

The End of the World

By Les Woodson

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Matthew 24:29-34
Preached on: Tuesday, June 6, 1972

Century House Evangelistic Foundation
1520 Manchester Dr.
Elizabethtown, KY 42701

Website: www.centuryhouseministries.org
Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/centuryhouse>

The Scripture today comes from the 24th chapter of Matthew, the words of Jesus. In this entire chapter, Jesus is talking about the end of the world and I am reading only this portion which applies to the thoughts of the morning. Beginning in verse 29,

29 Immediately after the persecution of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give light, and the stars will seem to fall from the heavens, and the powers overshadowing the earth will be convulsed. 30 And then at last the signal of my coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning all around the earth. And the nations of the world will see me arrive in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 31. And I shall send forth my angels with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast, and they shall gather my chosen ones from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven. 32 Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When her branch is tender and the leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is almost here. 33 Just so, when you see all these things beginning to happen, you can know that my return is near, even at the doors. 34 Then at last this age will come to its close.

I have concluded with verse 34 of the 24th chapter of Matthew.

The present world order will not end with man, not with any one man nor with any group of men, the present world order will end with a decisive act of a divine being. After the apostasy and the rebellion of that last prophetic week which we have been discussing now for these past months, the curtain will rise on what will be the most spectacular and the most glorious sight ever seen by human eye. In the flesh, the Lord himself will return in a cloud of glory to the earth. The Apocalypse puts it like this, "Every eye shall see him and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." He will be as visible when he returns to the earth as he was visible when he departed from it. The disciples stood upon the Mount of Olives and watched as Jesus ascended back into the presence of the Father and the angel said, "This same Jesus which you have seen go away will come again in like manner, that is, in the same way as you have seen him go."

There are always those with a scientific bent who have questions about this matter. If the earth is round, then how will everybody be enabled to see him at one and the same time?

A better question is: if television can cast the image of a man across the earth so that persons on opposite sides of a round globe can see that image at the precise identical moment, are we to assume that God who created the whole principle of television is unable to find his own methods whereby men everywhere can see Christ when he returns? It will be the same Christ as he whom the disciples touched and talked with and communicated with and ate bread with between the resurrection and the ascension. The returning Christ will be no more of a ghost than he was a ghost when he was here upon the earth before. In fact, John says when he returns we shall see him as he is, by which he means we shall never see him again as he was, despised and rejected and spurned and dying but we shall see him as he is now in heaven. The unknown writer to the Hebrews says he will be crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death which means that Christ will be a glorified Redeemer who will return to the earth to establish an entirely new order of existence. He is coming in regal splendor and every man will bow before him at his coming so that the words of Paul shall be ultimately fulfilled, "Every tongue shall confess that he is Christ and Lord and every knee shall bow before him." He will come to right the wrongs of our whole universe as the King of kings and the Lord of lords who alone has the answer to the human problem and as Paul has suggested, creation yearns since the beginning of time for its redemption and that redemption of all creation will be fulfilled in the coming of its King.

But there is another thing the Bible says about the return of Christ, that he will not only be visible to us but that there will be others visible as well. He will be accompanied by a heavenly entourage. If the antichrist during the last period of trouble upon the earth is to be surrounded by demonic spirits and fallen angels as both the Old and New Testaments insist, then also we must accept in literal fashion what the Bible says about the angelic host who will surround Christ at his return. The angels have always been involved in the conflict between good and evil in the universe and at the end of the age, the Son of man and Son of God will come "in his glory and all the angels with him." It will be the same retinue of heavenly angelic beings as those which were present at creation when the morning stars sang together. It will be the same retinue of angelic beings as those which were present at the incarnation of Jesus when the angelic host filled the heavens and from the light and illumination of God's Shekinah presence they said, "Glory unto God in the highest for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." It will be the same retinue of angels as those which ministered to him after his temptation in the wilderness. It will be the same retinue of angels as those Jesus spoke about when he said shortly before his death, "Do not worry about me, for if I so chose, I could call down to my defense 12 legions of angels to protect and defend me in this hour." Paul calls these angels "the mighty angels in flaming fire." And the purpose of the angels with the returning Christ the Bible says, is to gather together his elect from the four winds, that is, they will be like troops under the direct command of the King himself.

But there will be others with him when he returns besides the angels. The church glorified will also be with the returning Lord. Remember, that the church has been translated seven years or the last prophetic week in Daniel which amounts to seven years in prophetic talk. The church will have been translated seven years earlier, that is, the church will have been caught up out of the tribulation to be with the Lord in the air as

Paul describes it. At the conclusion of the seven years of tribulation, he will return with the angelic host and with the glorified church which is called all through the epistles of the New Testament "the bride of Christ" which is now being prepared for the marriage supper of the Lamb which will transpire in heaven during the seven years of tribulation upon the earth. Zechariah, the prophet, envisions this in this fashion, "Then the Lord your God will come and all the holy ones with him." Paul promised the church at Colossae, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." The redeemed will associate with the angels of God and they will be admitted to the palace of the King, both of which which are incredible thoughts to imagine. This is the relationship which has been reserved for the church by God for all eternity.

Now, the first thing I have said is: the Lord is going to return in a cloud of glory precisely as he said he would; exactly as the Old Testament prophets predicted he would; exactly as the apostles told us he would; in the same manner in which he went away as told to us by the angels themselves. The second thing we must note is: when he returns, he will bring with him both life and judgment for at his return, there will take place the resurrection of the righteous dead. Some will accept Christ as Savior and Lord during the period of awful tribulation under the preaching and witnessing of the 144,000 which we have looked at before in the book of Revelation and all of those who accept Christ during that period, will be martyred for their faith. They will be put to death in the same way in which Christians were put to death in the early days of the Roman empire. John saw this take place in this fashion, "A great multitude standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, cry out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb." And when he asked the elder in his vision who these people are, the elder identifies them as, "They who have come out of great tribulation and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb."

But when do these people rise from their graves? John, speaking of the second advent of Jesus says, "They came to life and reigned with Christ 1,000 years." Thus the martyrs who died during the tribulation period are those who will be raised from the dead at his coming. But what about the Old Testament saints? This is always a question which disturbs us. What about those who died in God as righteous people before the coming of Jesus? What about those who are not included in the church which is the bride of Christ? What of those who will not live during the tribulation period and have the opportunity to suffer and die for their faith? Isaiah promised, "Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise, O dwellers in the dust, awaken and sing for joy." But when? Daniel prophesies about this seven year final period, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life." So that if we understand the Old and New Testaments both as they predict this resurrection at the return of Jesus, they are saying that the Old Testament saints and the tribulation martyrs will be raised from the dead at the return of Jesus Christ.

This is what John in Revelation calls "the first resurrection" in contradistinction to the second resurrection which is the coming to life again of the wicked at the end of the millennium to stand at the final white throne judgment. Now, if I understand the New Testament, the New Testament says that the first resurrection takes place in three phases.

The first was when Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits for us all. The earnest or down payment of our immortality, the promise that we too shall one day be alive forever with him. The second phase of the first resurrection is when the church is caught up to be with the Lord in the air at the beginning of the tribulation period when the dead in Christ shall rise first to be with those who are yet alive with Christ in the air. The third phase of that resurrection is after the tribulation period when Christ returns to the earth to establish his eternal kingdom and the Old Testament saints and those who have died for their faith during the tribulation are raised as well. All is a part of one divine act, the first resurrection in contradistinction to the second resurrection, the resurrection of the wicked dead.

Now, I am aware that as I say these things to you, your mind gets in a whirl but I am giving you passages that I shall be happy when there is time at the close of the service to give you the places where these passages can be found so that you can read for yourselves and study for yourselves this whole panoramic view of the end of the world as given in Scriptures.

At this time, when Christ returns, the nations of the world will face divine judgment. The Jews will be called up to determine who among the Jewish race shall be admitted into the newly established kingdom of David and who shall be rejected. The scene is pictured by Ezekiel, "As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness, saith the Lord, so I will enter into judgment with you and I will purge out the rebels from among you and those who transgress against me, they shall not enter the land of Israel." But does not Paul proclaim in the New Testament that all Israel will be saved? Yes, he does but before that he says, "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendents." By which he says, "All Israel, all true Israel, all Jews who are completed Jews, all Israelites who have accepted their Messiah," and that's the true nation of Israel, "will be received into the coming kingdom."

The returning Christ will take up exactly at that place and moment in time where he left off when he was rejected and crucified by his people. He will even return to the earth at the exact spot from which he left it. Zechariah, 2,500 years ago, long before the ascension of Jesus from the Mount of Olives said this, "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward and the other half southward." Ask any scientist, any geologist, about the Mount of Olives and he will tell you that there are two high spots on that mountain and that there is a cleft in the rock between those high spots of fault. Ask any scientist today and he will tell you that this is a risky place to build any kind of edifice. Ask Holiday Inn chain of restaurants what happened to them when they sought to lease a parcel of ground on the top of the Mount of Olives for a new Holiday Inn and they will tell you that the Israeli government rejected their request because it was too dangerous. The fault in the rock between the two high points is widening and they do not know how long it will be safe to build on that spot. The Bible told us 2,500 years before the coming of Christ, the Bible told us that Christ would return and stand upon the Mount of Olives and that the mountain will be split in two. This is where he ascended. This is where he

will return. This is where the nations will be judged. This is where the kingdom of Israel will finally be restored.

Now, all of this means that there is a day of reckoning for the nations of the world and when the Bible uses the word "nations" it's talking about all nations except the nation which is God's chosen people of Israel. The word "nations," in the Greek the word "ethnos" or "ethne" in the plural, the "ethne" are all the Gentile nations of the world and this will be the time for the judgment of the Gentile nations as well as the restoration of the kingdom of the nation of Israel. John envisions that day like this, he says, "Christ will return on a white horse and there will be a sharp two-edged sword issuing from his mouth with which he smites the nations of the world." In the book of Proverbs, long ago we were told that God's word is sharper than any two-edged sword so we discover that the instrument of judgment is not going to be actually a sword for God does not wield swords, his weapons are not of a carnal or materialistic nature, but the instrument of divine judgment will be the word of God himself which is Christ revealed within the written word. That's why John Wesley said, "I am a man of one book," unius libri, a man of one book," and he urged Methodists to know this book because this is the word of God which will judge us when Christ returns to the earth.

This will be the judgment of the Gentile nations and the faith of the nations of the world will be proved by their attitude toward the Jewish people. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us what's going to happen at that judgment. He's talking about the nations; he calls them nations in that parable. It's the parable of the sheep and the goats which will be separated right and left on either side of him at the judgment and he says, "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was in prison and sick and you did not come and visit me. And inasmuch as you did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it not unto me." Who was he talking about when he spoke of his brethren? This passage has been lifted out of context and used to prove every conceivable thing but what did Jesus really mean? What was he actually saying? Anyone who studies his Bible carefully knows that the brethren of Jesus were the Jews and so he is saying to the nations at the judgment, "You will be judged on the basis of the way you have treated my brethren, for the way you treat my Jewish brethren is the same way in which you have treated me." Isn't it interesting that 4,000 years ago when God gave the covenant to Abraham for a nation that would be everlasting, God said to Abraham, "Those nations who bless you," the Jews, "will bless themselves and those nations who curse you, will curse themselves." That was a prediction of the judgment which Jesus talked about in this passage in Matthew which I just read.

There is one other thing that needs to be said about the end of the world and that is: it will be the end of the Satanic reign. The antichrist and the false prophet will meet their doom. At the battle of Armageddon which we looked at last Sunday, as the battle goes badly against the antichrist and the rebel nations of the world, the antichrist will see the appearance of the sign of the coming of the Son of man and he with all his hordes will attack the returning Son of God. But of what value is it to attack God with carnal weapons? None, so that the battle will be very short-lived. The Scriptures say, "They," the antichrist and his nations, "will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer

them for he is the Lord of lords and King of kings and those with him are called and chosen and faithful." Paul puts it like this, "The Lord Jesus will slay him," the antichrist, "with the breath of his mouth." And what is the breath of his mouth? It is the word of God. The word of God which we have spurned and rejected will be the weapon of man's destruction in his rebelliousness. The book of Revelation uses the word "capture" to describe what happens to the antichrist and the word "capture" means "unconditional surrender." Once he is captured, he will be, Revelation, "thrown alive into the lake of fire." Isaiah long ago called that place a place of burning. It's not Hades which is the place where the wicked spirits await the judgment, it is hell which is the dumping ground of God for all the refuse of the world.

Satan himself will be imprisoned. Lucifer, the old serpent, Satan, the devil and he is called by all of those terms in the Bible, caused war in heaven and was cast out and since that time recorded in the 14th chapter of Isaiah, he has raised hell on earth but at last he will meet his Captor. John describes it like this, "I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain and he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan and bound him for 1,000 years and threw him into the pit and shut it and sealed it over him that he should deceive the nations no more until the 1,000 years were ended." That simply means he is going to be confined to his prison; he will be allowed no more to attack the world of man. Jude says he will be confined to the world of evil spirits which is the world of his own kinship. Where is that? It is called in the Greek "abussos" from which we get our English word "abyss." It is called in the translation "the bottomless pit." It is not hell for Satan is not cast into hell until after the millennium, the 1,000 year reign of peace. At this point, he is imprisoned for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit and when John says God will bind him with a chain, the chain affirms the sovereignty of Almighty God. Now listen carefully: it is during that period of his imprisonment when he will not be allowed to molest the world anymore, that the King of kings, the Son of David, the heir to the old throne of the kingdom of Israel, will establish that throne in the land of Israel for 1,000 years and from that throne he will reign in righteousness and peace over the whole world.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we are so eternally grateful that you have reminded us again and again in your word and that you are reminding us over and over again in the events of our time that history is really going somewhere, that there is a divine climax to it all and that we can be in the stream of the Spirit as these events transpire. We want to be ready for that glorious day. We want to be prepared to enter into the kingdom with you, Lord, and if there is a doubt in our minds today as to whether we have made that commitment by faith, may this be the time when we make it in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.