

THE KING'S FUTURE
MATTHEW 24:29-41

On January 1, 2000, the *Wall Street Journal* looked back at some predictions that had been made over the previous 100 years about what life would look like in the year 2000. There were a few errors in judgment:

- ✓ In 1950, *Popular Mechanics* surmised: "The housewife of 2000 can do her daily cleaning with a garden hose. Why not? Thanks to plastics, everything is waterproof."
- ✓ In 1966 *Time* predicted: "Remote shopping, while entirely feasible, will flop — because women like to get out of the house, like to handle merchandise, like to be able to change their minds."
- ✓ In 1927 Rudyard Kipling suggested that "By 2000, atomic-powered zeppelins will zip along at 300 miles per hour." But he was not the only one who overestimated travel changes. As late as 1975, Arthur C. Clarke, from the *People's Almanac* anticipated that "Cars without wheels will float on air, bringing about the passing of the wheel."
- ✓ In 1900 *The Ladies Home Journal* hoped that "'Strawberries as large as apples will be eaten by our great-great-grandchildren for their Christmas dinners a hundred years hence."
- ✓ In 1966 *Time* predicted that "By 2000, the machines will be producing so much that everyone in the U.S. will, in effect, be independently wealthy." Similarly, in a now oft-quoted article, Marvin Cetron and Thomas O'Toole (Forecasting International) predicted in 1982 that only 18 years later, "There will be shorter workweeks...25 hours by 2000. Flexible schedules will be the rule, with two or three people sharing a job and arranging their shifts."
- ✓ And in a prediction that didn't make it by 2000 but did by 2020 (unfortunately), in 1980 Alvin Toffler wrote in *Third Wave*, "Computers and communications can help us create community. If nothing else, they can free large numbers of us to give up commuting -- the centrifugal force that disperses us in the morning, throws us into superficial work relationships, while weakening our more important social ties in the home and community."

As we think about the future, it's good to be wary about making predictions. But there are some "predictions" that the believer can make about the future because God has revealed truths to us about that future. This morning we are going to consider one of those revelations: the future of King Jesus. From Matthew 24, we don't have all the details of what His kingdom will be like, but we do know this:

IN THE FUTURE, KING JESUS WILL RETURN TO EARTH AND WILL BE KING OVER ALL.

In this section, let's observe **four realities** about the future of King Jesus:

1. The King Will **RETURN** (vv. 29-30a)
2. The King Will Return with **GLORY** (v. 30)
3. The King Will Return for **HIS PEOPLE** (v. 31)
4. The King Will Return: a **WARNING** (vv. 32-41)

1. The King Will RETURN (vv. 29-30a)

- We are dropping into the middle of one of Jesus' longer sermons, called the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25); it is Jesus' response to the disciples' question in 24:3. It is also tied to Jesus' lament over Jerusalem and her rejection of Him as Messiah (23:37-38) and His promise to return (23:39). It is particularly about the nation of Israel at the end of the age and the fulfillment of the OT promises of the Messiah.
- In verse 29, Jesus notes the timing of His return — **after the Tribulation of those days**; the Tribulation was the topic of the first part of His sermon (vv. 4-28):
 - ✓ In verses 4-8 Jesus tells of the first half (3½ years) of the Tribulation and that it will be characterized by false Christs (v. 5), wars (vv. 6-7a), famines and earthquakes (v. 7b), and death (v. 7). [Remember that the church will be raptured prior to this judgment of God, 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 3:10.]
 - ✓ In verses 9-14 Jesus reveals the activities of the second half of the Tribulation: the Antichrist and his persecution of Israel (vv. 9-13) and the preaching of the Gospel in those days (v. 14).
 - ✓ In verses 15-28 Jesus reveals specific signs of the Tribulation: the emergence of the Antichrist (v. 15), the persecution by the Antichrist (vv. 16-20) and the greatness of the Tribulation (vv. 21-26). During these days, more than 2/3 of the Jewish people will die (Zech. 13:8).
 - ✓ **After** the completion of God's wrath and judgment against the earth (and Israel) Christ will return.
- At the end of those days, Jesus says, **the Sun will be darkened...**
 - ✓ This darkness of daytime (sun) and nighttime (moon and stars) is prophesied in Zeph. 1:15 and alluded to in multiple other OT passages as being part of the day of the Lord (e.g., Joel 3:15)
 - ✓ It is less certain what the **powers of the heavens** are — it could be a summary term for all the created world in the universe; or it could be a reference to spiritual powers, indicating that in both the physical and spiritual worlds, Christ is supreme and will manifest His authority and power.
 - ✓ What we can understand is this:

“...when the Lord withdraws the least of His power from the universe, nothing in it will function normally, and every aspect of the physical world will be disrupted beyond imagination. All the forces of energy, here called powers of the heavens, which hold everything in space constant, will be in dysfunction. The heavenly bodies will careen helter-skelter through space, and all navigation, whether stellar, solar, magnetic, or gyroscopic, will be futile because all stable reference points and uniform natural forces will have ceased to exist or else become unreliable.” [MacArthur]

- **And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky...**
 - ✓ After everything goes dark, then the sign of the Son of Man shows up.
 - ✓ There is much debate about what the **sign** of the Son is — ancient church fathers like Origen and

Chrysostom thought the sign would be a huge burning cross in the sky. Others say it is the trumpet announcing His coming (v. 31), others the *shekina* of God's glory, or the return of Christ Himself.

- ✓ It's impossible to say with certainty, but I lean towards the glory and shining of Christ's radiance: the heavens have been blackened to provide a backdrop for Christ's glory to shine most brightly.
- What is important for us to see is this: as bad as things are now in this world, they will get unimaginably worse (e.g., vv. 21-22). And then Christ will return and rectify all things —
 - ✓ That time will be a pouring out of God's righteous (just/right) judgment. He will do what is right against all the wrongs of the world.
 - ✓ The evil that we see in this world (personal sin, political injustice, cultural wars,...) are not victorious. All evils are doomed to failure when God will finally judge them all.
 - ✓ The evil of this world and the judgment of Christ loosen our attraction to this world and cultivate a deeper desire to live for Him and His coming.
 - ✓ While it is terrifying news for the world, the great news for us is that *the King will return!*

2. The King Will Return with **GLORY** (v. 30)

- When the sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens, ***all the tribes of the earth will mourn...***
 - ✓ These ***tribes*** could be the various people groups of all the earth.
 - ✓ But it is also possible that the term "earth" means "land," referring to the promised land of Israel, so that Jesus means us to understand that the ***tribes of the land*** of Israel mourn in repentance and are saved — which is the very thing prophesied in **Zech. 12:10-13**.
 - ✓ So the return of Christ will come with massive repentance of the nation of Israel so that she will experience the promised blessings of the OT (which we also saw in Rom. 9-11).
- Notice also that twice in this verse Jesus refers to the return of the ***Son of Man*** — Jesus' most common title for Himself, and clearly a Messianic title of kingship (**Dan. 7:13-14**), which He also quotes here.
 - ✓ When Christ comes both Daniel and He emphasize that the coming is ***on the clouds*** — the clouds into which Jesus ascended (**Acts 1:11**) are the clouds that serve as His chariot (Ps. 104:3) to return.
 - ✓ We don't necessarily connect the clouds with power and glory — but here it is: like an infinite lightning bolt from Heaven, Christ returns with tremendous ***power and glory*** — authority (**v. 27**).
 - ✓ His power is seen in the physical realm when His feet touch the Mount of Olives (**Zech. 14:4**).
 - ✓ His power is seen in the political realm with His conquering of the nations with a word (**Rev. 19:15**).
 - ✓ His power is seen in the spiritual realm with the salvation of Israel and the judgment of unbelievers (**Rev. 19:20**) and Satan (**Rev. 20:2-3, 10**).

- Every other glimpse of Christ’s glory and authority to this point has been “veiled” and brief (17:1-8). But then the fulness of His heavenly glory will be revealed. All will see and know Him as God. Though some will still reject and not honor Him as God, His coming will bring about the salvation of Israel, the great demonstration of His glory.

3. The King Will Return for HIS PEOPLE (v. 31)

- At Christ’s first coming the **angels** were the heralds of His advent; in His second coming, they are His gathering servants to draw His people to Him.
 - ✓ While the Scriptures don’t give extensive explanation, we understand that the angels are part of God’s instruments in judgment (13:41, 49; 25:31). Here they are also instruments of salvation.
 - ✓ As far back as Dt. 30:4, God promised to recall His people; the promise is reaffirmed in Is. 27:12-13.
 - ✓ The blowing of the **trumpet** was used throughout the OT to indicate a calling and a gathering (Ex. 19:16; Zech. 9:14). That is the very purpose of the trumpet here: God is calling **His elect**.
 - The **elect** could refer to the gathering of all people from all over the world that have been saved during the Tribulation.
 - It is probably better to understand that Jesus is giving specific information about Israel at the end of the age in these chapters.
 - ... In verse 30, it is most likely that Jesus is speaking of the salvation of the tribes of Israel; so here He is speaking of the regathering of His covenant people.
 - ... Because of persecution, the nation has been scattered to **the four winds** (all over the world; e.g., vv. 9, 16, 20); now they are drawn back by God.
- The history of Israel in Scripture is a history of suffering, disobedience, punishment, discipline, and exile. But none of those is God’s final word on Israel. His final word is that the promised King is coming for the explicit purpose of bringing His people to Himself. This is the kind of God and King Israel has — and we have. He is the kind of God who keeps and fulfills promises. They (and we) can trust Him.

4. The King Will Return: a WARNING (vv. 32-41)

- While the return of the King is good news, it is not good news for all; it will be terrible news for those who do not believe in Him. That is Jesus’ message in the parable and historical analogy in these verses.
- The **parable from the fig tree** is obvious:
 - ✓ When trees produce leaves and blossom spring is over, summer is here, and the harvest is coming.

- ✓ When **these things** (vv. 4-28) are observed, people should know that God is wrapping up the history of the world and that everything is coming to an end — **He is at the door** (about to enter the house) — He is close in proximity.
- ✓ Jesus affirms that certainty of His coming with the promise that **this generation will not pass away** (v. 34) — meaning that the generation that sees the coming of Christ (v. 30). *That* generation will not die off until Christ establishes His Kingdom.
- ✓ He reaffirms the certainty of that promise in v. 35 — every earthly kingdom will pass away and this creation may pass away, but His **words** (promise) will not die or fail. This *will* happen.
- ✓ When will it happen? **No one** knows — not the **angels** in Heaven, and not even the **Son** of God in His humanity (a verse that affirms the limitations He willingly endured in His manhood, for in His deity He certainly knows the time of His return). He particularly emphasizes that **no man** knows the time of His return.
 - A third-century clergyman, using the dimensions of Noah’s ark, speculated Christ would return in A.D. 500.
 - Pope Innocent III added the number 618 (establishment of Islam) and the number 666 (mark of the beast) and arrived at the year of 1284 for Christ’s return.
 - In 1415, the Taborites thought Christ would return after they defeated their German persecutors, so they engaged in battle. Things didn’t go so well.
 - William Miller proposed that Christ would return between 1843 and 1844. Nope.
 - In 1988 Whisenant Edgar wrote “88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988.” He tried again with a similar book in 1989. And 1993. And 1994. Nope.
 - I’d agree with one theologian who said, “Speculation regarding the time of the Second Coming is nothing less than blasphemy, for the man who so speculates is seeking to wrest from God secrets which belong to God alone.” [Barclay]
- ✓ No man may know the time of His return, but there *are* signs, and those who are alive in that day need to be attentive to them.
- The point that Jesus is making is that they must **learn** (v. 32) from the parable.
 - ✓ To learn something means to understand a teaching and then integrate it into one’s life; we understand that when we say, “he’s only book smart,” or “he has more learning to do...”
 - ✓ And what we are to learn from the parable is not *what day* Christ will return, but *how to prepare* for Christ’s return. So Jesus tells the analogous story of **Noah**.
 - In the days of Noah (Gen. 6-7), Noah didn’t just build the ark, but he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pt. 2:5), warning the people of the coming judgment. No one listened and everyone kept **eating and drinking** (engaging in ordinary daily tasks, unconcerned about the promised disaster) and **marrying and giving in marriage** (planning for the future...).

- **They did not understand...** = The door of the ark closed, the heavens opened and it was too late to make a change. That's the way **the coming of the Son of Man** (King, Dan. 7) **will be**.
 - In a similar way, **two men** will at that time be **working in the field** (preparing for the future and ignoring the warning signs of impending judgment) and one will be **taken** in judgment and one will be **left** to enter the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. So too with the **women grinding** (acting as if that day is just another ordinary day). One is **taken** in judgment and one is **left** to enter the MK.
 - ✓ Christ's coming will be sudden, final, and complete.
 - ✓ He will come in glory (v. 30). And He will also come in judgment.
 - ✓ So (v. 32), the lesson to be learned in that day is "judgment is coming; repent and trust in Christ." But the masses won't. And they will suffer an end that is similar to the unbelievers in Noah's day.
- While we, as believers, are not destined to undergo those days, yet there are several ways that we should respond to this:
 - ✓ *This is a warning to unbelievers:* there is no escape from the wrath of God. If you do not believe in Christ today, you will not escape any more than the unbelievers in that day will. You must believe in Christ as Savior, turning away from your sin and turning to Him as One for whom you want to live.
 - ✓ *This is an encouragement to believers:* we grieve over the proliferation of evil. Christ is not overlooking it; He is waiting for the right moment to return and set up His Kingdom. He *will* come.
 - ✓ *This is an exhortation to believers:* in light of Christ's return, how should we live?
 - We should live with boldness for the gospel — being unafraid to say, "Christ is coming..."
 - We should live with holiness of life — being conformed to the gospel that saves us (2 Pt. 3:11f).

CONCLUSION: In C. S. Lewis' book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan asks Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about the Lion, Aslan:

"Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or just plain silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you."

Is the King safe for unbelievers? No. But He is good, making Himself available to them; and He is the King who will return. That's His future. And it's a future we can also enjoy as His subjects.

BENEDICTION: Prayer — baptism and membership