

May 8, 2016

The End Times

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it...for the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done." Matthew 16:24-28

"Watch out that no one deceives you...you will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come....At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds in the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds...No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven or the Son, but only the Father." Matthew 24:1-36

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them..." Matthew 25:31-40

There has been a great deal of talk lately, as there seems to be whenever this country elects new leadership, about the end times and the second coming of Jesus. Some of the information being shared is Bible-based and some of it is not. Because of the focus on this issue I thought it might be helpful to discover what Scripture actually says about the second coming of Jesus and how we will be affected if it happens in our times.

My approach to issues like this one is to begin with what, if anything, Jesus says on the topic and then to work out from there. Jesus speaks to his second coming throughout the gospels and particularly in Matthew's account. Among the first of these statements by the Master is found in chapter 16. Building on Peter's confession, "***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God***" Jesus begins to address his second coming.

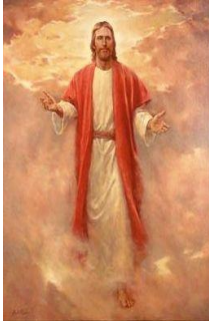
His statement is clear and has two key components. First, he is coming back is coming back in his "***Father's glory with his angels...***" And the second, "***...he will reward each person according to what he has done.***" Whatever we may want to believe about the end times these two components will be a part of that final picture.

In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus shares a long and complex discussion with his disciples about the end times. He is in Jerusalem for the last week of his life and as he walks through the Temple grounds he says, "***I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another, every one will be thrown down.***" In response to this statement the disciples ask a question or actually two questions. They ask, "***Tell us when this will happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?***"

It is important that we understand that the Master's answer to the disciples question has two parts because they really asked two questions. The first of their questions was about when the Temple and Jerusalem would be overthrown and not one stone remain on another. The second question asks about the signs that will attend the second coming of Jesus.

In answer to the first question Jesus describes a situation that will begin with the "***abomination that causes desolation***" standing in the holy place. The Master warns those in Judea that when they see this sign they should flee the city without waiting for anything. This prophecy

was fulfilled, by the way, when Roman legions stormed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. completely destroying the sacred city.



In answer to their second question, Jesus shows his disciples what his return will be like. He says, ***"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect."*** As we noted earlier, the second coming of Jesus will be an obvious event which all mankind will witness and it will be heralded by a trumpet call, and it will end with a gathering of the ***"elect"***.

Jesus also tells the disciples, ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father...Therefore keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*** The one message concerning his return which the Master repeats over and over again is a message of preparation. The challenge for us then is not to learn when the second coming may be, but to be ready for it regardless of when it occurs.