

Matthew 24:29a – “Immediately after”

I. The “problem” of “immediately after”

This morning, we come to the main reason (within the text itself) that there has been so much confusion and disagreement over the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse. (Read verses 29-31) The question is obvious. How can the second coming of Jesus follow “immediately after the tribulation of those days” if the “tribulation of those days” refers to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70? Aren’t we still *waiting* for the second coming? There are basically three ways to solve this problem.

II. The first possible solution to the problem of “immediately after”

The first solution is to say that the period of great distress in verses 15-28 is fulfilled at least partially, if not fully, in a worldwide tribulation still to come at the end of this age and just prior to the second coming of Jesus. Can you see how this would solve the “immediately after” problem? In this view, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70 is not the only fulfillment of Jesus’ words – *if* it is even a fulfillment at all. But while this would solve the “immediately after” problem, it introduces a host of its own problems.

III. Why I believe the first possible solution doesn’t work

If Jesus is referring *both* to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70 *and* to a period of tribulation at the end of this age, then I have to say that His words are hopelessly confusing.¹ In this case, commentators must resort to speaking about “double fulfillments” and “prophetic foreshortening” in a most awkward way.

“We most profitably read Matthew’s sermon when we read it in this iridescent way, seeing both Jerusalem’s end and Jesus’ coming in most texts, not always being sure which of the two events Jesus meant.” (Bruner)

“The destruction of Jerusalem [and] the second personal advent of Christ... are undoubtedly in some parts of the chapter so entwined together, that it is difficult to separate and disentangle them.” (Ryle)

“It is not claimed, of course, that any exegete is able completely to untangle what is here intertwined, so as to indicate accurately for each individual passage just how much refers to Jerusalem’s fall, and how much to the great tribulation and second coming.” (Hendriksen)

Honestly, this kind of talk is very “suspicious.” The reality is that Jesus clearly assumes a *single*, historical, very well-defined event. He is not mixing up two events in some sort of hopeless, tangled jumble. And if He was, there would be no precedent for this anywhere else in the Scriptures.

Second of all, the period of “great distress” in Matthew 24 is a *localized* tribulation in Judea, and *not* one that is worldwide. The ones who should flee are the ones *in Judea* (16). The fact that it’s

¹ This would be the equivalent of saying that Daniel 11:1-39 is referring to two different events at the same time.

possible for those in Judea to flee for safety indicates something less than a worldwide tribulation such as we often imagine. Luke explains things for his Gentile readers:

- ✓ Luke 21:20–21, 23-24 — “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near... There will be great distress upon the land [of Judea] and wrath against this people [Israel]. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations.

God’s wrath is specifically poured out upon the Jewish people, and upon their land – *not* on the whole earth (at least not at this point). So these verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are most naturally and simply understood as Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question about the destruction of *Jerusalem* in A.D. 70, which Jesus had just been predicting (23:34-24:2).

The third thing we need to remember is that Jesus’ words read most naturally as if His own disciples would live to *see* the events surrounding this period of great distress. Let’s begin with the general labor pains:

- ✓ Matthew 24:4, 6, 9, 15, 20, 23-26 — See that no one leads *you* astray... *You* will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that *you* are not alarmed... they will deliver *you* up to tribulation and put you to death, and *you* will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. So when *you* see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)... Pray that *your* flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath... Then if anyone says to *you*, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told *you* beforehand. So, if they say to *you*, “Look, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out. If they say, “Look, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe it.

Jesus is very concerned for His disciples *because* He knows that all these events will happen not in some far distant future, but actually within their own generation. And as we saw last week, every single one of Jesus’ words were historically *fulfilled* in that first generation of His disciples. Very closely related to this point is the fourth one.

- ✓ Matthew 24:32–34 — From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when *you see all these things*, *you* know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, **THIS GENERATION WILL NOT PASS AWAY** until all these things take place.

What are “all these things” that will take place before that generation passes away? They are all the things that must happen before Jesus can come again – before He can be truly “near,” and “at the very gates.” This naturally includes the “abomination of desolation” and the period of great distress, but would not include the actual coming of Jesus (Murray; Morris; Carson; Hagner; Blomberg). Jesus says: “So also, when you see all these things, you know that *he is near, at the very gates.*” Jesus has already explicitly stated that the disciples themselves will “*see* all these things.” But then He goes on to make His point even more emphatic: “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that “this

generation” refers to the generation alive in Jesus’ day.² This means that we have a very explicit, and clear, and sobering statement about the timing of the “abomination of desolation” and the period of “great tribulation” that would come upon the Jewish people in Jerusalem: “Truly, I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place.”

The fifth and final reason that I cannot see this period of great tribulation as a time just prior to the second coming of Christ at the end of the age is because Jesus specifically tells His disciples:

² Some people take “this generation” to mean “this [Jewish] race of people.”* But there is another Greek word for “race,” and it’s already obvious that the Jewish “race” won’t pass away until “all these things take place” because all of these things are all about the Jews! Some people take “this generation” to mean the generation alive in that future day. But this goes against the normal and natural meaning of the words in the context of Matthew. Of all the other places in Matthew where one specific “generation” is referred to (cf. Mat. 1:17), it *never* means “race,” and it *never* means a generation other than the one alive in Jesus’ day.

- ✓ Matthew 11:16, 18-19 — But to what shall I compare *this generation*? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates... For John came neither eating nor drinking, and *they* say... The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and *they* say...
- ✓ Matthew 12:39-40 — But he answered them, “*An evil and adulterous generation* seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
- ✓ Matthew 12:41-42 — The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with *this generation* and condemn it... [because] something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it... [because] something greater than Solomon is here.
- ✓ Matthew 12:45 — Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with *this evil generation*.
- ✓ Matthew 16:4 — *An evil and adulterous generation* seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.
- ✓ Matthew 17:17 — *O faithless and twisted generation*, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?
- ✓ Matthew 23:34-36 — Therefore I send *you* prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom *you* will kill and crucify, and some *you* will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that *on you* may come all the righteous blood shed on earth... Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon *this generation*.
- ✓ Matthew 24:33-34 — When *you see all these things*, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place.

The *reason* for Jesus’ very solemn statement (“Truly, I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place”) is because He wants to help His disciples understand the *timing* of the things He’s talking about, and that requires that “this generation” *must* mean the generation alive in Jesus’ day. Donald Carson sums things up: “‘This generation’ (see on 11:16; 12:41-42; 23:36; cf. 10:23; 16:28) can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke... to make ‘this generation’ refer to all believers in every age [or to the Jewish race], or the generation of believers [or Jews] alive when eschatological events start to happen, is highly artificial” (cf. Blomberg, Murray, France, Hagner, Morris).

*Lenski takes “generation” as referring to a specific “kind” of men (cf. Psalm 12:7). But this can only be the meaning of the word “by extension.” In other words, this would be the “figurative” meaning of the word. In the context of Matthew 24, there is no hint that we should understand “this generation” in terms of a supposed “extended” (figurative) meaning.

- ✓ Matthew 24:44 — Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not *expect*.³

But if the second coming of Jesus follows immediately after a very well-defined tribulation at the end of this age, then it's hard to see how the second coming could happen at a time when Christians are not expecting it. Jesus also says that at His second coming, people will be going about their *normal, everyday* lives (eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, etc.; 24:37-42). But this hardly seems like an accurate description of life during a period of great distress and tribulation such as Jesus has just described!

For all of these reasons, I am *fully* convinced that Jesus' teaching about the "abomination of desolation" and the period of great distress and tribulation was completely fulfilled in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70. You could say that I would consider this to be a "non-negotiable" in my approach to the Olivet Discourse. I have been completely unable to find any way around it. So what about the coming of the Son of Man happening "*immediately after* the tribulation of those days"?

IV. The second possible solution to the problem of "immediately after"

Instead of moving the tribulation forward to the end of the age, a second solution would be to move the coming of the Son of Man backward to A.D. 70. In other words, Jesus' coming (in verses 29-31) is not actually His second coming at the end of the age, but rather His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁴

- ✓ Matthew 10:23 — When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes [in judgment on Jerusalem].
- ✓ Matthew 26:64 — Jesus said to [the high priest]... "I tell you, *from now on* you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" [visibly manifested on earth in the destruction of Jerusalem].

If Jesus is referring to His coming in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem, then it's easy to see that Jesus did come "*immediately after*" the tribulation of those days.

³ Jesus does *not* say that His disciples will still be alive when the Son of Man comes, because even He does not know the day or the hour (or the year, or the decade, or the century, or the millennium) of His coming – no more than we do (24:36). But that's precisely why the disciples must always be ready, because they don't know, and because if Jesus does come back in their lifetimes, it will be at a time that none of them would expect.

⁴ The language of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven is from Daniel chapter seven where the Son of Man comes *to the Ancient of Days and is presented before Him*, and where He receives kingdom rule and authority. This coming of the Son of Man and the clouds of heaven was fulfilled at Jesus ascension and enthronement at the right hand of God. But then this coming of the Son of Man (this enthronement of the Son of man) was manifested *visibly* on the earth by the destruction of Jerusalem (Mat. 10:23; 26:64), the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29-36), and the spread of the Gospel throughout all the world (Mat. 28:18-20). The "coming" and enthronement of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven will finally be manifested visibly on the earth when He returns bodily to this earth at the end of the age.

V. Why I believe the second possible solution doesn't work

There is *one* main reason that I cannot accept this view – and this is *very* important.

- ~ Matthew 24:3 — Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your *coming [parousia; noun]* and of the end of the age?
- ~ Matthew 24:27 — For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the *coming [parousia; noun]* of the Son of Man.
- ~ Matthew 24:30 — Then... all the tribes of the earth will... see the Son of Man *coming [erchomai; verb]* on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”
- ~ Matthew 24:36–39, 42, 44; 25:31 — But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the *coming [parousia; noun]* of the Son of Man [the coming referred to in verses 27-31]. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the *coming [parousia; noun]* of the Son of Man [cf. vv. 27-31]... Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is *coming [erchomai; verb]*; cf. vv. 27-31]... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is *coming [erchomai; verb]* at an hour you do not expect [cf. vv. 27-31]... When the Son of Man *comes [erchomai; verb]* in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne [cf. vv. 27-31].⁵

It is explicitly clear that from start to finish, the “coming” under discussion is always *one and the same* – in every instance it is the public and visible “parousia” of Jesus when He returns bodily to this earth at the end of the age.⁶ You could say that I would consider this, also, to be a “non-negotiable.” I have been completely unable to find any way around it.

So if all the other “solutions” have their fatal problems, then don't we (I) also have a fatal problem? How can Jesus say that His coming will follow “immediately after” the siege and

⁵ France argues from the different Greek word for “coming” (erchomai) in verse 30 (which is the same Greek word used to translate Daniel) that this “coming” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, while the “parousia” in verses 3, 27, 37 & 39 refers to the second coming. This is unacceptable for two reasons. First of all, the reason for the different Greek words is contextual. The noun “parousia” is used every time with the article so that it refers essentially to the coming “reality” and “event” (“the coming”). Where the reference is not so much to the “event” as it is to the *action*, then the verb “erchomai” is always used (without the article). Secondly, we see that “parousia” and “erchomai” are clearly used to refer to the *same* event/action in 24:36-39, 44, & 25:31).

⁶ There is another view that seeks to solve the problem of the “unexpectedness” of Christ's “parousia” by suggesting that there is a preliminary “stage” of that coming in a “secret” rapture of the church which will occur *before* a period of great tribulation at the end of the age. An earlier secret rapture would still allow the “parousia” to be unexpected. There are several reasons that I personally am not able to accept this view (which still wouldn't solve the problem of “immediately after”). First if all, I can't say that I see a secret rapture taught anywhere else in Scripture. In fact, it appears to me that the rest of Scripture speaks against the idea of a secret rapture. But second of all, it is clear from the context of Matthew 24-25 that from start to finish, the “coming” under discussion is always one and the same – in every instance it is the public and visible “parousia” of Jesus when He returns bodily to this earth at the end of the age.

destruction of Jerusalem. Was Jesus mistaken, as some say? Of course not! Has the second coming already come and gone? Of course not!

VI. The solution to the problem of “immediately after” that I believe best accounts for the rest of the evidence in the Olivet Discourse.

Let’s remember first of all that Jesus was speaking in very clear Greek. He was speaking not to confuse His disciples, but rather to make things explicitly *obvious* and crystal *clear*. You wouldn’t know this for all the debate and confusion, but that’s the definite impression we get from the tone of Jesus’ words. While I have not been able to find any way around the problems with the other views, I do feel like there is a reasonable way to interpret “immediately after” in light of the rest of the evidence.

What do Mark and Luke say?

- ✓ Mark 13:24 — “But *in those days, after that tribulation*, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light...”

Mark is a little more vague about exactly how soon after the tribulation Jesus may come. He certainly never says “immediately after.” But now let’s look at Luke:

- ✓ Luke 21:23–25 (cf. Romans 11:25) — For there will be great distress upon the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword *and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars...

Luke actually assumes a period of time (which could be three weeks or three thousand years) *in between* the period of great tribulation and the second coming of Jesus. *We know* that so far, this period of time between the great tribulation and the second coming of Jesus is about 2000 years. So Mark is more general and vague about the timing. Luke is also vague – assuming an unspecified period of time in between the tribulation and the second coming. But then Matthew, alone, adds the word “immediately” (“immediately after”). So is Matthew disagreeing with Luke? And what about the last 2000 years?

It seems to me that when Jesus says, “immediately after the distress/tribulation of those days,” He is now looking back at all that He has said from verse 4 all the way to verse 28. His *primary* reference is to the especially severe labor pain of Jerusalem’s destruction (24:15-28), but now He is merging this period of great tribulation into the general tribulation and distress that He said would characterize all of the time before the end of the age (24:4-13).⁷ So in other words, *immediately after the distress and tribulations of this age, the Son of Man will come on the*

⁷ Blomberg, Carson, Morris, Murray, and Lenski seem to make a more “hard and fast” distinction between “those days” of the “great tribulation” in verses 15-28 and “those days” of the more general tribulation and distress in verses 4-13. Blomberg sees the change in subject at v. 21, Carson and Morris at v. 22, and Murray and Lenski at v. 29. However, this more “hard and fast” distinction seems somewhat artificial to me. France rightly points out that the most natural antecedent of “those days” in verse 29 is the “those days” of verses 19 & 22. I would also mention that Carson’s explanation of this age being “cut short” for the sake of the elect comes across to me as very forced.

clouds of heaven – which, of course, no one would argue with. *And yet* we have to remember that for Jesus and for His disciples, the great tribulation of A.D. 66-70 was the very *last* sign that had to be fulfilled before Christ’s coming. So for the disciples, “immediately after” would point not simply to the end of the age, but especially to their *own* generation. And so also for *us*, “immediately after” continues to point not simply to the end of the age, but especially to our own generation.⁸

VII. A Summary and Overview of the Olivet Discourse

The disciples have asked about the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and the “parousia” of Jesus at the end of the age. Jesus responds by taking the disciples as far out as He can go. The second coming at the end of the age will not happen until you have experienced the “labor pains” of false Messiahs, famines and earthquakes, wars and rumors of wars, persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the world, betrayal and apostasy within the church, and also the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the whole world. OK, so this puts the second coming out at least ten, perhaps twenty, thirty, or even forty years. Even more specifically, the second coming at the end of the age cannot happen until the disciples have seen the period of great distress and tribulation associated with the destruction of Jerusalem.⁹ These things must all happen first, and they will all happen within that first generation of Jesus’ disciples.

Once these things had all taken place, *then* Jesus could speak of His coming as being “near” and “at the very gates.” This is not chronological nearness in time, but rather a sense of imminence and “**any** momentness.” He can be “near” and “at the very gates” because once these things were all fulfilled in the first generation of Jesus disciples, there would be *no* remaining sign or event that still had to happen before Jesus’ return (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11).

- ✓ Matthew 24:32–35 — “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when *you* see ***all these things*** [that must happen prior to the second coming at the end of the age], *you know that he* [the parousia of Jesus in verses 29-31] *is near, at the very gates*. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until ***all these things*** [that must happen prior to the second coming at the end of the age] take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But beyond these things Jesus cannot go, because even He does not know **when** His second coming will be – any more than we do.

- ✓ Matthew 24:36 — “But concerning that day and hour *no one knows*, not even the angels of heaven, *nor the Son*, but the Father only.

⁸ This solves the problem (which I think Blomberg, Carson, Morris, Murray, and Lenski must face) of Jesus being made to say something like, “Immediately after this age is over, the Son of Man will come.” Of course, this would seem so entirely self-evident as to border on absurdity. I believe this should also be a sufficient response to Hagner, who considers the word “immediately” to be a misguided redaction (editorial comment) by Matthew. I consider it to be a redaction, but not misguided – say rather *divinely inspired!*

⁹ This could explain Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7 (cf. footnote 13).

So all that Jesus can do at this point is to warn His disciples against responding to any further delay of His coming with laziness and ungodly living (24:36-25:46).¹⁰

Especially after the destruction of Jerusalem, the disciples must live always in light of the reality that He is “near” and “at the very gates.” This is how Jesus could exhort and encourage His disciples by saying that “the one who endures to the end [of the age] will be saved” (24:13), even though none of them actually lived to see the end of the age. This is also how Jesus can say, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations [in *this* generation], and then the end will come” (24:14) – even though the end did not actually end up coming in that first generation. And I would suggest that this is how Matthew can legitimately add the word “immediately” without contradicting Luke or Mark, and certainly without contradicting Jesus. The second coming would be the next “scheduled” (revealed) event after the destruction of Jerusalem.^{11, 12}

Blomberg writes: “It is crucial to observe the fulfillment of all these preliminary events prior to A.D. 70. This fulfillment... demonstrates that *everything necessary for Christ’s return was accomplished within the first generation of Christianity.*”

Lenski puts it this way: “Just when the end will come no man knows. We are to be ready at all times for its coming, since all the signs have already occurred again and again.”

“Through the missionary work of the apostles, the gospel has ‘gone out to all the earth.’ ... ‘The end’ *could* already have come in the first century. The required conditions were all present. All the sufferings in vv 5–12 were experienced in the years prior to A.D. 70 and the fall of Jerusalem, and in varying degree they have been signs experienced by the church down to the present era.” (Hagner)

Bavinck writes: “Jesus links his parousia immediately with the destruction of Jerusalem. In the fall of this city he sees the announcement and preparation of the consummation of the world.”¹³

The Son of Man will come immediately after the distress and tribulations of this age. But since the very *last* sign that had to be fulfilled before Christ’s coming was the “great tribulation” of A.D. 66-70, we can say that for the disciples, “immediately after” pointed not simply to the end

¹⁰ Recall at this point that the disciples had probably been expecting the parousia within a matter of weeks or months (Acts 1:6). Now that the disciples have to push the parousia out a full forty years, any further delay would probably once again seem like forever. Indeed, Jesus expected that some of His *own* disciples could live long enough to be tempted to despair at any further delay.

¹¹ “‘All these things’ (vv. 4-28) must happen; and then the Parousia is ‘near, right at the door’ ‘imminent.’ In other words the Parousia is the next major step in God’s redemptive purposes.” (Carson) “G.C. Fuller equates ‘immediately’ with the concept of ‘the next significant even in salvation history,’” (Blomberg)

¹² I am not yet aware of any reasonable explanation explaining how the second coming of Christ can truly be imminent, and yet still be preceded by a yet future period of well-defined and specifically predicted “great tribulation” (see, for example, the attempt of Murray, pp. 399-400). I also remain unaware of any reasonable explanation for how the second coming of Christ can happen when Christians will not be expecting it and when the world is going about its normal business of eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage if, in fact, the second coming will be preceded by a well-defined and specifically predicted “great tribulation” of world wide extent such as Jesus describes in Matthew 24 (see, for example, the attempt of Waldron in his eschatology lecture notes).

¹³ This understanding could then give us insight into the proper approach to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (esp. vv. 7-8) and also the book of Revelation (esp. 19:11-21). For the most part, I would follow the amillennialist scholar Greg Beale in my approach to Revelation.

of the age, but especially to their own generation. And so also for *us*, “immediately after” continues to point not simply to the end of the age, but to our own generation. Especially since the destruction of Jerusalem, the church has been called to live every day in light of the “*immediately after*” coming of Jesus. But even *before* the destruction of Jerusalem, as the disciples witnessed more and more of the labor pains beginning to unfold, they could begin saying things like this:

- ✓ Hebrews 10:25 — You see the Day drawing near.
- ✓ Romans 13:12 — The night is far gone; the day is at hand.
- ✓ Philippians 4:5 — The Lord is at hand.
- ✓ James 5:8 — The coming of the Lord is at hand.
- ✓ 1 Peter 4:7 — The end of all things is at hand.
- ✓ And Jesus Himself said three times in the book of Revelation:
- ✓ Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 (cf. 11:14) — Behold, I am coming quickly.

Conclusion

In the next couple of weeks, we’re going to come back to some of these themes in a more pastoral and “practical” way as we move through the text. But for right now, I just want to remind us that in the midst of whatever disagreements we may have concerning the end (and as *practically important* as some of these disagreements may be), the main thing is that we all believe in the *parousia* of Jesus, when He will once again be personally and bodily present with us. This we can agree on, and this we must agree on. And if we do agree, then we can be fully and wonderfully united in the midst of a whole lot of other disagreements. So let’s *relish* and *make much* of this agreement *especially*, and *most of all*, when we come to those places where we sincerely disagree. May we always make a much *bigger* deal of our agreement on the things of first importance than we ever do of our differences.