

## **WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY** **(Matthew 24:29-35)**

In February of 2015 a photo appeared that is said to have “broke” the internet. It was the picture of a dress. In fact, if you were to open up the engine browser Google, type in “the dress,” and hit “Enter,” you could access numerous articles and images of the infamous dress.

Let me give you some back story. Back in February of 2015, a couple got married in Scotland. A week before the wedding, the mother of the bride found a dress at a local department store that she liked. She bought it for herself to wear to the wedding. Before leaving the store, she took a picture of the dress and sent it to her daughter.

The Bride posted a picture of the dress on Facebook. A friend of the bride put a picture of the dress on her blog. Within days, the photo went viral, and it became the most viewed photograph on the internet.

What generated so much interest was the fact that people couldn't agree what color the dress actually was. Some people looked at the photo and saw the dress as being blue and black, but even more people saw it as gold and white. Arguments broke out among friends and family members because they could not agree on the color of the dress.

The newly married couple cut their honeymoon short to fly to America to be interviewed by Ellen DeGeneres on her daytime talk show. During her opening monologue she revealed that she thinks the dress is gold and white, and a large segment of her audience roared their agreement, and when she admitted that many people see the dress as being blue and black, another group within the audience cheered loudly in support of that opinion.

Ellen revealed that they had the dress backstage, and she promised that she was going to interview the dress to find out the real story and the dress' real colors.

Today, you can read articles on the internet that provide scientific explanations as to why different people see different colors when they look at the same photograph.

I think something similar, happens when two people read the same passage of Scripture. A Church of Christ person reads the Bible and says, “It is quite clear that you have to be baptized in order to be saved.” A Baptist, however, reads the Bible and says, “It seems obvious to me that baptism is just a symbol of what has already happened in the life of a person who has trusted Christ as Savior and Lord.”

One segment of the Christian community reads the Bible and says, “Be careful. You can lose your salvation.” Another segment reads the same Scripture and says, “Relax. When you are saved, God gives you a gift that will never be taken from you.”

Nowhere is this phenomenon seen more clearly than in the return of Jesus and the end of the world. If you interview ten Baptists about those things, you might get 11 different answers.

Just as there is a real color to the dress (which happens to be blue and black), there is a true interpretation to biblical passages and a true answer to doctrinal questions. If someone views Scripture differently than you do, you ought not to question their character or accuse them of trying to deceive others. What you can do is politely explain

why you believe what you believe and patiently allow the other person to do the same.

When we come to the matter of last things, there are a host of different positions. I confess that the position I hold is a minority position, but I am seeking, with the Lord's help, to explain what it is that I see in Matthew 24. I do so with the admission that I may be wrong. When we get to heaven, if things don't happen the way I interpret the Bible to read, you have my permission to come up to me, elbow me in the ribs, and say, "You were wrong pastor." And I will admit that I was wrong, and we will get a good laugh.

It is my belief that much of what we find in Matthew 24 and much of what we read in the Book of Revelation has already happened. Much of what Jesus said would happen was not to be fulfilled in the distant future. No. They were fulfilled within 40 years of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

So, what do I believe has not yet happened? What we call the Rapture, the return of Jesus, and the resurrection of both the lost and the saved have yet to happen. By the way, I believe all three of those happen simultaneously. When Jesus returns, the dead will rise, and the Church will be caught up to meet Him in the air. After that will come the judgment, and heaven, the eternal city will come down to a redeemed and restored and recreated earth where the saved will live eternally with Jesus and one another.

With that in mind, let's go back to Matthew 24. At the outset, I said that everything in vv. 1-35 were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He said what He said in answer to the disciples' question, "When is the temple going to be destroyed?" What Jesus said beginning in v. 36 answers their question regarding Jesus' coming.

Consider the following table:

**Matthew 24:4-35**

**Matthew 24:36-25:46**

Specific signs

Vague signs

Run away when it happens

Be ready at all times

Christ knows what and when

Christ knows not time/hour

There are warning signs

Will happen unexpectedly

Abnormal times

Normal times (weddings, etc.)

Judgment on earth

Judgment in heaven

(J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*. p. 160)

The verses we will look at today are among the most debated in Scripture. Let's read Matthew 25:29-35.

The first things Jesus says is, "Immediately after the tribulation . . ." To what tribulation is He referring? He is referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. What comes next comes immediately. I wouldn't say that 2,000 years, which would put us close to our time frame is immediate. He also said that all these things would take place in this generation, the generation now living at the time He spoke those words.

What Jesus says in vv. 29-30 sure sound like the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. We know, however, that the world has not ended, and Jesus has not come back triumphantly. I am going to show you that those words of Jesus are referring

to the events surrounding and immediately after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

We do not think like a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish person who was steeped in Hebrews Scripture thought. We think like 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans think, and because we do, we often miss what Jesus meant by what He said.

When the OT prophets foretold the coming destruction of a certain place, they would often include great disturbance in our solar system. Such events did not happen literally, but they were a figurative way of saying, “Judgment is coming.” As an example, look at Isaiah 13:1, 10. This refers to the destruction of Babylon. Look also at Isaiah 34:4-5. This is what Isaiah said would happen when Edom was destroyed.

Isaiah was not the only prophet to employ such language. You can find similar depictions of cosmic disorder in the Books of Ezekiel, Amos, Joel, and Zechariah.

It is funny that we expect the Bible to speak literally when we don't expect that of ourselves. We might say, “That news report I heard was earth-shattering.” Was it really? Or we might exclaim, “That musical group really brought the house down?” Well, I'm glad to see that you survived. How many were crushed when they brought the house down.

Speaking as a Jewish teacher who knew Scripture well, Jesus was addressing them with language they would have readily understood. He was telling them, “God is really ticked off, and He is coming in a huge way to judge.”

Look at v. 30. I think this verse may be mis-translated by many versions. The Greek word for heaven could also be translated as “sky.” Context usually helps determine whether the word is referring to the place of God's abode or to our atmosphere. In Greek a clarifying word may be found far from the word being clarified or it could be right next to it. So, my question is, “Does the word *heaven* clarify where Jesus is, or does it refer to where the sign of the Son of Man is seen?”

The verse could be saying, “Jesus is in heaven reigning upon His throne, and the sign that He is there ruling is this sign you will see.”

Now, what is the sign? I believe the sign is the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Jesus is saying, “When you see this destruction take place, you will know that I am ruling and reigning upon My throne? And the tribes of the land living there in Judea will mourn.

Jesus' coming in that verse, as I understand it, is not Jesus' literal physical coming. That, to be sure, is going to happen, but this coming is a coming of judgment. The word for coming in v. 30 is not the usual word that is used to refer to Jesus' Second Coming.

Verse 31 sounds like something that would happen at Jesus' return, but let me give you a couple of things to think about. The word that appears in our Bible as *angel* really mean's messenger. It most often refers to a heavenly being that is available to serve God however He wishes. The word could also be used of a human messenger.

In the first two chapters of Revelation, we find seven letters that Jesus dictates to John, who wrote does this revelation from Jesus. Each letter is addressed to an angel of a particular church, such as the angel of the church of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and four more. Most interpreters believe each letter is meant for the pastor or the chief elder of each of those churches. In each case, the angel would be a human messenger of a

certain church.

Many believe that what Jesus is saying is that after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, He would send His apostles, His missionaries, His messengers across the world to preach the gospel and to bring His sheep into His fold. They are to bring into the Church those who God has called to Himself as they preach the gospel.

Beginning in v. 32, Jesus offers up an agricultural metaphor. We in Oklahoma are big wheat farmers. Had Jesus been addressing Oklahomans, He might have said, “When you see those green blades turn into golden stalks, and as though stalks begin to bow under the weight of those fully formed heads of grain, you know that the harvest is about to happen. In the same way, when you see happening what I have foretold, you know that I am coming in judgment.

Then, as we have said, in v. 34 Jesus answers the disciples “when” question by saying, “in your generation.”

He closes in v. 35 by assuring His hearers that what He has said will happen will most certainly happen.

Now, based on what I said, let me give your four take-aways about what Jesus does.

**With Power and Great Glory:**

## **I. JESUS JUDGES THE IMPENITENT.**

Throughout His ministry, Jesus called upon the people to repent. From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus preached, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Just several weeks ago, we looked at when Jesus said, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). Jesus longed for the people to come to Himself, but for the most part they did not. Jesus preached to great throngs of people. He ministered to multitudes, but at the end of His ministry, there were only 120 people who gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. The Day of Pentecost started with the church numbering 120 people. The day ended with an addition of 3,000 more believers. The church was 26 times larger at the end of the day than in was at the beginning.

As the Book of Acts continues, we see that the greatest growth of the church was among non-Jews while for the most part, the Jewish people rejected their Messiah. Judgment was inevitable.

For the believer, Jesus is your Advocate. He stands at your side and represents you before His Father. To the unbeliever, however, Jesus is your judge.

Consider what we read in John 5:22, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” Earlier in that chapter, the Jews were upset with Jesus and wanted to kill Him. The reason they were so angry is that Jesus was making Himself equal with God. He continued that theme by claiming that judgment was now His domain.

Do you want Jesus to be your Judge of your Advocate?

## **II. JESUS REIGNS OVER ALL CREATION.**

One commentator wrote that v. 30 is an enthronement text. It shows us that Jesus is now seated upon a throne in heaven. The sign that He is now reigning supreme is that judgment has come upon the city that rejected Him. If a people reject their King, they must be judged. The fact that the capital of the Jewish people was destroyed illustrates that Jesus is the King. As the King, He uses whomever He wishes to accomplish what He wishes. He can even use a Roman General named Titus and the Roman army he led.

We serve a reigning King whose Kingdom will never end. If Jesus is your King, then He can use you however He wishes. What is the Lord doing through you? What does He want to do through you?

## **III. JESUS SAVES THOSE WHO BELONG TO HIM.**

Just maybe, just maybe, He wants to use you as one of His messengers to go out into the world and bring back those who belong to Him.

I have a friend who lives close to our church. He used to be the manager of a used car dealership here in Enid. At his dealership, if someone buys a car on credit and fails to make timely payment, the ownership of that car reverts back to the dealership. One of his tasks as the manager was to go and repossess cars when the buyer quit making payments. I went with him a couple of times on repo calls. I would drive his vehicle back from the call while he drove the repossessed car to the dealership.

Jesus offers something far better than a used car. You can't fall behind on payments because Jesus paid it all. Jesus wants to partner with us. He wants us to go with Him to those who need Him. He will give them something better than a new car. He will give them a new life, an eternal life that they can't lose. That new life will never be repossessed because payment has been made in full.

Some people will never know what Jesus offers them if Jesus didn't use His messengers to tell them. God means for you and I to be messengers of this good news.

During my first week of seminary, it may have been my first day, I had a class taught by Dr. Roy Fish. Dr. Fish was an icon in Baptist life. Years later, I got to assist Dr. Fish with a funeral. His mother-in-law was a member of the church I pastored. When she died, the funeral was held at the church I served—the FBC of Stillwater.

During that first, class period with Dr. Fish, he gave a lecture about how we can reach the world for Christ. He had two key points. The first dealt with what he called “Total Penetration.” We are to go through all the world with the gospel leaving no people group untouched. The secret to achieving total penetration was the topic of his second point. The second point was about “Total Participation.” Every believer in every church across this globe should be involved in that task of telling others the good news of Jesus Christ. We will only achieve total penetration through total participation.

Jesus is going to save those who belong to Him, and He want to use you as one of His messengers.

#### IV. JESUS SPEAKS TRUTH THAT IS ETERNAL.

Every physical thing in this world is temporary. Nothing you can hold in your hands will last forever. You will wear a hole in your shoes and have to get a new pair. If you don't wear out your clothes, you will outgrow your clothes. I've got some pants hanging up in my closet just waiting for me to lose 15 pounds.

With proper maintenance, your car may run a long time, but it won't run forever.

Jesus identifies the one thing that does last. His words are eternal. They are eternally true and eternally relevant, and when He says something is going to happen, it is going to happen. It may not happen when you think it should or when you want it to, but it is going to happen.

Jesus promised that judgment was coming upon His people in Jerusalem and that judgment came. Next week we will start looking at another promise made. Jesus said He is coming back, and make no mistake, He will.

I close with a story told by Kevin Miller. It's his story so I am going to tell it with his words:

In April of 2008, I had to drive to Fort Wayne, IN, for work, so I went to Enterprise to rent a car. They gave me a big, brand-new, comfy Chrysler 300 to drive—and I loved it! In fact, I enjoyed feeling large and in charge so much that I blew right past the first tollbooth. You see, I'm not used to stopping for tollbooths, because I have an I-PASS in my own car—a little device that signals I've already prepaid my tolls.

After passing the first tollbooth, I thought about it: *Oh! This car doesn't have an I-PASS! But just as I started to worry about it, I thought, This car belongs to the rental-car company—not me. So they're probably responsible for any tolls. That must be what your rental money goes toward covering.*

When I got on 294, I drove past another toll, thinking, *Even if I am responsible for the tolls, there's only a few tolls between here and Indiana—maybe \$4 round trip. I'm sure there's some threshold where they don't even bother sending you a bill for the tolls. I mean, it wouldn't be worth their time to send me a bill for only \$4. Nothing's going to happen!*

After I returned home from my business trip, a month or two went by. Nothing happened—and I knew nothing ever would. But then, in October, I received a piece of mail that read: "Notice of Toll Violation."

I was right, to a degree. The Tollway Authority wouldn't bother sending me a bill for my measly \$3.90 in tolls. But when you add in a \$20 fine for every one of the 5 tollbooths I drove past, they *did* bother sending me a bill for \$103.90!

I about had a heart attack. They had me dead to rights. They had a photo of my rental-car's license plate. They even knew the exact lane number I was in. The fact that months had gone by and nothing had happened didn't mean that nothing was ever going to happen.

In a passage concerning the return of Christ, Peter says: "Get a clue, people!"

Just because the Lord hasn't come back yet, don't think for a minute that he won't! The Lord isn't being slow about his promise, as some people think. No—he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.”

Jesus is coming back. He said He would, and He always does what He says He will do. Let me ask you, “Are you ready? Is everyone in your family ready? How about your friends, and neighbors, and co-workers? Are they ready?”