

Do You Recognize This Man? (Part 5)

Christ Glorious Appearing

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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The popular, worldly conception of the return of Jesus Christ is essentially one of two emphases. The first, and probably the most widely held is that of Armageddon, and the end of the world—what we in the Churches of God would say actually precedes the return of Christ. We have the recent "Left Behind" series, and stuff like that, and most of that series takes place before Christ's return, setting it all up; also the Beast, and the False Prophet, and the Rapture, and that sort of thing.

But, what I am thinking of in this first scenario/emphasis is on Jesus coming back and stopping all the fighting and destruction. It is concentrated on Jesus' actions as a Conquering Warrior. He comes back, and He destroys all the wicked.

But, then what happens? I mean, this is exciting; this is cinematic stuff of action heroes and such. Many people hold this view without really being very clear about what the Bible actually says. Like I said, this is a popular idea and understanding about the return of Jesus Christ, where only the exciting things are emphasized.

And so, these people not really studying the Bible, not really knowing what the Bible says, are not sure about what happens next. Jesus comes back as this Warrior/Soldier/King, and He stops the bad guys, and then—things just go on as they were?

Some see it as the end of human history. They named it "The End of the World." However, we look at the end of the world in a different way—the end of this present evil world. There will, then, be a world beyond that. But these people, not really understanding God's word think of it as, "The End."

So then, what happens in this popular view is that all the Christians are whisked off to heaven to live happily ever after, while all the wicked are condemned to hell to roast forever. In this view, the aftermath of Christ's return is quite vague. This first view tends to emphasize the things that happen before He returns, while the second emphasis, the one most predominant among fundamentalist Christians who are looking for going to heaven and that sort of thing, acknowledges Armageddon, yes, but not so much the blood, and the natural disasters, and the misery of that end time, but rather about the rapture of the faithful, and the peaceful utopia that comes on the wings of His appearing. Of course, if you have noticed, this tends to emphasize the things that happen after He

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returns.

Like all of us in the Churches of God, some of these people believe in a Millennium—a real, genuine 1000 years of peace and prosperity with Christ as King of kings, and Lord of lords. And He rules during this time. And they imagine a life of ease, and calm. They cannot seem to get away from the traditional ideas that have come down through the ages about what life will be like in heaven, with everybody one with God. And they do not really think very much, though, about what will actually happen. They just have this vague sense that they will be one with Christ, and there will be peace and prosperity, but they do not have any idea what it will actually occur then. They do not think of life going on in the normal business and routines of life happening during this 1000 years. They just think of it as a time of idealist peace, and nothing more.

Now, there are other ideas too. Some believe the 1000 years to be symbolic; that they think that this 1000 years is only a figure for eternity. And so, right after the return of Christ, much like the first scenario, everything just goes to the new heavens and the new earth. And they are taken with/by Christ to heaven, and they get their harp, and their robe, and they live sublime eternal peace strumming their music I guess, while looking at Christ, or the face of God for the rest of eternity.

Anyway, this second one emphasizes the things that come after, more or less. These folks are looking forward to Christ's return, and just having that peace that comes afterward, and not really thinking a great deal about what happens to cause Him to return.

Now, we know from our study of scripture over the past 80 years (we should know it pretty well), that these two emphases have elements that are both right, and both wrong in various and sundry ways. In certain respects they are right. In other respects they are wrong. That is the way with all human derived knowledge. They get a little bit of good, and little bit of evil; a little bit of truth, and a little bit of error.

And so, these common conceptions of the return of Christ have bits of the Bible, and a lot of tradition that maybe is not true; maybe originally based on something seen in the Word, but having become distorted. These folks have come to their understanding, and you cannot blame them, because they are not being taught the truth.

However, in one important sense, which I will emphasize today, they are both utterly wrong.

Both of them fail to account completely for Jesus Christ's actual return. Remember I

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said that the first idea emphasized the events before He comes back, while the second emphasizes the events after He comes back. Both of them fail to account for Him actually coming back, and what that return is all about in its own right.

Why is He coming back? What is it for? What will He be doing?

So, this sermon will continue my on-going holy day series, "Do You Recognize this Man?" Today is part 5. The series' basic theme is that we need to understand the true Jesus Christ, and what He actually taught, not the misconceptions and traditions of men that have come down to us, but rather to see the things that He said that are actually in the gospels. Sometimes the things that He says do not fit our preconceived notions of what we think He said, or what He is.

Today, being that it is the Feast of Trumpets, I want to rehearse what Jesus Himself—notice this because I want to be very specific—I want to rehearse what Jesus Himself says about His own second coming in the gospel accounts. We are not talking about the Book of Revelation, or parts of the Old Testament, or other things that the Lord, the God of the Old Testament said, but rather the things that He Himself said about His own return while He was a human being. And, I want to emphasize in particular the reason that He Himself gave for His return.

Now it is my opinion that this reason has been obscured by the more exciting elements of His return. I think that we know this reason. But I think that it is also not exciting enough for some of you. It should be exciting to us, and I hope by the end of the sermon that you are excited about it. I think that the reason we are not excited about it is because in a particular word, which we will get to shortly, has a negative connotation. But for us, it should not have a negative connotation.

Now we realize that the return of Christ is written a little about on just about every page of the gospels. He mentions something about Himself coming back, or something about the Kingdom of God, or something along those lines that alludes to His return. So, we are not going to be able to read every verse on this subject in the gospels today. That would be impossible in the time allotted for my sermon.

However, I do want to hit the highlights of the overall instruction. And, we are going to do this by mostly concentrating on what He said in the Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24. These are the points that everyone knows, and today we will spend a good deal of time on the parts that people often miss, or ignore.

Now that you have your marker in Matthew 24, please turn to Leviticus 23.

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Leviticus 23:24-25 Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.'

Now, obviously, these are God's instructions to Israel about the Feast of Trumpets. There are not very many instructions in the Bible regarding the Feast of Trumpets. There is the chapter in Numbers 29 where you have the offerings given on the specific holy days. Otherwise, there is not a whole lot else in the Bible about the Day of Trumpets.

It is talked about as a memorial of blowing of trumpets. There are a couple of other places where the blowing of the trumpet is mentioned in the new moon, and that sort of thing, but this is one of the few places where it is mentioned.

Now it is called here, "A memorial of blowing of trumpets," in verse 24. From the Hebrew it more literally says, "A remembrance of shouting."

Now, think of that. Both the words memorial, and remembrance have to do with thinking about the past. That is what you do when you have a memorial service, remembering the past of the person who has died. When you have a Memorial Day, you are remembering something that occurred in the past, and honoring those who participated in it.

The Israelites, here, in Leviticus were only about 24, or 25 months out of Egypt. And God was telling them to have a day, once a year, on Tishri 1 and its new moon, to remember something that had already occurred. It was a memorial in which a day of much trumpet blowing had occurred. And they were supposed to remember those trumpets—to remember the blowing—to remember that shouting of the shofar, because that is what it is alluding to. This blast was a continual, rising blast on the shofar. So, here we are, just a couple of years out of Egypt, and they are to remember this day in which trumpets were blown.

Now, thinking about that, this brings it down to just a couple of occurrences, especially that they all had witnessed. Now the first that we would think of would be the shofar blowing when they came out of Egypt. I always refer back to the Ten Commandments Movie with Charleton Heston. If you might remember while they were assembling there to leave Ramses, someone was blowing a ram's horn, calling the people to their places.

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And something similar to this is very likely what happened, that they used the ram's horn to help move everybody along.

"Toot toot, you are up," and that sort of thing. "Levi, take this one! Judah, do this! Manasseh, you do that!" Who knows, maybe each particular tribe had their own call, and they were assembled that way. Perhaps. It is one of our possibilities.

Then you have the next big occasion of possible blowing of trumpets, and that would be about seven days later at the crossing of the Red Sea. This was probably a cacophony of shouting of trumpets and people. I am sure that they did something along these lines to help move the people along. In fact, in Numbers 10, it talks about using the trumpets in an orderly fashion to move, or stay, or whatever through the wilderness. I suppose that they could have acted at the Red Sea in this manner too.

But in both of these occasions, Exodus 12, and Exodus 14, the trumpet or shofar itself is not mentioned. And so, that leaves only one other event when it could have been. And that is found in Exodus 19 and 20 when God came down upon Mount Sinai. In this passage there are significant mentions of trumpets.

Please turn to Exodus 19. While we go through Exodus 19, I want you to think of the return of Christ, and start noting the similarities between the two events—little details that occur in both.

Exodus 19:10-25 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.'

When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain."

So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives."

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Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." But Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.'" Then the LORD said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them."

So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

And then after God gave the Ten Commandments,

Exodus 20:18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.

Now, in our English versions, the word trumpet is mentioned three times—in verses 13, 16, and 19, as well it is mentioned one more time in Exodus 20:18. So it is found four times in these passages quoted to you. However, in Hebrew, the shofar is actually mentioned only in verses 16, and 19 above, as well as Exodus 20:18.

Now it seems fairly conclusive to me that this is the event that the Israelites are suppose to memorialize on the Day of Trumpets. It is the only one that fits the criteria. At least in my mind, this is the one that we are to look back to. But this fits into our understanding of the Day of Trumpets as well if you think of it enough.

We know on the calendar the giving of the law at Sinai took place in the late spring, perhaps on the Day of Pentecost according to Jewish tradition. But in this case, the timing is not critical, which I believe parallels nicely with what Christ said, "We will not know the day nor hour." The law was given on the Day of Pentecost, but it was also a day in which God appeared to the people, coming down to them.

And so on this day, the Day of Trumpets, He wants us focusing on the trumpets which announced His appearing when God came down on the mount at Pentecost.

Now, were you ticking off the parallels between the two—the Sinai Appearing, and the Second Coming—as I read the passage? I want to go through the ones that I found. Who knows, but that there might be more. In every reading we often come up with something new.

These are the ones I found in the verses mentioned already, Exodus 19:13, 16, 19, and Exodus 20:18.

1. There is the long deafening blast of a trumpet. This is the most obvious parallel between the two events.
2. Exodus 19:10 is a command from God for His people to sanctify themselves—to set themselves apart—to make themselves ready.
3. Exodus 19:11 mentions the time element that they are supposed to ready for the third day, which accords with the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ.

Now, we also need to factor in here that Jesus also said that the time would be shortened (Matthew 24), and perhaps that brings us back into the third day. Who knows? I do not know. We must remember that He said that we do not know the day, or the hour. And so, this third day is very close to the three and a half years of that end time.

- Exodus 19:12 has a very strong warning that the disobedient will be put to death.

And, they were to be put to death with things that could be hurled—stones, arrows, darts—the people were not to touch the mountain, they were to be killed by some means wherein they would not be touched person to person. These people were anathema, you might say. And this accords with Christ's return—how does He kill the disobedient and who oppose Him? Zechariah 14 says that He does it in a manner without being touched, such as their flesh melting off of them.

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- Exodus 19:11 also has a phrase, "that He will return in the sight of all the people."

This is similar to Matthew 24.

- Exodus 19:16, there are the lightnings, thunderings, the cloud and smoke, and the people trembling in fear.

All of these are elements that occur when Christ returns.

- Exodus 19:18, there is a similar thing, in that there is fire, smoke, and an earthquake—such tremendous natural responses to the coming of God.

These are mentioned time and again throughout the Bible as evidences of God coming. When God comes He makes a statement!

- Exodus 19:19, there is the voice of God.

If you will remember in I Thessalonians 4, there is a voice of the archangel.

- Exodus 19:20, there is the main event of God coming down to the top of the mountain.

So in this case, it is Mount Sinai, while in Zechariah 14 it says that Christ comes down upon the Mount of Olives. And this next time, unlike Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives will be split in two.

- Exodus 19:22 is pointed at you and me; there is the command for the priests who come near to God to sanctify themselves under penalty of God's judgment.

We just had a series by John Ritenbaugh on the priesthood, and we know that we are a priesthood forming to serve under God and Christ, and what I think is so interesting about all this is that at that time, as far as we understand, the levitical priesthood had not been set up yet. But He said, let the priests sanctify themselves. It is very interesting.

I am sure that Moses was Himself acting as priest, and it is a good bet that Aaron would be a priest. But, it is interesting that it is stuck in here before the priesthood was set up.

- Exodus 19:24, there is a palpable sense of God's anger, and God's sternness.

He gets a little angry with Moses, "Away! Get down there! Make sure the people know

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that they are not supposed to touch the mountain lest I break out against them!"

- Exodus 20 is the giving of the law.

What is law except the basis of government? We know that when Christ returns, He will restore God's government to the earth, and the law will be a huge part of that.

I did not count them, but there are significant parallels to the return of Christ right here in this chapter. And with that background, we can then go to Matthew 24 and the gospels where Jesus prophesies on His return.

Now a lot of this is going to be review—nothing new. But, I think it is very interesting for us to see these two accounts side by side, seeing the parallels for ourselves.

Turn to Matthew 24. Obviously we know that the disciples had come to Him, asking Him about "when will these things be?" They were thinking about both the time when Jerusalem will be ripped apart stone by stone, as well as the end of the age. And He gets to both questions, but we will concentrate on the time of the Great Tribulation, and His return.

Matthew 24:15-16 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

What I want to pick up here is that you have, once again, a wilderness situation with mountains. Those in Judea will flee into the wilderness to the mountains. Now, where was Mount Sinai? It was a mountain in the wilderness. This is setting up a similar scenario.

Matthew 24:21-22 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong always added the Moffat translation to this verse to make sure you knew that God was talking about physical life, and not spiritual salvation.

Once again, we have the idea of the wilderness and mountains; a people in flight as

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were the Israelites; fleeing the evils of slavery to this world, typified by the Egyptians; we will be [are] fleeing this world as well, the evils of slavery to this world.

It will be a time of tribulation and testing. As it says in Deuteronomy God declared that He tested His people through the whole 40 years' wandering in the wilderness. He wanted to see if they would obey Him, walking in faith. Once again, we have another time of tribulation and testing at the end where He is testing His people.

And we have here, the promise that the days will be shortened, which is very pleasant to think about, because we had just been told that it was going to be the worst time ever, and the shorter that period of time is, the better for all of us—the whole world.

Like I said, perhaps this shortening of the time brings it back within the three days that we noticed in Exodus 19. I do not know. That is pure conjecture. We do not know. But, we do know that it is going to be so bad that God is going to have to intervene or all life on this planet would be obliterated. Men will become that crazed to go nuclear on everything, annihilating all life.

So, in any respect, we see a scenario that is being set up that is very much parallel to what happened at Sinai.

Now, leading up to verse 27, the verses talk about the people saying that Christ is either here or there, do not believe them.

Matthew 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Now, we have lightning again just as in Exodus 19.

Matthew 24:28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Now, this is one parallel, and one new detail. The parallel is the lightning. When lightning flashes, especially at night, it brightens the whole sky. You cannot help but to see it, especially if it is close. No one misses it when lightning streaks across the sky. It grabs your attention.

That is that same idea here. This is the image about lightning that He wants us to

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understand. He had just been saying that people would say that Jesus is out in the wilderness, or He is in the desert, or He is some secret inner room someplace, etc. Only the people of God know where He really is, and that He is waiting for the time to reveal Himself.

But Jesus said that this is not what His second coming is going to be like. His first coming He came to an obscure, oppressed people in Judea, and very few people knew He was there. But the second time, He says, it will be like lightning streaking across the whole of the sky from east to west. Everybody is going to notice this. It is not going to be something hidden, secret, but it is going to be open, and everybody in the whole world will be aware of it. They are going to know that something is happening. They will be able to look up in the sky and know that something big is happening. Could this be...?

The new detail, though, is that in verse 28 about eagles being gathered where the carcass is. The image is of vultures, buzzards, and other carrion fowl circling high in the sky because they know that something has died down on the ground, and they are ready to come in and devour it.

He uses the plural "eagles," and the idea he wants to get across to us is not two eagles, or three, but rather huge flocks of them because there is a bloody mess down on the ground. And they are ready to feast on it. He is giving the image of an ancient battle, where men have been hacked to pieces as these armies have clashed, and blood has been spilled on the ground, and the streams are flowing red with blood. Of course, even in modern warfare, these bodies would lie on the ground for long periods of time before they could be buried, if they were ever buried at all. And, carrion fowl of all sorts would have their fill, dining on the bodies of the slain for days at a time. This is the image that Jesus wants us to understand, that when the lightning flashes from the east to the west, that is what the coming of the Son of Man is like, up there in the sky, able to be seen by all, and there will be a battle royal going on at the same time—the biggest battle of all time on the face of the earth.

We know one detail from Revelation 14 that mentions the blood will be up to the horse's bridles. That is blood three to four feet deep. All the carrion fowl of the earth will be gathered for this.

This is the setting in which Christ will appear again. Gruesome? Yes. Grisly? Yes, very much so. But this is one of the signs that He has given us.

Matthew 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from

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heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Now the details in verse 29 are almost all entirely new. And they heighten the importance of this event—the Return of Jesus Christ—over the appearance of the Lord at Mount Sinai. This one is far more important. Not only is it more important in terms of our salvation, but it is important in terms of that one appearing back there in 1400s BC, which occurred to only the people of Israel in one small corner of the world to a couple of million people.

However, this appearance of Christ on earth is going to be worldwide. It is going to take place universally. Everyone on earth will see it. All the powers of the heavens will be shaken. So, this is not just something that occurs locally, or hidden, or in some other secret means, but rather it is something that everybody will see, and everybody will know. It will be obvious. They will be looking up in the sky, and being terrified at all the destruction they think is happening up there. What does it say? The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven—maybe a big asteroid shower? But, it will look like everything is being ripped apart.

In one place in Revelation 6, I believe, the sky appears to be rolled back like a scroll! What does that mean? Does that mean that it will appear that the sky is being ripped in two? Or folded up? Does that mean the clouds roil across the sky in a huge storm?

People are going to be looking around and seeing that something big is happening, and it is not just in one small area of the earth, but rather everywhere indeed. Not just worldwide, but universal. Every bit of God's creation is focused on this one event.

We read in Romans 8 last week about the whole creation is just yearning for this time to come. Finally it will come. This is an utterly unique situation, because He is coming to set the whole world straight, not just Israel.

Now, no one really knows for sure what the Sign of the Son of Man is. We can make some guesses. Catholics, and many Protestants propose that it is the sign of the cross, similar to what Constantine claimed to have seen in the sky. We would be loath to accept such an idea as idolatrous as the cross is in terms as how people look at it.

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Some suggest a cloud is the sign because that is how He ascended, and it says in Acts 1 that He will come back the same way. Perhaps this has support in Daniel 7:13-14. Others have thought it might be a star because was that not His sign when He came the first time? Could be.

What ever it is though, people who see it will understand that it is something that spells their doom, whether they understand the symbolism of it or not. But, they are going to look up into the sky, and see this sign, and know that the judgment day has arrived.

And then, they will soon see Christ following up this sign with His personal return, as it says here "in power and glory." Once again we have this idea that the whole world witnesses this event.

Of course, in verse 31 is the blast of a trumpet, when He sends His angels to gather His elect to Him. Now traditionally we have understood this to be the resurrection of the dead, and the changing into spirit all the saints who are still alive. And this parallels what is said in I Corinthians 15:52 where it speaks about this event at the last trumpet, as well as I Thessalonians 4:16 where it says that it occurs with the voice of an archangel. So this is very well known to all of us. So I do not have much to add about all that.

So now, we have gone through these verses, but have you noticed what is not there? It is difficult to notice something that is not there is it not? But has it crossed your mind that there is something not specifically here? The information is supplied elsewhere.

Now, I probably messed you up on this, because I talk so much about the eagles being gathered and the carcasses. But, specifically, Jesus never really mentions that He battles the armies gathered against Him. There is no mention of Armageddon, there is no mention of the events of Zechariah 14, descending upon the Mount of Olives. There is no mention of flesh melting off their bones. There is no mention of the Beast, or the False Prophet being there with their armies. All there is, here, is a very obscure and somewhat cryptic reference to the eagles being where the carcass is.

So, He acknowledges it in an offhand way that there is going to be a great battle at His return. But, He does not dwell on it for sure. He makes it almost so mysterious that we have a hard time figuring out what He actually means. And I think the reason for this is because He does not want us to focus on that. He gives us the sign, and moves on. He gives us a few more signs, but then moves on again. He gives us enough of a taste to be excited about it, and to know what is coming so we can keep an eye out.

I tried to remember through the whole of the gospels any place where Jesus says that

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He returns as a conquering King, or as a conqueror at all. And I drew a blank. I went through the gospels page by page, looking through all the occasions trying to remember others that I might have not marked, and there is no place that I found in the gospels where it talks about Jesus returning as a conqueror. Maybe it is there, and I missed it. If I did, let me know. But, there is nothing on the order of Revelation 19 where He mounts His horse, and the saints with Him, and He defeats the armies of the Beast and the False Prophet. It does not mention such in the gospel accounts. It is left to be in other places.

It does say in the gospels that He is a King, it does mention in the parable of the sheep and the goats, that He has come to judge the nations putting the good ones on His right hand, but it does not talk about Him battling these armies. I think it is very interesting.

He is not shown in battle. He does not show Himself in battle with the nations. Now, verse 30 mentions Him coming back in power, but it does not say how it is used. It just says that He comes back with great power and glory. His emphasis is elsewhere.

And the next two sections show just where it is.

Let us begin reading in Matthew 24:32. Here, He has given them the signs,

Matthew 24:32-39 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

He immediately follows His prophecy of His return with the parable of the fig tree, which is about noticing the signs of the times. He then prophesies that the generation that begins to notice these true signs will not die off before He returns. So once these things start occurring, we have a rather small window in the history of the world in which His coming will occur.

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Now a generation, how long does it last? I mean, before the last part of a generation dies off, sometimes it is 100 to 110 years of a very long lived generation. But we know that there are people, now, who are dying at age 116, and we say, "Wow." So, it could be as long as that.

Now an average generation lives about 70, or by reason of strength 80 years. So, that gives us a better window to look at. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong always thought that the signs began to be apparent once the world had the ability to annihilate all life on the planet through nuclear weapons, which happened in the 1950s. So, if we project out 70 to 80 years from 1950, that puts it in this current time frame where we live now. And, it runs to about 2030 or so. So, we are in the ballpark if Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was right.

So, if Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was right, if we understand that this is the way it is, then we should be looking and finding these signs of the times. This prophecy is for us. The parable of the fig tree is for us to understand, that summer is near, as it were. He coming is very close, and at the doors.

But He makes sure that He emphasizes several times in this parable that we just read, you will not know the day or the hour. You will know that this is the general time, but you are not going to know the specifics, pinpointing down to the very day on the calendar. We already found out in verse 22 that the time will be shortened. So, if we would take all the numbers that are in the Bible, and try to figure them out, that might give us an endpoint of possibility, but He says that it will also be shortened back from that endpoint.

So, we do not know. If we do not know, what good is doing it? What good is getting out the protractor and slide rule and figuring it all out, and taking up precious time that could be better spent on the things that He is telling us, as we go through here, are more important. Think about it. It is a futile endeavor. If even He does not know, but only the Father in Heaven knows, then why are we wasting our time doing this? It is a distraction.

Notice the signs of the times. Know that we are in the window. And do what? He also said that it would like the days of Noah were. This gives us another sign about what it is going to be like out there. This is not something that pertains to the church specifically, but it is something that we need to be aware of out there, the stuff going on in the world. He says that the flood when everyone was just going about their normal activities. They were eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. These are everyday things, and things we on special occasions—normal routines, and special times of life events. They will continue right up unto the end. People are going to be going along thinking that

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things are as they always were.

So, that is the attitude of the world—that things are normal. So it will be when Christ comes. The world will be going along blithely unaware that the momentous appearance of God is about to occur.

It seems odd to us. And the reason for that is because we are so focused on the return of Christ. We want it to happen yesterday! But the people out in the world are not focused on Christ's return, but rather on making money, gaining power, putting food on their table, giving away their daughters in marriage, or finding a mate for themselves, etc.

But not us. Christ is telling us that we should not be like the world. Your life should not be ho-hum hum-drum day after day, but rather be focused on something much greater. Obviously, we will be doing many of these things, but they are not supposed to be the focus of our lives. Our lives are supposed to be elsewhere, which is our next section.

Let us begin in verse 40:

Matthew 24:40-44 "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

That is a kind of grim prophecy, is it not? It can be taken two ways. But let us finish reading first.

Matthew 24:45-51 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, [the negative part] and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping

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and gnashing of teeth.

Returning to the one taken, and the other left in 41 and 42. They are rather obscure. And, I do not want to go into all the different ways it could be interpreted. But, the general drift here is that God's judgment at Christ's return may split the closest of relatives, friends, neighbors, and fellow workers. Whether one is taken like many think in the rapture, and the other is left on earth, is one way of looking at it. Another way is that the person taken is the one who is slain, while the one left is the one saved. The Greek words used do not give us a clue. That is why I say that it would be better to understand the general drift. When this judgment occurs at His return, it is going to separate even the closest of relationships. It could be two men in a field, it could be a man and his son. It could be a woman with her daughter. But, what Christ is saying is that when He returns, He comes in judgment. This is the point I am trying to stress in today's sermon. That is the word with the negative connotation up above. Truly, we should not think of it negatively.

He is saying that when He comes back it is going to divide people into two camps. How many times did we see this in the gospels? He says that when He comes He is going to separate the sheep from the goats; the wheat from the tares; the good from the bad; the righteous from the wicked; and the saints from the spiritually dead of this world.

So, He is saying here, also, that not only is a separation coming, but that this separation is going to be based on a person's individual character—his individual works. There is no such thing as group salvation. It is going to be one person and what he has done before God, and with another person with what he did before God.

It is not according to which church you attend, or the group you are in, but rather it is between you and your Judge. One will be taken, while the other is left.

So He says, "Watch!" You watch, specifically. You watch. Do not let anybody else do it for you. You watch, therefore, because you do not know when the time is specifically coming. You need to be the wise master of the house who has a good idea that we are in the window, as it were, and was watching for the thief when he came.

So He says for you to be ready. The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him. You are not going to know that point of time. So you have to keep watching. You have to keep being ready. You cannot just do it once, and let it go, because you would backslide, obviously. You must keep up this level of character growth right up to the end. What does He say in the other gospel accounts? He who endures to the end

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shall be saved. In your patience possess your own souls. You must keep going, keep enduring, keep watching, keep preparing, because you do not know the day or the hour. So, be ready!

He wants us to be like the faithful and wise servant who keeps things prepared for His return. It behooves us to be ready.

What I find so interesting about Jesus comments on His own second coming is that they are consistently spiritual in nature. He is speaking, not to this world, not to the Jews or the Israelites, but only to His followers—true Christians—His Church of God. His focus is consistently on being aware, expectant, faithful, and ready to receive Him upon His return, as a wise and faithful servant would.

And the reason for this is because the way Jesus Christ Himself presents His appearance as a judgment. When He returns, it is a time of separation.

Turn to Matthew 16 and we will see this once again.

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me [as a Christian], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

So, how does He present His second coming? As a judgment we are to be ready for. But notice, too, that He does not put it negatively like, "I am going to come, and I am going to get rid of all the rats!" What does He say? "I'm going to bring a reward to each according to His works."

Obviously, there has been a judgment made, and it has been a good judgment. That is why I said we need to think of this judgment in a positive way, not negatively. He is coming back to reward us eternal life with Him in His kingdom, with rulership, and the everlasting priesthood. That is what He wants to give us. He does not want to smash us with a rod of iron, or to throw us in the lake of fire. He wants to come back and reward us, and so that is why He constantly tells us to take up our cross and follow Him. Do not lose your life by pursuing power and wealth and all those things in this world. Give your life to God as a living sacrifice, and you will gain your life and more, eternally, in the

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kingdom.

That is what He wants us to focus upon—positive giving of ourselves. This is where we grow in character. This is where we produce the fruit. We prepare ourselves for His return by being ready for His judgment, ready to accept our reward from Him.

So look at it this way: He is coming back for us! This is His main objective and concern. He wants to welcome His brothers and sisters into the fullness of His kingdom. That is His chief goal.

Turn to Titus 2 and quickly read a couple of scriptures.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

From the very beginning He has had this day in mind when He would have a special people to return to and bring into His family in its fullness.

Turn to I Thessalonians 2.

I Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

This is how Christ sees it! It is going to be a time of great rejoicing! His family will be gathered together finally, being like Him.

Turn to chapter 3.

I Thessalonians 3:11-13 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

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And, one more in II Timothy 4,

II Timothy 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.

II Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

That is what Christ is looking forward to.

I know that there will be the bloody judgments of the unbelieving sinful world. We have the prophecies of that all over the Bible, particularly in Zechariah 14, Revelation 14, Revelation 19, and so on. We can be sure that Armageddon will occur. We can be sure that the blood will rise up to the horse's bridles. We can be sure that the Beast and False Prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire, and their armies will melt at a glance from the Lord. Those things will happen.

Yet, I think that in the great scheme of things, they are mere nuisances compared to the joy of God's positive judgment and rewarding of His faithful people.

Let us end today in John 14.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

And so we say, echoing John in Revelation 22:20, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"