

The Second Coming of Christ in Biblical Perspective  
“Who is Taken Away and Who is Left Behind?”

Matthew 24:15-31

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

September 22, 2002 • Sunday Sermon

This is our fourth study on the Second Coming of Christ and we'll be looking at who is left behind. This is the Word of God. Matthew 23:36-39, 24:1-3 says, [36] *Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

[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. [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.’”*

[24:1] *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?”*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord abides forever. By His grace may His Word be preached to you.

I had the privilege of being born when my dad and mom were young, 18 and 17, in fact and that meant my grandparents were young because my dad and mom were born when they were young. I had my grandparents around along time when I was growing up. Both my granddaddies were 36. Both my grandmothers were 35 when I was born so we all got to be good friends. They were so young they wouldn't let me call them granddad and grandmother. I actually grew up calling them by their first name and people used to wonder how I was able to get away with that and it was because they told me to do that. My grandmamma Lois said to me “If you ever call me Grandma in front of people you're in trouble.” So I never did. My mom's dad and mom were my grandmother Mary and my granddaddy Henry. They were from a place called Forest City, North Carolina. I used to go up and visit. My granddaddy was the silent type and my grandmother was the talkative type. I don't know whether my granddaddy was the silent type by choice or just of necessity, but he was the silent type.

This story is legion in my family. They stopped off at a service station about halfway from Charlotte to Forest City and sometimes my granddaddy is a little forgetful. He went in, paid for the gas, got a Coca-Cola, came back out, got in the car and drove off and the only problem was my grandmother wasn't in the car with him. She actually got locked in the bathroom somehow. He got about 15 or 20 miles away and said “I noticed it sure was quiet in the car.” He looked around the car, she wasn't there and said, “oh no, she's been raptured and I've been left behind.” Just in case, he turned around, went back to the service station, she was still locked in the bathroom and he managed to get her out.

Why did the thought ‘she'd been raptured’ come to his mind? We're dealing with in some senses, these intricacies of there could be a pre tribulation rapture, which many of us have been exposed to quite powerfully through a series of novels called Left Behind. Actually, my

granddaddy would have never thought about that, or those books would have never been written until about 160 years ago. The idea that there was a pre tribulation rapture of the church prior to the tribulation, which is immediately prior to the second coming of Christ, was not taught until the mid-19th century. It was popularized in the Scofield Bible. It should be investigated of whether it is true or not? It obviously falls within the realm of Orthodox Christianity because it takes seriously the second coming of Christ. It takes seriously the resurrection and it takes seriously the judgment, but what would the Bible say about this? There's room for disagreement here among believers but I thought I would just go ahead and give you a couple of thoughts about it as we continue our study and what Jesus said about the second coming.

First of all, I'm doing a little bit of extensive review because five studies on one series and I want to be careful that they're all interwoven appropriately and we don't lose from one to the next. So let me remind you, the first thing about this sixth discourse of Jesus is that it is in the context of the fifth discourse of Jesus, the ending of which I just read for you in Matthew 23. In that discourse, Jesus made a statement that the Temple or the House of Israel, would be desolate and that generation would see all these things. Therefore, the temple would be empty. Now, that was an amazing thing to the disciples. So as soon as they leave, ask Him kind of a back door questioning of what He meant when He said 'Look how beautiful all these things these buildings are and the magnificent stones of 120 tons or more' and the unstated question is You're going to be saying this will be desolate? Then Jesus really challenges them by saying to them as He walks out of the temple, "not only will it be desolate, one stone will not be left upon the other for it will be utterly destroyed." So He predicted the temple desolation and destruction.

They go out a little bit further and the second thing I want you to see is the key to the sixth discourse is the question that's asked in Matthew 24:3 when they said 'Tell us when will all these things be.' All these things are referring back to the judgment upon Israel, the desolation of the temple and now, as He has informed them, the destruction of the temple. The disciples then immediately associate such a traumatic, cataclysmic event that there must also be with it the end of the age and the coming of Christ. Then they want to know what will be the sign of Your coming and the sign of the end of the age?

The third thing to see is that there is a threefold question that's being answered. When we go through Matthew 24:4 through Matthew 25, those are the three questions that are being asked. One is when will all these things be, i.e., temple, desolation and destruction? What is the sign of Your coming and what is the sign of the end of the age? So those three questions have been asked and we've been studying Jesus' answer to those three questions.

Let's affirm now what Christ has taught us. Number one, Jesus has taught us in response to what is the sign of the end of the age as He answers that in Matthew 24:4-14 through a series of statements that He says. The Disciples think when the temple is desolate and destroyed, that must of necessity mean the second coming in the end of the age and the first thing He informs them is that there is a span of time between the temple desolation and destruction and the end of the age. In other words, the desolation and destruction of the temple is not the harbinger of the second coming and or the end of the age. It's related to it, but not directly. It's not interwoven into it.

The second thing He tells them is that the presence of national conflicts, that is wars and rumors of wars, of natural catastrophes, that is earthquakes and famines, etc., persecution of the church, apostasy within the church, the killing of love and lawlessness – those six things, He

says are going to be used by false teachers to proclaim the end of the age. The amazing thing is Jesus warns about this and to this day people line up to buy tickets to get into the sermons where people preach that. Jesus says, these are not the signs. These are misleading signs.

The third thing that we've learned, that these six misleading signs are not signs of the end of the age, but they are the birth pangs that will be increasing with intensity until the end of the age. In other words, the things that are mentioned are not the sign of the end of the age, but they are the evidences of a sin, sick, broken world that is laboring to be delivered. So, these are not signs of the end of the age, but these are birth pangs that tell you there will be an end of the age.

Fourthly, we learned was there of necessity, will be an intervening period of time between the temple destruction and desolation and the end of the age. Why? Matthew 24:14 says, "The Gospel of this Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world is a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." So there of necessity, will be an intervening period of time between the temple destruction, desolation, and the end of the age. Why? It is to allow for the sign of the end of the age, which is the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations.

Let's go to the second question that they asked; when will all these things be? This refers back to the temple desolation and destruction. He gives them the answer in Matthew 24:15-20 which says [15] *"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), [16] then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. [17] Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, [18] and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. [19] And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!"* <sup>20</sup> *Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.*

The desolation and destruction of the temple will be preceded by the desecration of the temple and a time of distress will accompany it. This is a replay of the abomination of desolation prophesied by Daniel. Now the prophecy of Daniel has already been fulfilled with Antiochus Epiphanies in the second century, before Christ came – the desolation of the temple. It fits the timing in Daniel and everything. That's why the phrase 'let the reader understand' is put in verse 15. He's saying that there is going to be a replay of the abomination of desolation right before the temple is destroyed and desolated.

This, of course, was in 66 A.D. in the siege of Jerusalem when Titus came in and erected pagan worship in the Temple. Antiochus Epiphanies had come in in the second century and not only put a pagan altar, but had sacrificed a pig in the abomination of desolation. Now is a replay of it and He says 'when you see this get out of town and I love you so much, I pray it's not a Sabbath because there's obstacles to travel on the Sabbath. I pray it's not winter but don't go back and get a cloak, don't go downstairs, get out of town, because there's going to be a time of distress.' That time of distress is described for you in the history of Josephus. When Josephus writes of the Jewish wars, it got so bad in Jerusalem in that siege that there were even accounts of people eating their young. That was a great time of distress.

The third question they asked; what is the sign of the second coming? He answers that in Matthew 24:21-31 which says [21] *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. [22] And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. [23] Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. [24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. [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.

[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.

What have we learned so far in this series? The first thing is that the second coming will be sudden, visible, and immediately after the great tribulation. What happened in 70 A.D. is kind of a foreshadowing of what happens in the great tribulation but immediately after the Great Tribulation will be the second coming of Jesus that will be sudden and visible.

Secondly, the desolation and destruction of the temple and the resulting time of distress that happened in 66 to 70 A.D. is a foreshadowing of the great tribulation before the coming of Christ.

Thirdly, is that since the elect are being cared for so that they can endure the great tribulation, then it is obvious that they will be present for the tribulation and not removed by a pre tribulation rapture, and then they will be gathered up at the second coming of Christ. But the days will be such that they will be cared for. Why would he say that he would shorten the days for the elect during that time if they're not there during that time? It stands to me patently obvious about that.

Fourthly, the end of the age is after the second coming and it will be cataclysmic. The heavens and the earth, let me use the language of the book of Romans, will be rolled up like a scroll, the language of Peter says it will be melted with a fervent heat. It will not only be cataclysmic, it will be transformational because out of it will come great glory and majesty, a new heavens and the new earth dwelt in by the Lord Himself. There will be power, glory and majesty that comes at the second coming, and that immediately follows the great tribulation.

Fifthly, this is a prophetic Word because Jesus said, 'I've told you in advance' (Matthew 24:24). Why is it here? It is not for curiosity, but to equip, encourage and prepare the people of God. He is giving us the word before it happens so that you will be encouraged, you will be prepared, and you will be equipped to deal with what's yet before you. Let's continue in the text, where Jesus now gives us an illustration or a parable.

Matthew 24:32-35 says [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."

Jesus tells us here that we know the season by looking at the fig tree. Is it spring? For that is when the bud comes. Is it summer? For that is when it flowers. There are a couple of things we need to identify from this text to see what Jesus is trying to tell us here. In the King James version Matthew 24:33 does not contain the word 'He' but uses the word it. The word 'it' may be referring to the Son of Man but it is not a translation of the Greek word used here but an interpretation. What else could it mean? If it is translated 'it' it could mean the Kingdom

is at the door and I believe that's the way to translate it. The 'it' refers not to Jesus directly, but indirectly. It refers to the kingdom directly.

Here is why. There are two parallel passages to this. One is in Mark and one is in Luke. Let's look at the parallel passage in Luke 21. There is no Greek word for it in the Luke passage but there is a fuller statement. The same sermon is being given in this Luke passage as it is in this Matthew passage. Luke 21:29-33 says [29] *And He told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. [30] As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. [31] So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [32] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. [33] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."* 'The Kingdom of God is near' certainly means the King is coming, but it also means the Kingdom of God is near or upon you, when all these things happen. So I believe that the right translations of the Greek word 'it' used in the original of Matthew 24:33 refers directly to the Kingdom of God and indirectly to the coming of the King in the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Number two, what is all these things referring to in Matthew 23:34? It is the judgment of Israel that is going to come with a desolation and upon this generation. So, the Disciples question in Matthew 24:3 is when will these things happen? In the fig tree illustration Jesus says 'when you see all these things happen' which He is referring to the destruction of the temple and its desecration we are to recognize the Kingdom is near. It's at the door. The King is coming. The clock has been struck for the coming of the fullness of the Kingdom and the King at that moment.

Thirdly, we learn from the text; what is this generation? There are all kinds of discussion on this. Matthew 23:34 says [34] *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* I found eight interpretations of this generation. I'm not going to tell you all eight of them, but I will tell you four of them. The other four of them are just not worth telling you for those were guys just writing books just trying to think up something.

One of the four that give a worthwhile discussion says the word generation doesn't just refer to a period of time, a generation, like a generation in the Bible. Do you know how long a generation is in the Bible? It is 40 years, exactly, but sometimes the word generation is referring to a group of people or an existence of a people. So one person translated this verse as 'Behold, this generation shall not pass away until all these things take place' and says it refers to the human race. To me, that interpretation is a little redundant. It's very clear that the human race is going to be here at the second coming so why would Jesus say that when He's bringing everything to a consummation?

The second interpretation of this generation says it refers to the unbelievers. A generation of unbelievers will not pass away until the judgment. To me, that is also redundant.

The third interpretation says the word generation refers to the people alive when the great tribulation hits – that they will be here until the second coming and the end of the age.

The fourth interpretation is the one I believe. I can't get away from the word 'this generation.' I can't get away from the fact He said it back in Matthew 23:36 (*[36] Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*), in His fifth discourse to the Jews. So it seems to me 'this generation' refers to a generation of the people that were there when He spoke to them, that all these things will take place, within this generation.

Remember two things. What does all these things refer to? All these things refer to the destruction and desecration of the temple. He's not saying that everyone is going to be kept alive until the end, but basically these things will take place – the destruction of the temple will take place when? He said when the desecration comes, you know, the destruction is coming. Now He's telling you the desecration and the destruction will take place within at least a generation from the time He speaks this to the time this happens. Now, when is Jesus speaking? He is speaking this in 33 A.D. When does what He says begin to happen? It happens in 66 A.D. to 70 A.D. within 40 years, which is the generation that is listening to Him. That is consistent with what happened in 66 to 70 S.D.

Another thing from the text, is what is sure, what is eternal, what is passing away, and what is temporal? Jesus just told us heaven and earth will pass away. Let Me tell you what's eternal and sure, it's My Word. My Word will never pass away. But heaven and earth will surely pass away. The world, the earth and the heavens they're passing away and they're temporal. My Word is sure and forever. As I read and thought this, I wondered why it is I live so attached to what is temporal and passing away and not hungering and rooting my life in what is forever – the Word of God which shall never pass away. Now let's look at a summation that Jesus gives in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:36-42 says [36] *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. [37] For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [38] For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, [39] and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [40] Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. [41] Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. [42] Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”*

So, He brings a summation to these answering of these three questions in this text above. I want to identify three things here. The first thing is the setting of dates for the second coming and the end of the age is futile and impossible. So please do not buy a book that tries to say they know the dates of the second coming. Jesus uses this to affirm his real humanity. He tells us the angels do not know, men and women don't know, nor does the Son of Man, speaking from His humanity. If Jesus in His humanity not speaking from His deity, didn't know the date in the hour 2000 years ago, then don't listen to a preacher today that tells you he's knows the date and the hour. A man put out a book in 1987 called 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Come in 1988. One reason why I know Jesus is not coming in October of 1988 is that no man knows the date.

The second thing I want you to see from the text is Christ's second coming will be like the days of Noah. What was it like in the days of Noah? This is what the text says one, it was a day of unbelief. They didn't believe in those days. Noah preached righteousness, 'judgment's coming' but they did not believe. Secondly, it was a day of scoffers and mockers. Thirdly, it was a day in which business was usual. When it talks of giving in marriage, eating and drinking it's not a reference to gluttony or drunkenness or sin. It just means it was business as usual. Noah was out there building an ark on dry land. It's never rained and Noah says 'Rains are coming and judgment is coming. God is coming to judge everybody. Be ready, repent.' They said "Noah, what rain? What are you talking about?" I received an email the other day – remember an amateur built the ark, professionals built the Titanic. Noah is building that ark and they're just marrying, eating, drinking and everything – business as usual. The fourth thing is

that they had no understanding, no discernment. The signs are there, the preachings there, the preacher of righteousness is there but they had no discernment. That was the days of Noah.

Before I get to the third point from this text, I want to look at one other text from II Peter 3. Peter is picking up on this same thing – before the coming of the Lord, the days of Noah. It's just like it is all the other days. II Peter 3:8-13 says [8] *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

[11] *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13] But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

He's coming. There will be cataclysmic destruction, transformation, a new heavens, a new earth. What is everybody going to be doing while we're waiting for that? While we're looking for it we're hastening the coming of the Lord, how? We're sharing the Gospel, preaching the gospel to all the nations. What's the world doing?

II Peter 3:3-7 says [3] *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

What is the unbeliever doing during this intervening time from the temple destruction to the coming of Christ? They're being emboldened in their unbelief, no discernment, mocking, business as usual, saying 'what second coming?' They've escaped the notice of one thing. They did that before, and there was a judgment by water. They're doing it again and there will be a judgment by fire.

Here is one final thing. Matthew 24:39-41 says [39] *and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [40] Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. [41] Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.* Let's look at this in its context.

I know I'm going after the title of a whole novel series here. It'll be like the days of Noah. Who was taken away in the days of Noah? The unrighteous were judged, taken away in judgment. Who was left in the security and gathered into the ark of safety? It was Noah and his household. Matthew 24:39-41 says 'So it will be when the Son of Man comes... one will be taken and one left...' One will be taken, but not taken to safety. This isn't the rapture of the church. The one taken is taken to judgment, just like the days of Noah. Do you see that? In the days of Noah they were taken away to judgment. The days when Jesus comes, one will be taken, to what? To judgment and one will be left in the safety of the Lord, gathered up unto Him. Two will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, the other will be left. The one taken in

the context is not taken to safety, they're taken to judgment like those in the days of Noah were taken to judgment. It's the same language, same words. The day of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah and in the days of Noah it was business as usual. Then the judgment came and they were taken away into judgment. Noah was left so it will be in the days of the Son of Man.

Here are some takeaways and then will close. Number one is the temple desolation, destruction and the desecration started the second coming of the age or it started the clock ticking for the second coming of Christ and the end of the age. It's not the harbinger of it. It's not directly tied to it but as soon as that occurred, the next thing on God's agenda is the gathering of His people, then the coming of His Son and the end of the age. That's why the very first generation was preaching 'He's coming soon' – come quickly, Lord Jesus, and set their mind to take the Gospel to the ends of the world.

The second takeaway is we're required to repress and call to engage. What are we called to repress? Date setting and our setting. No man knows the date and it is a moral responsibility that God has laid upon us not to set dates, not to set the hour. What are we to do? Engage in being faithful and world evangelism.

The third takeaways is Christ's coming will find the believers left and ready to be gathered up into the ark of eternal Safety, Jesus Christ and the unbelievers will be taken away to judgment when He comes. So now I have a tribulation, a coming of Jesus, and I've been told He's going to take care of His people during that tribulation which tells me they are there in the tribulation and I'm told they're going to be left in safety and then He will bring them unto Himself. Then comes that rapture of the church as we're gathered up for His glory.

The fourth takeaway is Christ's coming closes the day of grace. There's no seven year extension. Christ's coming brings the end of the age. It closes the day of grace so work while it's still today for today is the day of salvation.

Fifthly and finally, one of three is in the history books that assures the last two. What do I mean by that? There were three questions asked of Jesus. One was when would the temple be destroyed? Jesus said it would be destroyed in a generation, and it will be accompanied by a desecration of the temple which is recorded in the history books as well as Scripture and it happened 37 years after Jesus said it would, within 40 years – a generation. That was in the history books and that tells me the other two are coming and I want us to be ready, to be ready in Christ, to be ready to endure no matter what the days are like for the Lord will be your protection. You may have to die for Him. Be ready. It matters not if we die for Him, as long as we die in Him, in Christ. But He will bring us through no matter what comes our way and when He comes, He will come when the Gospel has gone to the end of the world. Then He will come in glory and majesty, and there won't be any of us that will be lost or left. We will be gathered in by His blood and His righteousness, for He is our hope.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to study our way through this text. Lord, we want to be careful. We don't want to read in or take out or read it through our schemes and we don't even want to develop a scheme out of it. We just want to understand the truth – what You have done that foreshadows what is going to happen, what You will do, and Jesus is our hope. Finally, Father, because of this prophetic Word, I ask one thing and that is that we will ever be mindful that our Savior is coming. May we be found faithful even to the end for I pray this in Jesus's Name, Amen.