or fall short of it.

Let's get started by looking into the essentials of the second coming by looking at Matthew 24. There are a couple of reasons I want to do this series and one reason is for a historic reason. I'm around a half century old and I became a Christian out of a drug problem. My dad and mom drug me to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and Wednesday night, and I thank God for it because the Lord used that to keep the tether even when I was walking hard and fast after sin. I grew up in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church and there were two things you knew would happen in this church. One is we would have at least five missions' conferences every single year and you would need to go forward in at least two of them, in order to survive membership in that church.

Two, is we would have at least one prophecy conference every year. It wasn't only the Christian Missionary Alliance Church for I think we can safely say that the evangelical church was highly absorbed in the matter of prophecy with the wars that had occurred, like WWI and WWII and the conflicts rising with communism and the atheistic state. There was a large fascination with the doctrine of last things. So prophecy conferences abounded. Also, a new system of eschatology had made its appearance on the stage of the church in the mid 19th century. It was called dispensationalism, with a particular scheme called pre tribulation, rapture of the church, secret rapture of the church, and then a pre tribulation rapture pre millennial view and that God actually doesn't have one plan in the Bible, as we have been teaching for

thousands of years, but two plans – a plan for Israel and a plan for the church and the church was a parenthesis.

This new teaching grabbed a hold of many people, and a Bible which became very popular in popularizing was called the Scofield Bible and many, many conferences, most of them pre millennium conferences, began to abound throughout the church and everyone began to study it. Now, in this particular view, one of the things that was made very clear is a Biblical truth that evil will become more evil and desperate as the day of the Lord appears. With such a statement about the evilness of people and the wars that had occurred, a very pessimistic view of what was going to happen in the world before Christ had come, began to abound, and the old views of post millennialism that had been very popular, that the gospel preaching would usher in a rule and reign of Christ and all the nations begin to disappear and this understanding that things were going to get worse. So the idea was not to worry about the world. Christians get out of the world, get your Gospel, understand your Gospel, lead people to Christ, disciple them, win them to Christ and this world is on its way to hell anyway. I remember one of the prophecy conference preachers explained to us that the world was like the Titanic going down and you wouldn't rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic or polish the brass, would you? So why mess around with this Titanic going down?

What happened is, as Christians begin to abandon the field of the arts where we used to have a presence, we abandoned the colleges and the academics where actually we started all the colleges. We abandoned the political sphere. We no longer define Christian statesmanship. All of that belonged to the world that was on its way to hell and all we needed to do was just evangelize, disciple and protect them until we get there as we rescue as many as we could. The result was the movement of removing all of the salt, the light and the leaven from society. So I believe our views of eschatology do greatly impact us because we are still suffering for it.

Here is how we are suffering for it now. As we are trying to reengage the world instead of reengaging many times in a Biblical way, we're reengaging with the secular weapons of the world instead of the Gospel weapons of the world, and how the Lord would have us fight the battle with divinely fashioned weapons. So I believe that this matter of eschatology in our own culture historically because of what was taught, removed us and is now trying to reengage us but we're not reengaging properly because we still don't have a right view of what God is going to do in the future and what He has revealed.

A second reason why we're doing this series, it's because of a reactionary reason. The reactionary reason is because the prophecy conferences were so numerous and many people began to see the effect that it was having the reaction was that nobody now preaches on the last things. When was the last time you heard a series on hell, on heaven, the second coming of Christ called in the Bible not the avoided hope but the blessed Hope, the truth that purifies the church? I'm not speaking about Briarwood because you know of my enormous esteem and respect for the previous pastor, Dr. Barker who I'm sure covered all these subjects. But I'm speaking of the church in general. So our reaction has been to avoid it, and now the world is discipling the church, because now we only concentrate on those Gospel truths that have an existential impact on the now, because that's what our world lives for is the now. So we're trying to show everybody the Gospel has got more now than the world does and so all we preach on is the now.

That doesn't make any sense because the Bible keeps teaching delayed gratification. Now is the cup of suffering for the believers until the cup of blessing forever more in the new heavens in the new earth and the blessing that we now have been granted is suffering in this

day. Everything is not now for what we have now is a taste. I never say that you have heaven on earth, and I never use the phrase you have hell on earth, because I don't think you have either. You have a taste of either, but you never have both. Heaven is too glorious for us to even imagine, but yet the Word has revealed things to us about it and hell is so awful that I can hardly think of it or mention it when I know of loved ones, friends and coworkers from places I used to be employed that are headed there before I went into the ministry and far as I know are still headed there. So we can't react by avoiding the doctrine of the last things. The Bible is full of information and we must teach and preach the whole counsel of God.

The third reason I'm doing this series is for a contemporary reason. For some reason there has been a proliferation of material, and many of the mistakes of the past are being repeated again, of going beyond what the Bible says and are pushing schemes into what the Bible says instead of just simply saying what the Bible says and leaving the rest of it for fulfillment to reveal. Sometimes we have made maps and charts that are far beyond the details of the what's coming in the future and what the Bible has revealed. A wrong map, even though sincerely given, will guide people astray.

A fourth reason why I believe this series is important is a Christological reason. My Savior has come into this world and He has been born of a virgin. He has lived in a suffering life with perfect righteousness, tempted at every point, like unto us, but without sin. He has died an atoning death on the cross. He has risen from the grave and ascended into heaven. All of those things of Christ have been done, except for one that He has yet promised and that is His present ministry of intercession will be consummated with His second coming. We need to know everything, not only what Christ has done, but what Christ has promised to do and His promises are sure and they are very practical for our lives.

The final reason to do this series is the Biblical reason and that is the Bible teaches the second coming of Christ. There is a lot material to cover here and we will be taking a few studies to cover some material that will set us up to cover that one very powerful book, the Book of Revelation which brings us to a consummate understanding, yet without total revealing of the details. Jesus said much about His second coming. According to Obadiah, the day of the Lord has two manifestations. There is the day of the Lord in His first Advent, when He came as Deliverer and the second is the day of the Lord in His second advent, when He comes to bring everything to consummation and judgment.

The most prolific statement Jesus made about His second coming, His second advent is found in Matthew 24 and 25. So that text will be our home base in the coming weeks. I just want to read the opening verses from this text. Matthew 24:1-3 says *[1] Jesus left the temple and was going away, when His disciples came to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. [2] But He answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."*

[3] 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 end of the age?" This is the Word of God.

Matthew 24 and 25 is what I called the key text for the second coming of Christ. It's not the only text and we'll look at others in this study as well. I want to start by giving you some basic things about this key text in Matthew.

First of all, it introduces one of the three key words about the second coming. It introduces the Greek word *Parousia* – the second coming of Christ. The disciples ask Him 'what is the sign of Your *Parousia* – second coming?' This word *Parousia* is used to talk about

other things as well but is mostly used for the second coming of Christ. The word means ‘Your coming’ or more than that ‘Your presence.’ It’s a word that would be used for royalty when it appears, where royalty has come. When is Your royal presence to be established? When is the coming of the King to be seen? They knew He had come for He had already taught them for three years and showed them how He came as a suffering servant. He showed them He had come to seek and to save the lost and that He was going to die. When is Your royal presence coming as King? Thus, they chose the word *Parousia*.

Here, a second word that you will find in your Bible that refers to both Advent of Christ – His first coming and second coming is the word epiphany. This word means His appearance – a sudden appearance, a bright appearance, a bursting appearance, or Your bright radiance. This is the word that is used in Book of Hebrews 1:3 when it talks about Jesus Christ in the Incarnation being the perfect stamp of God making visible the invisible, the radiance of His glory. This is also referred to in John 1:14 which says *[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* It’s what Titus 2:11 refers to when Titus is told by the Apostle Paul those glorious words, *[11] For the grace of God has appeared (an epiphany), bringing salvation for all people.* It has shown forth the brightness of His glory but the second advent is also an epiphany in the Bible. It is a sudden burst of the appearance of the living Savior, the bright radiance of God Himself, filling the whole earth.

The third key word used in the Bible concerning the second coming is the word apocalypse – the revelation of Jesus. Now He has revealed Himself in the first Advent, the Word Incarnate and in the Word Inscripturated, but yet this One will come still veiled in bodily form glorified and it is His revelation or His sudden manifestation – the revelation of Christ. Apocalypse is the word used in the Book of Revelation. Those are the three key words and the first one is introduced here in Matthew 24 so let’s now take a closer look at this text.

First of all, this text is the sixth discourse of Christ. In the Bible, there are six teaching sermons, ministries of Christ, either to the multitudes or to the disciples or to the disciples while the multitudes listen in. The fifth discourse of Christ is in Matthew 23 and He delivered it in the temple when He brought the lament of Jerusalem and the condemnation upon the Pharisees. This sixth discourse that follows the fifth one is distinct.

A second thing about this text, is of His six discourses, three of them are called the great discourses of Lord. Those three are the Sermon on the Mount, the sermon in the upper room or the upper room discourse and then this one in Matthew 24, called the Olivet Discourse. The other three are considered minor discourses but how can any sermon of the Lord be minor? It just refers to the length of material. The Olivet Discourse extends to even greater length than the others.

The third thing is important for this sixth discourse must be kept distinct from the fifth one. I want to show you from Bible why these need to be seen as separate even though they occurred literally within minutes of each other, when so many want to try and put these two together. I want to take you back to Matthew 24:1 which says *[1] Jesus left the temple and was going away, when His disciples came to point out to Him the buildings of the temple.* Now, where had Jesus been? He had been in the temple. What He said in the temple is recorded in Matthew 23 and it’s the sermon of condemnation upon the Pharisees.

It ends with a lament over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37-39 which says *[37] “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her*

wings, and you were not willing! [38] See, your house is left to you desolate. (Jesus may have been referring to all of Israel, but He was in the temple, which was Israel's house of the Lord.) [39] For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

He finishes with this lament after giving this word of desolation being pronounced upon the house of the Lord – this magnificent herodium re-fabrication of the temple that would astound people. Everyone talked about how astounding Herod the Great had refurbished this temple, and they cannot believe their ears at the end of that sermon. So as they're walking out of the temple, actually, it's not just all of the disciples but there are four spokesmen. One of them will be Peter, and then James, John and Andrew because this same text is recorded either in whole or in part in Mark and in Luke. After hearing the house of the Lord is being desolate these four start point out to Jesus how beautiful and magnificent it is. How can this be desolate because this thing will draw crowds forever.

Then Jesus astounds them, as they point out the beauty and magnificence of it, Jesus adds to His pronouncement of desolation. He says to them in Matthew 24:2, [2] *But He answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* They are standing in front of stones that are over a hundred tons, just one of magnificent size and beauty and He says they will be torn down. Not only will there be desolation, there will be a ravaging and a destruction of this temple. These buildings will be brought down to the very ground. That's what He said coming out of the temple and now they start on their little journey here but the Bible doesn't tell us something that has to happen here.

To get to the Mount of Olives they came out of the temple buildings through the eastern gate, down through the Kidron Brook, over the valley of Jehoshaphat, up the side of the Mount of Olives and first, they would have passed the Garden of Gethsemane that will hold a very important place in just a few days. When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, the Scripture says Jesus sat down. He took the position of a teacher and one disciple on behalf of the rest ventured to ask three questions – 1) When will these things be the desolation and destruction of the temple? 2) What is the sign of Your coming and 3) the sign of the end of the age? To prepare for our next study in this series read Matthew 24 and 25 and keep those three questions in mind. They're the key to understanding the text.

Do you see why the fifth and sixth discourse need to be separate? They're right on top of each other but one awakened the other, but they are separate. He is now having a discipleship discourse – a small group Bible study with 12 men, giving the Bible to them and the doctrine of the last things in response to their questions that they have asked him. The text itself is built around those three questions and the focus of the text is around the phrase that will be repeated five times in Matthew 24 and 25 – Your *Parousia*, Your coming – what is the sign of Your coming?

Before we go into this text what are the non-negotiable essentials about the second coming of Christ? The first essential is this, the coming of Christ will be personal and actual. You can go to seminary after seminary, school after school and they will tell you that there wasn't a real virgin birth and maybe not even the real Jesus. It's just a good story and certainly no second coming. We're just looking for the day in which the goodness that's represented by God will revisit the Earth and it's a feeling, a movement that we long for.

No, the second coming of Christ is not a feeling, not a movement, not a theory. It is a promised historical event that will be personal and actual. The Lord wanted to make sure we

knew this for sure through many texts of Scripture but for the sake of time I'm just going to show you one. I want to look at Acts 1. Here is the ascension of Christ. The disciples are longing to know the facts of the future and have asked Him these questions again. When they asked Him before He told them 'no man knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36)' and now they're trying to come in the back door now.

Acts 1:6-8 says [6] *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* [7] *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

In other words, the time of My coming should not dictate your life for it's the fact of My coming and I have work for you to do till I come so be about the work. Even if we knew that Jesus was coming back tomorrow, we shouldn't be doing anything different today other than what we ought to do before the Lord. Our lives ought to always be lived in the sudden expectation of His coming. Let's continue in the text.

Acts 1:9-11 says [9] *And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."* Here is a historic, actual, personal ascension of Christ, and His second coming will be personal, historical and actual.

The second thing that we need to know about the coming of Christ, it is universal and visible. Jesus says in Matthew 24:29-31, [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."* They shall see Him and it is for all the world.

Now, what else do we know about this? There are two other things I we know about this that I want to put together. The second coming of Christ will be, on the one hand, sudden and unexpected, like lightning, we're told but on the other hand anticipated and actual. Where would we see? It is found in several texts that I could go to, but I want to go to just one. All right, go with me. Let's look at I Thessalonians 4.

I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 says [13] *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep (have died). [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command (it's no secret), with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (the last trumpet – I Corinthians 15). And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

[5:1] Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. (No one knows the day or time the Lord will come and we don't need to concern ourselves about this.) [2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they (unbelievers) will not escape. [4] But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. [6] So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

He is basically saying that when Jesus Christ comes back, the unbeliever, it will take them unawares. It will take them just like the unbelievers in the days of Noah. It will sweep them away like lightning it will come – sudden and unexpected. For the believer, while we don't know the day or hour, it doesn't overtake us like that for we are looking to the blessed Hope. We are hastening the coming of the Lord. We are crying out with John as he said in Revelation 22:12, 'Come quickly, Lord Jesus.' While we don't know a day or an hour, we are waiting, anticipating and expecting, not slovenly but even as we do our labor, build our buildings, sell our products, clean our house, prepare our sermons, we are doing it unto the Lord, waiting and doing that which we want Him to find us doing when He comes – sudden and unexpected, yet at the same time anticipated, actual and embraced.

Another thing about this essential is that it is certain that it is undated. Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, *[36] "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."* Paul has also said this in the text we just looked at from I Thessalonians 4 and 5. As believers we don't need to concern ourselves about the date or hour but just that it is certain and undated.

I have a dear friend that said to me, 'I can't wait until Jesus comes.' I said, "Me too." Then she said, 'But I want to have a baby first. Here's the way I've solve this. As I tell everybody about Jesus I will also tell them that today is the day He will come and I will say this until I have my first baby because then He won't come if I keep saying He is coming today.' The only problem with that is you're saying the day, but you don't think He's going to come so that may be the day that He comes. We know the certainty of His coming, but we don't know the Day or the hour.

Finally, it is decisive and final. The second coming of Christ is decisive and final. What do we know about that day? Matthew 24:25-28, 30, 44, 25:31-33, 46 says *[25] See, I have told you beforehand. [26] So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. [27] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [28] Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

[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.

[44] Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

[31] When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. [32] Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left.

[46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Here I will be a little bit controversial. It is decisive and final. We don't have an indecisive coming of Christ for we have a decisive coming of Christ. It will be a final statement of God for there will be a resurrection of all and a great judgment of all. There will be the resurrection of His people, His church, who will be gathered up to Himself. There will then be the establishment of a new heavens and a new earth. There's no day of grace left. The day of grace is shut forever. As His people are gathered up to Himself, they will rule and reign with Him in the new heavens and the new earth. Those are the things we will find in the Scripture.

Here are a couple of takeaways. The first one is let's be careful but not fearful. This for probably more for me than you. I want to be careful and not be fearful. I'm somewhat fearful because I know out here there are pre millennials, post millennials, a-millennials and dispensationalist pre millennials, covenantal pre millennials and pan mil, there's everything that's out here. I want us to be careful, not be fearful and have our eschatology, not from necessarily conferences and schemes or things that have attracted us or even well written novels. Let's come to the Scriptures without fear.

The secondly takeaway is, the second coming of Christ is not a matter of speculative discussion. It is wonderful that we can sit around and talk about this for this is life changing. I John 3:3 says *[3] And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.* This hope that purifies when properly understood. In light of His first advent and the power of His grace, this is life changing.

The third takeaway is this we will be declarative where God is declarative, but we will not be definitive beyond what He has been definitive. One man took me to the Book of Revelation on this and he explained to me that this bird was really a stealth helicopter and this group of alliances were this and people have done this for years where there is this list of who the anti-Christ has been identified as. They were all wrong, but then again, they're all right because John says in I John 2:18 that many anti-Christ have arisen, even though the anti-Christ Paul tells us, has not come, the man of lawlessness (II Thessalonians 2:1-12). We're not going to get into some kind of inordinate, unbiblical numerology, but where God has used symbols, we will identify them. Where He has given prophecies, we will state them. Where He has given us these things to be understood in light of historical events like the days of Noah and the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, we will use the historical events to fill in the blanks. We will be declarative where God is declarative, we will be definitive where God is, but not definitive beyond that which He is.

When I was a little child and lived in a small house, my room was at the top which was a covered attic. It was one block off the busiest street in North Carolina known as Independence boulevard. At 2am I'd hear the sirens and we'd been taught in school about the nuclear explosions. I'd gone to the prophecy conferences that told me about how the second coming of Christ would be preceded by nuclear war and it would probably blow us up. All of the things had been filled in and I'd sit there in great fear.

Friends, the people of God have no fear of the Day to come. It is the blessed Hope. It is a glorious day when He comes for, we shall see Him and rejoice in Him for He will gather us up to be with Him for all eternity. There are probably some reading this today who are seeking and have not yet given their life to Jesus. That second Day is coming, but there was a day 2,000 years ago when He came into this world, died for our sins and has risen. If you come to Him who came for you, then you will be ready to go up with Him when He comes back for you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, Thank You for the moments that we could be together. Thank You for the privilege to begin to open up Your Word in this matter of the promises of our Savior's Royal Coming, His presence. We do sing with the gospel writers, 'The King is coming! The King is coming! Praise God, He is coming again!' With that certainty, we lift up our voices in praise, we live our lives with hope, and we ask that You would train us and mature us, that we would live as in the day, loving the things of the day while it is still today. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.