

## Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 17, Matthew 24-25

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 17, Matthew 24-25.

In this context, Jesus has been saying that you need to flee when you see the desecration that will lead to destruction.

The Jewish patriots slaughtered the priests in the temple in the year 66. Josephus, who lived through this, and was part of the war actually at that time, reports that he believed that that was the desecration that eventually led to destruction. And the temple was destroyed three and a half years later.

Well, Jesus says, when you see that, you need to be ready to flee. And that's in Mark. It's also Luke who makes it more explicit.

Luke says, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you need to flee. Most people, when war was coming, the people in the countryside would flee into a city, hoping that the army would pass them by, hoping if there was a siege, then the army would get tired and move on somewhere else. But instead of moving on somewhere else, the Romans besieged Jerusalem until people were starving to death inside the city.

And Jesus had given the true wisdom. Well, you can't stay in the countryside when the army is passing through, but don't go into the city because you'll just be stuck there until Rome is done besieging it, just like the way Alexander the Great besieged Tyre. It wouldn't move on until they were finished.

Instead, you'll be safer in the hills. Jesus says to flee immediately. Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Jerusalem was in the hill country and that was a strategic place to flee. Many narrow mountain paths and your massive numbers of an army wouldn't really help you there because people had to go single file and people above them could be throwing rocks down on them, dislodging them from the paths, and so on. David fled to the wilderness from Saul.

The Maccabees also practiced guerrilla warfare from the mountains, so it made sense. Jesus was emphatic about fleeing. He was emphatic about haste.

Let no one on the roof of their house go down to take anything out of the house. Well, they had flat roofs back then. People would dry vegetables on the roof, like Peter, and they might pray on the roof in Acts 10.

People might talk to their neighbors on the roof or whatever. They had flat roofs. Normally you would access the roof by an outside staircase, or if you couldn't afford that, you had a ladder to access the roof.

You didn't have something inside the house leading to the roof. So, when you fled from the roof, you'd come to the outside. It wouldn't directly take you inside the house.

So many people, if they were to flee in haste, they wouldn't go inside the house. They would just leave. Jesus says, don't even take the time to go into the house to get anything valuable.

Jesus gives another example of haste. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. Well, in the morning, when a person would get up, they would take their cloak with them that they slept in at night.

It would be their blanket or their bedroll if they were very poor. They would use that in the cool of the morning as they went out to the field, whether they were coming from the city or the town or just going outside if they happened to be living on the property where the field was. They would go out and by midday of working in the field, as the sun was hot, midday, actually, people were supposed to come into the shade and get away from the sun, and take a siesta.

But by midday, as it was getting warm, they would typically leave their cloak at the edge of the field. They wouldn't keep working with their outer cloak on. But Jesus says, as important as this cloak is, even though you say you need it to sleep in at night, even though you need it when it's cold, even though it's the one thing Deuteronomy says that a creditor couldn't seize from a debtor overnight.

Jesus said, leave it. Your life matters more than even the most precious of your possessions. When you know the judgment is on the way, flee immediately.

My wife was in a situation of being a refugee a couple of times during wars that took place in her country in Africa. And on the time that she became a refugee for 18 months, before that happened, she was with her, part of her family, part of her family had already fled, especially the able-bodied stronger men in the family. And the rest of the neighborhood had fled because fighting was clearly coming to the area.

They'd been warned by local soldiers, that fighting was coming to the area. They could hear bombs going off. They could hear gunfire.

Otherwise, the neighborhood was silent because their neighbors had left. So, it was my wife and her sisters, one of whom had just had surgery, and their aged mother, but they couldn't flee because none of them could carry her aged father. Her father was half paralyzed and they didn't know what to do.

And finally, they prayed, God, please, if you want us to leave, please send somebody who can help us. After they said, amen, there was a knock on the door and it was somebody they'd never expected had come. They put their father in a wheelbarrow and this man pushed the wheelbarrow and they fled into the forest.

Meanwhile, fighting was going on. They could see part of the city burning behind them. You have to flee in haste.

They had only had a little bit of time to decide what to take with them and what to leave behind. My wife took her passport, but many refugees, even though you can't get in another country legally without a passport, in times of emergency, people often can't even remember to take their passports, if they have passports to begin with. So, people were fleeing in haste and some people left behind aged relatives.

Some people left behind others. My wife was carrying a baby on her back, as well as other things on her head. Others were carrying babies.

Others were carrying elderly people. It was a very difficult situation for refugees. But Jesus says you have to flee.

My wife had a special concern for other women she saw who were pregnant or nursing, especially pregnant women. It was so hard for them to walk. Jesus has the same compassion for these women.

He says, woe to those who are pregnant or nursing. Those who are pregnant or nursing are more susceptible to death, bleeding, miscarriage, and so on. Their own health was impaired and it was very difficult to flee quickly.

But he may be thinking also of what we often have in Jewish literature which is mourning for the loss of the children, because when there's not enough food to go around, the infants are most susceptible to dying of starvation or malnutrition. And in Egypt, in the records we have there, again, half the children seem not to have made it to adulthood. And of those, the greatest number died in infancy.

Josephus reports what we might have expected from Deuteronomy 28, that some mothers during the famine in Jerusalem became so hungry, they actually killed and

ate their children. Jesus said, pray, verse 20, Mark doesn't include this, but Jesus said, pray that it's not on the Sabbath. Well, the city gates would be shut on the Sabbath.

It'd be harder to get out. And it would also be hard to procure transport on the Sabbath. Only disciples would recognize the severity of the situation.

Only Jesus' followers would recognize the severity. So, pray that it not be on the Sabbath if you're in Jerusalem. And also in verse 20, pray that your flight will not take place during winter.

Winter was so difficult for travel, not just on the sea, but even sometimes on land. Winter was so difficult for travel that even armies rested. And that was especially true if you were in the hill country.

Sometimes even snowy Judean hill country. Further, in Judea, winter is the rainy season. Rivers often flooded during the rainy season and they became difficult to cross.

You also had dry wadis or dry creek beds that filled with water during the season, making it much more difficult to travel. Josephus tells us that actually, this was not in winter. It was during spring, but the river Jordan was still flooded.

These people were not refugees in Jerusalem, but they were fugitives fleeing somewhere else. Judeans who were trying to get away from the Romans, got to the river Jordan. They were going to cross it, but the water was so high they didn't dare cross it at that time of night because they were afraid that some of the small children with them would drown.

They resolved to cross it instead in the morning. Unfortunately, in morning light, the Roman army caught up with them and slaughtered them. Haste was very important.

Jesus is expressing compassion, warning people, no less than Moses warned Pharaoh's servants about the hail that was coming. And those who listened to him took heed and those who didn't suffered the consequences. Haste really was important.

Immediacy might be hyperbolic, but you had to flee swiftly. After the spring of 68, it was virtually impossible to flee to the Romans. Initially, when the Jewish revolutionary seized the city, once they gained control of it, once they gained control of the city walls, you couldn't get out.

Fugitives from the countryside would come in thinking it was safe, but you couldn't get out afterward because the revolutionaries said, no, we're in this together. You're either with us or you're against us. So, nobody's leaving the city.

Occasionally, people did manage to escape these guards at the gates. In one case, we're told the story of Yochanan ben Zekai, whom I mentioned earlier. He and his disciples decided to flee.

He acted like he was dead. They put him on a stretcher. They carried him out and the guards said, you can't leave here.

They said, no, this is a dead body. We can't leave a dead body inside the holy city. It desecrates the city.

The guards, you know, there were a lot of bodies in the city, but they let him out. And as soon as they got far enough away from the city wall, Yochanan jumped off his stretcher and he and his disciples fled and surrendered to the Romans. But surrender to the Romans eventually became impossible.

Many of the legionaries were recruited locally. Virtually all the auxiliaries were recruited locally. And so many of the Roman armies that were stationed here, you had a lot of Syrian auxiliaries who were working for them.

Josephus wouldn't want to insult the Romans more than necessary, especially given his Roman patrons, especially considering the Romans won the war and so on. But Josephus talks about these Syrian recruits and says that a rumor went around among the Syrian auxiliaries saying that some of the Jerusalemites who were fleeing Jerusalem swallowed jewels so that they could make a life for themselves after they got out. They swallowed the jewels and then later on they would retrieve them after a bowel movement because they knew they'd be searched when they first escaped.

So, the auxiliary recruits said, these people may have swallowed jewels. From that time forward, anyone who escaped Jerusalem was intercepted by these auxiliaries and was split open to see if they had any jewels inside. It was no longer possible to escape Jerusalem alive.

Jerusalem's Christians, however, had already fled. Jesus' followers had his warning. Also, the early church records tell us that some prophets within Jerusalem, some Christian prophets, warned them to flee.

And so, they fled, in this case up the Jordan Valley, not necessarily into the hill country. They fled and made it safely to a different hill country, to Pella in the Decapolis. Eventually, Jerusalem was completely captured.

The temple itself was burned. And on the site of the temple, after the people had been slaughtered and burned alive, on the site of the temple, the Romans erected their standards. The standards bore the insignia of the Roman emperor.

They bore an image of the emperor. They were considered to be, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, considered to be idols. In fact, earlier, Pilate's first act as governor, Josephus tells us, was to bring these standards into Jerusalem under cover of night.

But in the morning, when the Jerusalemites awoke and they saw these standards, they said, take these idols from our holy city. And Pilate threatened to kill them. They said, slit our throats.

We would rather die than let these idols desecrate our holy city. But now these standards were erected on the site of the temple and sacrifice was offered to Caesar as a god on the site of the temple. Jesus had warned about a coming desecration associated with desolation.

And his people did not listen. Jerusalem, at least, did not listen. In intolerable tribulation, however, God has compassion on his own.

And he'd warned them about it. He uses language from Daniel about great tribulation. But he says that the days would be shortened for the sake of his own.

Well, some people, because Jesus, speaks of coming judgment, the judgment on the temple. He's also going to speak of his coming. Remember, the disciples asked two questions.

And some people would assume when the destruction of the temple happened, that he would come immediately. And some people would arise claiming to be Jesus. But when Jesus really comes, even the sky will declare it, verses 23 through 28.

He speaks of wherever the body is, that's where the vultures will gather. The word can also mean eagles, but in Greek that included vultures. It was a wider term.

As in many Old Testament references, Ezekiel 39 and so on. And you also have it in Greek literature, wherever there are battlefields strewn with carcasses, the dogs come to feast and the birds of the air come to feast on these bodies, sometimes dropping pieces of flesh elsewhere. Very grotesque descriptions of war.

And you have it also in the Old Testament. And of course, David is saying to Goliath, I'll give your body to the birds of the air, and so on. Jesus' return in Matthew 24, verses 29 to 31.

The effects of Jesus' revelation will be cosmic. When you see the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. He talks about the sun and the moon and so on.

This isn't somebody just coming in the countryside saying, I'm Jesus, come back. This is something everybody will see. So, you don't need to speculate on whether this is really Jesus or not.

If he's not coming cosmically, it's not Jesus. The nations respond with terror in verse 30, again, using some Old Testament language. And he's coming with the clouds.

And then in verse 31, Jesus' followers will be delivered. He will gather together his chosen ones from every end of heaven. And most people back then viewed the world as a disk.

Some people did view it as a sphere, but if it was a disk, it had the dome of heaven over it. So from one end of heaven to the other, in Mark, it's more explicit from one end of heaven and earth to the other. But Jesus isn't just going to be talking about the end.

He also gives some things that are not the end. Besides the events that will be fulfilled in 70 and besides the end, Jesus gives some non-signs of the end. There were many prophecy teachers in his day who said, well when you see this thing and that thing, you know, all these are signs of the end.

And they listed many of the signs that Jesus listed. They also listed a few others like mutant babies and things like that. The kind of thing that in my country you see in tabloids in supermarkets.

But anyway, there were false prophets in 24 verses 4 and 5. Jesus says you're going to see false prophets. You're going to see in verses 6 and 7 rumors of wars. Verse 7, you're going to see famines and earthquakes.

But he says in verses 6 and 8, such things must happen, but the end is still to come. All these things are the beginning of birth pangs. Otherwise, you know, he would have sounded like some of these other teachers.

Well, you'll see these things happen. That's the sign of the end. Well, those things were already happening in the first century.

All those things happened in the first century. And they've been happening ever since then as well. So just seeing those things doesn't mean that the end is at hand.

You can say, well, we saw a bigger one. You know, there was this huge earthquake in Portugal in, I believe, the 1400s. At some point, it was just huge.

It was more massive. You had, in terms of pestilence or plagues, what was called the Black Death killed about one-third of Europe, it's estimated, or as much as one-third of Europe during the 1300s, and 1400s in Europe. We've seen a lot of those things.

And at those times, people could rightly have thought, well, this is definitely war. This is definitely rumors of wars. These are, you know, many, many awful things that have happened throughout history.

But Jesus says, just because you see those things doesn't mean that the end is yet. These were things the prophecy teachers of the day were saying. Jesus gives a different signal for the end.

He lists one prerequisite for the end. Of some things he says, the end is still to come. But then he says, this gospel of the kingdom, this good news of the kingdom, this good news about God's reign will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples.

Then the end will come. Do you want Jesus to come back soon? Well, there's one role that he's given us to play in this. 2 Peter 3 says, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

Well, how can we hasten it? The context says in 2 Peter 3 that God doesn't want any to perish. He wants everybody to have eternal life. We can let people know the good news when the good news has been preached among all the nations.

Again, in Romans 11, it talks about the turning of the Jewish people. Before that, it talks about the fullness of the Gentiles coming in. Revelation talks about representatives from every people and tribe and nation and language before God's throne.

There's one thing we can do. We can participate in what God has called us to do. The kingdom is already and not yet.

We can work for the fulfillment of God's kingdom insofar as we can. When the good news about his kingdom has been offered among all peoples, then the end will come. Paul applies Jesus' end-time teachings in Matthew 24.

I started the course by talking about the reliability of the gospels. I mentioned how Paul preserved many of Jesus' sayings. Well, in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says, this we say to you by the word of the Lord.

He probably isn't referring just to a random prophecy. I mean, even if you just had an average of a hundred house churches up until the time that Paul was writing. In



those hundred house churches, if you go by what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 14, you had maybe two or three people prophesying per service.

Although Paul talks about, you could all do that. Even if you just have that, and it's happening every week, and 5,000 believers in Jerusalem alone in Acts 4:4. Well, 5,000 men, Jerusalem believers in Acts 4:4 alone. Then you think of, they met from house to house, as well as in the temple.

You think of how many houses that would have taken. You probably already have at least a hundred house congregations in Jerusalem at that point. But by the time that Paul's writing, we're talking about thousands, tens of thousands.

By the end of the first century, even if there's just an average of a hundred house churches, we're talking about maybe a million prophecies that had been given. Why would this prophecy overlap that much with what Jesus said? Why would Paul depend so much on one particular prophecy that overlaps so much with what Jesus said? I think when he says, by the word of the Lord there, he's probably not talking about a particular prophecy that someone gave, just anyone gave. He's probably talking about Jesus' own prophecy, by the Lord's own word, by what Jesus had said, by what Jesus taught.

In 2 Thessalonians, he says, these are the traditions that we delivered to you. These are the things that Paul taught in Thessalonica. And by the way, in terms of some scholars question the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, although the majority of commentators don't.

But some scholars have questioned the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. Nobody in their right mind is going to make up a saying about this man of lawlessness setting himself up in the temple after 70 when the temple is destroyed. And people, if they were going to make up a fake letter in somebody's name, they normally did it a long time after that person.

Pseudepigraphic letters were normally long after. Well, 1 and 2 Thessalonians both talk about many of the same things that Jesus talks about. And if you go through Jewish literature and you look at these things, elsewhere in Jewish literature, you have a lot of end time signs and so on.

Once in a while, they overlap with these, but you don't have anything close to this collocation of all these things together in one place. Basically, in two paragraphs in 1 Thessalonians and one paragraph in 2 Thessalonians, this overlaps just by accident, even using the repertoire of other Jewish teachings about the end time. What we have here suggests, I think, clear parallels between Matthew 24 and other teachings of Jesus elsewhere and what we have in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, which may be the earliest parts of the New Testament.

Some would say 1 Thessalonians is second earliest. I tend to think it's earliest, but whatever. Very early parts of the New Testament, written probably within two decades of the resurrection.

Now you have a warning about false prophets, Matthew 24:24. You also have it 2 Thessalonians 2 with the false prophet. End time apostasy and lawlessness, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2. The beginning of birth pangs now in Matthew 24, the birth pangs now in Romans 8:22, and also a final birth pangs in 1 Thessalonians 5. You have the desecration of the temple in Matthew 24.

You also have the man of lawlessness worshipped on the site of the temple, claiming to be God, 2 Thessalonians 2. Acts chapter 1, Jesus says, you don't know the times or the seasons of Israel's restoration. 1 Thessalonians 5.1, you don't know the times or the seasons of Christ's return. We also have it with some of Jesus' other teachings.

Jesus' coming, his parousia in Matthew 24. Parousia could mean presence or coming. It was often used for a royal coming, which would fit Jesus, for the coming of a king or a high dignitary.

Well, Paul uses that and conjoins it with another word, apontasis, which was often conjoined with such a meeting. When a king or some dignitary was coming to a city, an embassy from the city would go out to meet the person. That would be the apontasis, the meeting, and escort of the person on their way into the city.

Jesus comes in the clouds, Matthew 24:30. He comes in the clouds in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. He gathers his chosen ones, 24:31, by his angels. Well, in 2 Thessalonians 2, he gathers believers. And in 1 Thessalonians 4.16, by the voice of the archangel, he gathers together his chosen ones by the sound of the trumpet in Matthew 24:31. Well, he gathers by a trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:52, he calls it the last trumpet, not thinking of the trumpets of revelation, which hadn't been written yet, but a final gathering trumpet.

Matthew 24:43, and this is a motif that I don't find anywhere in ancient Jewish literature of the coming of God. He comes like a thief in the night, 1 Thessalonians 5:2. He comes like a thief in the night. And you have that alluded to in Revelation 3:3, Revelation 16, 2 Peter 3, and so on, Jesus coming like a thief.

Well, Paul clearly meant to refer to Jesus' teachings. And here, we have these as confirmed as some of the earliest sayings of Jesus, in a sense, confirmed in the New Testament. There were a lot of different end-time scenarios in early Judaism, but Paul echoes precisely the motifs that Jesus taught.

Paul gives these by the Lord's own word, and in 2 Thessalonians by the teachings that Paul passed on to them, the language used for passing on what one received from an earlier teacher. So, what may be the earliest letters in the New Testament attest that Jesus did talk about end-time things the way that we have written in the Gospels? But they also suggest something else to us.

Jesus talked about his second coming in Matthew 24:29, immediately after the tribulation of those days. Now, Paul uses these sayings of Jesus to talk about believers being raptured or being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Rapture is just taken from a Latin word meaning catch up.

About Christians being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. His term for meeting, if it's used the way it's normally used, it would mean that we meet him on his way down from his escort on the way to earth. So, Paul says that Jesus descends from heaven with a shout.

Shouts when they were conjoined with trumpets in antiquity normally were cries of war. Paul seems utterly unaware that anybody could place this at a different time from the second coming that Jesus described as being after the desecration, after what we call the Antichrist. Paul seems to place this at the second coming.

Now, I know that my viewers at this point hold different opinions. So, I ask you to be patient with me. There are different opinions.

I'm not going to try to get into that very much. But let me say this. There have been a number of views held by people throughout history, and God has used people who've held a number of views throughout history.

In Revelation 20, it talks about a thousand-year period, and that's been interpreted in a number of different ways. Most of the earliest church fathers believed that there was a future thousand-year period. Apparently, Justin Martyr, Papias, and Irenaeus all believed this.

What became dominant in later centuries, especially after Constantine, the earliest Christians believed that they were either in the Great Tribulation or they were about to go through it, and then they believed there was the thousand-year period. After Constantine, the church began saying, we've been through the Tribulation. Now we're in the Millennium.

We're reigning with Christ. That became the dominant view. It certainly was dominant by the time of Eusebius.

He says that there were some of these premillennialists, but unlike other heretics, they were able to be talked out of their heresy. Not a very nice way of talking about them. But the amillennial view became dominant.

Although the form of amillennialism at this point started the Millennium not with Jesus' first coming, but started it around the time of Constantine. So, it was really sort of a postmillennial view. They thought Jesus would come back after they had established the kingdom on earth.

But a thousand years after this Millennium supposedly began, people were saying, okay, where's the final judgment? It's supposed to have come now. And so you had some different views through church history after that. The postmillennial view, the view that we would establish the kingdom on earth and Jesus would come back, was based on texts like, well, when the good news of the kingdom has been preached everywhere, preaching it everywhere doesn't mean we've established the kingdom everywhere.

But in any case, that was the dominant view held by many of the leaders in the Great Awakenings. Jonathan Edwards held that view. The leaders in the Second Great Awakening in the U.S., many of them held that view.

Charles Finney, if you've heard of these people. In the United States in the 1800s, at least up until the Civil War, and for many people way after the Civil War, the dominant view among U.S. evangelicals was this, we will establish the kingdom on earth. Around the year 1830, a British thinker by the name of John Nelson Darby came up with a form of dispensationalism.

Now, his dispensationalism is different from the kind of dispensationalism you have among progressive dispensationalists today. But Darby said, well, God doesn't deal with the Jews and with the church at the same time. So, therefore, the church would have to be taken out before he could deal with Israel during the final tribulation.

And from that came the view that the church would escape the final tribulation before the thousand-year period. And people were expecting this tribulation at some point. You can see why that view would become popular, but it really became disseminated by the Scofield Reference Bible and was widely popularized then.

Nobody until 1830 is on record as having taught this catching up before a tribulation. Everybody before then either believed that they were in the tribulation or they were going to go through the tribulation, where the tribulation referred to all of church history. There were various different views.

But what I'm arguing is that the church was right through most of its history and many parts of the church, probably most parts of the church still hold this, that the

catching up happens at the second coming. When Jesus comes, he doesn't go back to heaven for seven years. But when he comes, the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our God and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever.

This is why Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 2 concerning Jesus coming and our gathering to him. And in Greek, these are bound together as probably referring to the same thing. He said, this, including our gathering together to him, won't proceed the day of the Lord.

Well, Paul has already said about the day of the Lord. He's already talked about that in 1 Thessalonians 5, the day of the Lord will come like a thief. That's the imminent day of the Lord that we're expecting.

2 Peter also talks about that. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will be destroyed with great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat. He's talking about the end, no tribulation after that.

But in any case, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2, this won't proceed the day of the Lord. And he says that that day will not come until the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed and sits on God's throne. So he's talking about surely something about tribulation, however, you take that before then.

He also says in 2 Thessalonians 1 that we won't receive rest from our sufferings until Jesus comes to destroy the wicked and publicly glorify the saints. That's why Jesus overtakes them like a thief to destroy them. If you look at all the passages that talk about, we don't know the day nor the hour, all the passages that talk about him coming like a thief, coming unexpectedly in context, read them in context.

All of those passages are talking about the end, not something seven years or three and a half years before it. The popular view today in many places is that Jesus will take his church out before any final period of tribulation. And you can see why that's popular.

And my guess is that some of my colleagues who are filming other parts of this series hold that view. And we can mutually respect one another without holding the same view. But remember the tribulation that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 probably started a long time ago.

Nobody actually held this view or can be attested for certain as holding this view of two different stages in the second coming until 1830. Now that being the case, I would suggest that it's possible that Jesus meant to warn us about something. When Jesus talks about the sufferings, we shouldn't expect to get out of them.

In fact, the church in many parts of the world has been going through them for a long time. I was at the headquarters of a denomination a few decades ago when the church in China had just suffered under the Red Guards in the time of Mao. And many other people had also suffered in China at that time.

But the Christians had really suffered very severely during that time. And some Western missionaries came and they said, Oh, we're allowed back into the country. We've come back to see you.

And they said, you told us that we were not going to go through tribulation, that we were going to be raptured before the great tribulation. And when you disappeared, we thought that you had been raptured and left us here to suffer. We can do this on our own.

We don't need you here to teach us now. That's not what everybody taught before that happened. But that's in these particular circles, that's what had been taught.

And that's how they heard the teaching. Now, John Nelson Darby himself did not mean that Christians wouldn't suffer. But there are people on the ground who've taken it that way.

So, whether you hold to this rapture before the tribulation or not, please make sure you let people know that this doesn't teach that we will not suffer. Because all through history, many Christians have suffered for their faith. Jesus says they can't do more to you than kill your body.

They can't take your soul from you. They can't take your true life from you. Many Christians have already faced that throughout history.

One reason I spend a little bit of time on this is that I was originally taught that view. But I began to notice, as I was reading 40 chapters of the Bible a day, you can get through the New Testament every week if you do that, I began to notice that none of the verses in context actually said that. And my pastor really didn't care that much, but a guest evangelist took me aside and said, no, you must believe this.

All men of God believe this. And I said, okay, well, I better believe this because I'm just a new Christian and I have to believe what you tell me. But later on, I found out that that wasn't true, that all men of God believe that, or all women of God believe that.

And that in fact, probably the majority of men and women of God through history have not believed that. Once I realized that, I said, I'm never going to let somebody do that to me again. From now on, I will always go back and check scripture for myself to see what it really says.

And that was the beginning of me cultivating, really searching the scriptures for myself, which is what the Lord calls us to do to search the scriptures for ourselves. Jesus says, if you search the scriptures if you really search the scriptures, you would know that I am he. Paul talks about, Luke talks about the Bereans who searched the scriptures diligently to see if what Paul was saying was true.

And that's why they could recognize that much of what Paul was saying was, that's why they could recognize, many of them could recognize that what Paul was saying was true. It's not so important to me whether you agree with me on this particular teaching or not, but I'm trying to provoke your attention to get you to think about how you approach the scripture on this particular issue. Read the scripture for yourself.

See if you really think it's talking about two separate events, two separate comings of Jesus in the future, or two separate stages, or if it looks like it could all happen at once. As I think, I think that's what I found in many passages. But the most important thing is not just on this, but on other things.

Search the scriptures for yourself. That's our common basis of authority. That's why we call the scripture a canon.

It doesn't mean that that's all God ever spoke. I mean, you know, in 1 Kings chapter 18, Obadiah says he hid a hundred prophets in a cave. There were other prophets whose prophecies weren't even recorded in scripture.

I mentioned all those prophets in the New Testament, all these prophecies that were being given in the first century that aren't recorded in the New Testament. It doesn't mean that's all God ever spoke, but the canon is a measuring stick. That's what a canon means.

The Bible is how we test every other claim to revelation. God isn't going to speak something that's not in the same spirit as what it was there. The spirit comes and attests to our hearts that we are children of God.

Well, that's in keeping with what we see in the New Testament. But we Christians, come from many different church traditions. We're brothers and sisters.

We believe in Jesus. We don't always agree on every detail. We don't have to be brothers and sisters, but we do have a common basis for authority.

And as we listen to one another, sometimes we'll be prompted to search the scriptures and often we'll see what we've been taught is right. But sometimes we'll see that some of the things we were taught, well, maybe some of our brothers and

sisters from another tradition have something to teach us. I'm not trying to get you to change your tradition, but I'm just saying as believers, we all need to go back to the Word.

That's what happened on Josiah's day. In 2 Kings 22, they found the Book of the Law in the temple. And Josiah didn't just say, well, this can't really be addressing us because look, other people in my day, they're not living this way and I'm sure they must be godly.

No. He said we aren't living the way this text tells us that we're to live. He tore his robes.

He took it very seriously. He sent to the leading prophetic figure of the day who sent back to him the interpretation of what that would mean for his day. He took it very seriously and that brought about a revival.

Didn't take care of everything. Things were too far gone in some ways in his day. But we need to go back to the scriptures.

We need to call people back to the scriptures. We need to hear what the Lord says to us. We need to major on the majors and minor on the minors.

We can disagree. We're still brothers and sisters. But we're going to get the heart of it best when we go back and listen to God for ourselves as we hear what the scriptures have said to us.

And those who can't read, who listen to what the scriptures have said to us. Let's yearn for that with all of our hearts. Well, in Matthew 24, there are no chapter breaks in the original, which leads directly into Matthew chapter 25.

As Jesus goes on to talk about what's going to happen at the end. I've said before, Matthew 24 verses 45 to 51, before we go to Matthew 25. Jesus gave a parable that the servant who knew his master's will and didn't do it was going to be in big trouble.

And the servant who was left to take care of the fellow servants, to give them their food in their proper time and their drink in their proper time while the master was gone. The master's going to come back at a time when the servant doesn't know. And it will be great for the servant who's been doing what they're supposed to be doing.

But if that servant, instead of taking care of their fellow servants, is abusing them and exploiting them and using the resources just for themselves, Jesus says that he will come and he will cut that servant in pieces and cast them into outer darkness. Now, cutting somebody in pieces was one of the things that was considered a very,



very extreme punishment. If we are in a position of leadership among God's people, we need to take that position as servants to our fellow servants.

A pastor is a shepherd of the sheep. In Ezekiel 34, he says, these shepherds were not taking care of the sheep. They were taking care only of themselves.

If we have a position in the body of Christ, let's use it to take care of our brothers and sisters because we answer to somebody who's the Lord over both them and us and who loves them just as he loves us. Matthew chapter 25, is another parable about being ready for this second coming in a way that many people weren't at his first coming. He tells a parable of 10 virgins, and 10 bridesmaids, so to speak.

Normally, there was a procession from the groom's home to the bride's home. They would normally have torches because normally this was done at night. Joachim Jeremias talks about how this was practiced in Palestinian villages in his day in the modern period.

I don't have more recent information. It may still be practiced that way. But certainly, in ancient times, I've explored ancient sources and neutral torches were standard throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

It's all over the place in ancient literature. So, you know, having your lamps lit, having your torches lit was very important. That's what they meant by lamps back then.

Normally would be something like torches. Usually, that's what it was. It was a great honor to be a bridesmaid.

It was a really great embarrassment to mess up. Keep in mind that the bridesmaids were normally pretty young virgins. They often married in their mid-teens.

So, these are young teenagers, probably. They're friends of the bride and they're looking forward to being brides themselves. Well, it's going to be a lot harder for them to get a husband if they mess up in front of the whole community.

Often the entire village would be invited to a wedding, as we said before. And often these weddings would go on for seven days. Well, they're not ready when the bride comes.

There's no way to predict exactly when he's going to come because everything had to be made ready before he would come and get his bride. Well, they can't take part in the procession. The five who were ready could take part, but the five who weren't ready, were locked out.

They're told, you know, you can't come in. Now, keep in mind that these wedding feasts, go on for seven days. People would be coming in and out.

Not everybody would be there for all seven days of the feast. They're locked out. They're not going to get to come in.

And they are told, we don't know you. Well, obviously everybody in the village would know about them, but this was a formula of repudiation. Unfortunately, something that Peter uses for Jesus.

I don't know the man. I don't know you. He's denying knowing them.

They are banished from the feast permanently. It's an image of great horror and shame for a teenage girl who might be listening to this. But Jesus applies this to all of us.

This is an image of horror and shame to us. Jesus was willing to use characters that not everybody in his audience would identify with. He didn't just use the elite characters that the elite would identify with and everybody else would wish they were them.

He drew on everybody. And then Jesus tells the parable of the talents. It's similar to one about minus in Luke, a smaller quantity.

I don't know that it's the same parable myself. I think it's probably a different one, but there's some overlap in the themes. The parable in Luke is in Luke 19 and talks about a king who goes to a far country to receive a kingdom.

Well, everybody knew that that sometimes happened. Herod the Great had to go to Rome to have his kingdom, and his authority confirmed to him. So did his son Archelaus.

But in any case, we're looking here at the parable in Matthew chapter 25, the parable of the talents. Few people had the capital. Few people could actually invest and lend and make money from it.

But those who did could make a huge income because there were only a few of them who had it. They could double their income or more by lending and getting back interest on it. So the first two servants, invest their income and they double it.

And their master is very pleased with them because that's what should be expected when people had income. But then you have this lazy servant. He said, well, I hid it in the ground and he wrapped it in a napkin or a cloth and hid it in the ground.

That was the least safe thing. You don't hide it in the ground. I mean, at least if you're going to hide it in the ground, you use a strong box, but you don't hide it in the ground in a cloth.

He says, well, you have what is yours. Probably no servant was going to speak that way to the master because that was an insult. Take what is yours.

And he said, the reason I did it this way is because I was afraid because you're so mean. That also was an insult. I mean, we often don't read it that way in our culture, but in that culture, that's what he was saying.

He's just insulting the master as his excuse. I didn't really want you basically to make any money off this that you left for me. So, I'm just giving you what's yours because you're mean.

I don't like you. Well, he gets in big trouble. We don't want to treat God that way.

God has given us resources. We need to use those resources, whatever gifts he's given us, whatever economic resources he's given us. Use them for the furtherance of the kingdom.

Don't insult God by not using your resources for God. That's what people do who waste their lives on other things. The sheep and the goats are the final parable in Matthew chapter 25.

Jesus appears here as king and judge. He's divine. Sheep were considered more valuable than goats.

And so it's not surprising he uses the sheep in the good way and the goats in the bad way. Goats were often rebellious too, but sheep were very obedient. So, people tended to like sheep more than goats.

Also, Jesus says the sheep, he calls them to his right hand, the goats to his left. The right was preferred to the left. Of course, we understand there's nothing wrong with being left-handed, but in the ancient Mediterranean world, the right was preferred to the left.

Well, who are the least of these, his brothers and sisters, who are going to receive a reward? Well, there are different views on this. The least of these are brothers and sisters who were received by those who were being judged and were given food and so on by those who were being judged. One of the views is that the least of these refers to the poor.

That was a view held by Mother Teresa. It's held by my really good friend, Ronald Sider, who teaches a lot about caring for the poor. It's held by a lot of other people that I have respect for.

I respect them, but I don't share their view. Ron and I have talked about this. Again, you can hold different views and it's all right.

But I think it probably refers to missionaries. Most other New Testament scholars seem to also hold that it refers to missionaries. By missionaries, I don't mean necessarily our traditional understanding of what that means, but people like those in Matthew chapter 10 who go out to share the good news with other people and other people.

They're willing to cross cultural boundaries to do that and they take the good news with them. Why is there a difference in interpretation? Well, certainly Jesus cares about the poor. You have that in other passages.

Think about Proverbs, whoever gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord will repay them. So, when somebody says, whatever you've done for the least of these who are poor, you've done for Jesus. Well, there's a sense in which that's true.

Proverbs says that. So, I'm not really disagreeing with people theologically on this point, but what does the exegesis of this particular passage mean in Matthew chapter 25? Well, who are Jesus' brothers and sisters elsewhere? Look at chapter 12, verses 48 to 50, pointing to his disciples. Jesus said, here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters.

Whoever does the will of my, and I translate it that way because adelphos, when it's used in the plural, you use the masculine if there are any males in the group, but it also can include females. That's just the way the Greek language works. So whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother.

So, who were his brothers and sisters elsewhere in Matthew? Well, whoever does the will of his father. Chapter 23, verse eight, you're not to be called Rabbi, for you have only one master and all of you are brothers and sisters. In chapter 28, verse 10, Jesus said to the women of the tomb, don't be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. Well, why were they hungry? Chapter 10, verses 11 through 14, whenever you enter a town or a village, search for some worthy person there and stay at their house until you leave.

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or that town. So, they had to depend on hospitality and when they would come, they could be hungry, they could be thirsty, but you're

supposed to take care of them, welcome them. If you welcome the messengers of the gospel and you embrace their message, well, on the day of judgment, you too will be received.

And many of us who are doing this Matthew course are also those who go and share the gospel. But Matthew 10, verses 40 to 42, one who receives you receives me. Ah, so whatever you've done to the least of these, you've done for me.

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because they're my disciple, I tell you the truth, they will certainly not lose the reward. This is 10:40 to 42. In the same way, we're going to places, as people leave their homes to go share the good news with other groups of people who don't have as much access to the good news.

That can even be within the same country, but just to different groups of people who don't have access to the message. As we do that, these messengers of the gospel stand in the place of the Lord. Whoever receives them receives the Lord whose message they bring.

And sometimes they may be hungry. Sometimes they may be thirsty. Sometimes they may be poorly clothed.

Paul went through all these things. Sometimes he says they may be sick. They may be in prison, but you visit them as was expected for people who were sick or in prison that you liked.

You were supposed to visit them. Receiving the messengers also entails receiving the message. So how are the nations judged in the time of the end? How are the sheep and the goats distinguished? They're distinguished by whether they've received the good news or not, by whether they've welcomed the good news.

That will be the standard of judgment on the day of judgment. And that's why the good news of the kingdom must be preached among all the nations before the end will come.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 17, Matthew 24-25.