

# Hanging Out With Jesus: How Jesus Describes The End Times

*Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-32, Luke 21:5-33*

Good morning, men! It's going to be a great day! Let's go ahead and do a shout out. We've got a group of men that started a couple of years ago. Three men wanted to reach other men for Christ, so John Phillips started Men of Value out of Crossings Wesleyan Church in Millville, NJ. They are 5-9 guys now, and they're meeting in John's home on Wednesday s at 6:30 pm doing the video Bible Study with us. We want to welcome you men to the Bible Study, so why don't we give these guys a rousing shout out? One, two, three, hoorah! Glad to have you men with us!

The series that we're in is *Hanging Out With Jesus*, and it's Tuesday before the crucifixion on Friday. Jesus has spent the whole day in the temple and he's now left the temple. There's a very interesting exchange that takes place between Jesus and his disciples.

We had both of our children and their families in our house recently, so our house of two became a house of ten. We put the kids to bed and the six adults were all sitting together in the family room. Our daughter was over here on her iPhone, our son-in-law was over there on his laptop, my son was here on his iPad, my daughter-in-law was over there on her iPhone, and my wife was over here on her MacBook. I'm looking around and I said out loud you know I just love family time! We've seen dramatic changes in the last twenty-five years, some good, and some bad. I love technology, but we've seen dramatic changes take place over these last twenty-five years. Some of these changes maybe are not so good. We've seen these incredible climatic swings take place, with floods, famines, fires, earthquakes, tornados, typhoons, and we have also seen incredible change in the types of war we have. Now, terrorism is all pervasive around the world. You never know when these little mini wars are going to break out. Then, on top of that, you have the genocides and things happening like in Syria. Then you have the fiscal irresponsibility's taking place. We all know about the federal debt, but did you know that we were a net lender nation through 1984? Since 1985, we've become a net debtor nation. The United States treasury owes six trillion dollars to foreign entities. Then you have rampage shootings. Did you know that around the world one estimate predicts about 150,000 Christians will be martyred this year. We have an entire generation now called the lost generation, younger people who from their early twenties and even thirties are walking away from their faith. We have a lot of tremendous changes taking place. Could it be that we're in the last days? This is not a question that you have to speculate about, because Hebrews 1 beginning at verse 1 says in the past God spoke to our forefathers, many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his son. So Jesus inaugurated these last days, these are by definition the last days.

In Peter it says to the Lord a thousand years is like a day, and a day is like a thousand years. God has this altogether different way of thinking about time than we do, so two thousand years since Jesus came is a long time in one sense, but in Bible time it's just the day before yesterday. These are the last days, we already know that. Today, we want to look at the end times. This is the study of eschatology in theology, most of you know that. We want to look at one great chapter in which Jesus describes the end times, Matthew 24. Starting at verse 1, it begins by his disciples asking him three great questions:

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.

These buildings, the edifices, the temple that Herod had built for the Jews, it was the great architectural achievement, the great building of the whole world at that time. Jesus asks them:

“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Three great questions. Number one, when will this happen? When will this temple be destroyed? Second, what will be the sign of your coming? The Parousia, in Greek. Third, what will be the sign of the end of the age. These are the three great questions that are being asked.

Why did the Holy Spirit preserve this account of these end times? The Holy Spirit preserved this account in the word because he knew that we too would have similar questions. In fact, he knew that some of us would even be preoccupied with this idea of when would the end come. We certainly do have these exact same questions, and so it was worth preserving them.

### **What Will The End Times Look Like?**

So the first thing I want us to look at is what will the end times look like? This is for planning purposes, as the disciples wanted to know it, so that you can plan your life accordingly. These end times present themselves in four stages, sometimes overlapping. The first stage of these end times is the destruction of the temple. Back in verse 2, I tell you the truth not one stone will be left on another; every one will fall down. We know that Titus is responsible for the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Historians and archeologists, historians like Josephus have commented that the destruction of the temple was so complete that they were in fact not able to find one stone on top of another. Josephus said it looked as though the place had never been inhabited. In fact, in the fourth century, Julian the apostate, who wanted to refute the scriptures, decided to rebuild a temple on that location. It was so disorganized and so chaotic that it was a laughing stock! So that was the first stage, or first phase of these end times.

The beginning verse 4 right after the three questions:

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. 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. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

This is the second phase of the end times. There’ll be people claiming to be Christ, there will be wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines. By the way, it’s very interesting, all of these things that we’re reading that are so obvious that they’ve happened. Remember, at the time that Jesus was articulating all these words, these were all predictions of future events, things yet to come.

The third phase of these end times, and now we're probably getting to the overlapping stages. Jesus is laying out some pretty specific things, but they're also examples of the kinds of things that happen in the end times as well. Next verse:

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Well, there's a lot of that going on! You look at young people today, and many older Christians and how cultural Christianity has affected us. You look at the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world and there is an entire industry of ministries who are devoted to fulfilling that particular text, preaching the Gospel to the whole world. I was doing quite a bit of looking around on Google, so you know it's true, and it looks like something around 40% of the world has yet to hear the Gospel in terms of unreached people groups, so we're quite a ways from that.

Let's skip over the next few verses and we'll come to the fourth phase which begins at verse 30:

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, 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, from one end of the heavens to the other.

So these are the four main phases and the kinds of things that are going to happen in the end times. When are these end times? We already know we live in the last days now. You see these things happening. The second coming, the end of the end times, this has not happened yet. When you look around and you see the kinds of things going on in the world today, why are you surprised? Why are you surprised that there are scoffers? 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Peter 3 talk about how there will be terrible times in the last days, there will be scoffers. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money. Why be shocked that you're persecuted at work? The Big Idea today is this: **why be surprised that everything is happening just like Jesus said it would?** Why be surprised by that? Everything is happening just exactly the way that Jesus said it would.

### **When Will The End Come?**

Now when is this end going to come? It's interesting, I said that the world has changed dramatically in the last twenty-five years, but could that not be said of any time in history? We think that this is the age. I get excited about movies, I come out of the theater and I say that's the best movie I ever saw! But I said the same thing two weeks ago! In cultural critique and evaluation, this is what happens! We tend to think that yes, they had problems in their era but now is when we really have problems! Every generation could have said the last twenty-five years have seen dramatic changes in the world. There have been people trying to predict when the end will come for as long as we've had the Bible! The most famous of these was a group called the Millerites. How many of you have ever heard of the Millerites? William Miller in the 1840's began to prophecy that sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844 that the world would be engulfed by fire, and this message gained a lot of traction. 100,000 people sold all their earthly possessions and moved to the mountains to wait for the end to come. Guess what?

March 21, 1844 came and went, and then he adjusted it to October 22. Then of course, it still didn't come.

Of more recent fame, Harold Camping said that the world was going to end on May 21, 2011. What many people don't know is before that he wrote a book called *1994?* In which he predicted the end would come then. When it didn't come then, he adjusted it to 1995. He said he was 99.9% certain that his math was correct. Then the Branch Davidians, some of you remember David Koresh and the Waco, TX compound, and ATF coming in and burning it down. I was there the year after, it was a fascinating study in the relationship between the government and these groups. He thought he was the Christ! Then, my favorite. How many of you are familiar with the book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*? It is the book that introduced the entire genre of prophecy in literature. It was the bestselling nonfiction book of the 1970's. If memory serves me correctly, at one point it was up 25 million copies sold. He said the world was coming to an end December 31, 1988, gave himself a nice long window, and of course it came and went, too. In his later books, he became less specific, saying the end would come by the end of the 1980's. Then of course, it was the end of the 90's and then the 2000's.

Another author wrote a book Called *Eighty-Eight Reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988* and he sold 4.5 million copies! Why are you people buying these books! When the end will come is something you can't know! We'll see that in a second. The author said only if the Bible is in error am I wrong! What hubris! Unbelievable!

There are eight references as to when the end will come. Let's look at them.

Verse 6: Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Verse 14: And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Verse 33: Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

Verse 34: Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Verse 36: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Verse 42: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

You do not know, you cannot know. Jesus doesn't even know, only the Father knows!

Verse 44: So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Verse 50: The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.

So, when will the end come? No one knows. Why be surprised that these people, these false prophets make these predictions? **Why be surprised that everything is happening just like Jesus said it would?**

## So What?

You can read the rest of the passage, but I'd like to get to the so what. The first thing I want us to understand is that the purpose of this text is not to terrify you about future events, but rather it's to give you a guide for a proper set of Christian expectations and a model for making wise choices when planning. In light of these things, how should I then live my life? Well, one thing that is clear from this passage is that Christianity is lived inside cultures. You've heard me say this before. Christianity is not its own separate culture, but rather Christianity is an inward kingdom and we live it out in the temporal cultures in which we live. Christians in America are different from Christians in Europe, Bangladesh, and India in terms of their cultures because Christianity is lived inside cultures. But in these cultures, all of these things are going on that Jesus is talking about. The earth as we know it is kind of like a foster home. You've heard me say before that the Bible is the paperwork that God filled out to complete our adoption. We have already been adopted, we're living in a foster home, and in a couple weeks he's going to come pick us up and we're going to go live with him.

One of our own members, Jim Seibert, is in full liver failure. He was at our leader retreat on Saturday. He said I'm not afraid to die, I'm ready. The reality of it is that when you contemplate mortality, from our perspective he's just moving to Montana. We're going to be moving there ourselves in a few years. This place, this earth is like a foster home. We've already been adopted, the paperwork's completed, and in a couple weeks he's coming to pick us up! This passage is here to help give us a realistic set of expectations, so that we can make wise choices.

There are five admonitions that Jesus gives in this passage and I want us to take a look at them. In verse 4, Jesus says watch out that no one deceives you. The first admonition that Jesus gives is don't be deceived. Demosthenes said it best, nothing is easier than self-deceit, for what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true. These people that believe these predictions, that's self-deception, allowing yourself to be deceived. So anybody who would say something like only if the Bible is in error am I run is allowing themselves to be deceived! If you hear anybody say that and you believe that, you're being deceived! So that's the first admonition about these end times.

Second admonition, verse 6. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. See to it that you are not frightened. Don't be afraid! The most paralyzing emotion in the world is fear! The most paralyzing emotion that we can have is to be afraid! We have here in the word a realistic set of expectations for what is going to happen, and elsewhere in the scriptures it says I will be with you! Don't be afraid! Take heart! I have overcome the world! Yes, in this world you will have many troubles, but take heart! I have overcome the world!

The third admonition, verse 42. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. Stay alert! What's the best way that you can stay alert? Stay in the word, make sure that you attend a weekly worship service so that you're around other Christians, and be in a small group with some other people so that you don't get isolated. If you want to be alert, to keep watch, don't let yourself be isolated. You've heard me say before from watching the National Geographic channel, the lion never goes after the herd, he goes after the stray, the straggler, the one who has become isolated. That is because every predator knows the strategic value of isolation! The Bible says you and I have a predator on our trail. 1 Peter 5:8, stay alert, your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Keep watch! Stay alert!

Number four, in verse 44. So also you must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. So be ready! In other words, live every day like it's going to be your last. Does that mean you can't watch TV? Does that mean you can't go play Wii bowl? Does that mean you can't go to the 24 hours race at Daytona? Of course not! It's not working your fingers to the bone doing good works to make God happy or avoid his wrath, but it's allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and direct you and to lead a sanctified life. Increasingly pursuing holiness, keeping short accounts. When you do become aware of a temptation, ask God to give you the power to overcome it. When you do become aware that you have sinned and done something wrong, it's to keep short accounts with God, to quickly confess it. By the way, are you going to hell if you die with an unconfessed sin? No, not if you have put your faith in Jesus. That's not the way it works! But unconfessed sin does break our fellowship with God now and on an ongoing basis, so it's important to live in the right way.

Finally, in verse 45. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge? Be faithful and wise. You've heard me say many times, God does not call us to produce a particular outcome, he calls us to be faithful. Here also he calls us to be wise. All the time I meet men who are making decisions that are not wise. I make decisions that are not wise. So I thought a lot about why do men make decisions that are not wise. Men make unwise decisions generally speaking when they are hasty and impatient. When they are not willing to wait for God to answer. So Jesus gives these five admonitions. You want to know so what? About how Jesus describes the end times and what they will look like? Do these five things and you'll know what. **Why be surprised that everything is happening just like Jesus said it would?** These are the end times, let's pray!

### **Closing Prayer**

Our dearest Father, thank you for your word. Lord, I don't remember talking about eschatology here before, but if it's once every twenty-eight years, good deal! I pray that you would take this text and superintendent to each of our hearts for our planning purposes, so that we would have a proper set of expectations, so that we could plan out our responses to not be deceived, not be afraid, to be alert, to be ready, and to be faithful and wise. For your glory Jesus, we are not surprised. Amen!