

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 17, Matthew 24-25

Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome back to the deep dive. You know, we are going to be diving deep into Matthew chapters 24 and 25 today. Oh, yeah, and you know, looking at the end times, the end times, it's a big topic. It's a little bit of a scary topic. Sometimes I can be, but you know, we've got some good material to guide us today. Oh, yeah.

Yeah, we're going to be looking at excerpts from a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Okay, who is a leading biblical scholar?

Yeah, a brilliant guy really brilliant guy. So I'm excited to kind of unpack his thoughts with you and see what we can learn. Yeah, I think what's so interesting about Dr. Keener is that he doesn't just you know, talk about these things in a vacuum He really puts them in historical context You know, he talks about how Jerusalem was facing a very real threat in the first century Oh, so he's connecting that to what Jesus said about fleeing when you see signs of danger Exactly relating that back to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans exactly and he even brings in Yeah, really powerful story about his wife who was a refugee Oh, wow during a time of war in Africa and had to flee her home with very little warning Oh gosh, I can't even imagine Just like you have to leave everything and just run you have to make split-second decisions about you know What to leave behind yeah the constant fear of being caught in the crossfire Yeah, I mean it really kind of puts a whole new spin on what Jesus was saying about fleeing, right? It's not hypothetical. Exactly. It was a real thing.

This was life-or-death advice based on real-world events. Wow, and you know what's so amazing is that the Christians in Jerusalem at the time? Yeah, they actually heeded Jesus's warnings. Yeah, and they fled to Pella. That's right. Which was a city in the Decapolis, right? And for those who don't know, this was a group of ten cities, yes, outside of Jewish control.

That's right. Largely, and they survived. They did. They survived the destruction. Isn't that amazing? It's incredible.

It really shows that they took Jesus's teaching seriously. Yes, and I mean, this is what's even more interesting. Is that? Dr. Keener goes on to talk about some common misconceptions about the signs of the end times all misconceptions. Okay, like, well, you know, the idea that, like, wars and famines and earthquakes, right, are like a sure sign, right, that the end is near, like that in itself means the end is near, right, and Dr. Keener kind of pushes back on that. He's like, well, you know, these things have been happening throughout history.

That's true. We've had some pretty major events. Yeah, like the Black Death. Oh, yeah, in the 14th century, it wiped out so many people, and you know, the Lisbon earthquake, yeah, in the 1700s, just completely devastated the city totally.

So if those things weren't the end, yeah, what was Jesus really getting at? That's the question, isn't it? Yeah, so Dr. Keener suggests that there's a specific prerequisite. Okay, for the end times, okay. What is it? The gospel being preached to all nations, all nations? Okay, Jesus specifically said this interesting, you know, like this has to happen.

Okay, before the end can come, and that makes me think about that verse in 2nd Peter Chapter 3. Where it says that we can hasten the coming of the Day of God. Yeah, like what role do we play in this whole thing? That's a great question. Are we just passively waiting? Yeah, are we supposed to be, or are we actively doing something, actively working towards it? I mean, it seems like, yeah, we're not just passive bystanders in this, right? We have a responsibility to spread the message, spread the message of the kingdom, and that could actually be a catalyst. It could be part of God's plan. Wow.

Yeah, that's pretty powerful. It is, and you know, what's interesting too is that? Yeah, Dr. Keener really emphasizes the importance of personal scripture study. Yes, he does, and he encourages people to, you know, engage with the text themselves. Yeah, come to their own conclusions.

Don't just take someone else's word for it, right? Don't just blindly accept right what you hear exactly, but really dig in yourself Yeah, he even tells a story about how he himself already accepted certain teachings about the end times, but through study and wrestling with the scriptures Wow He came to realize that they weren't fully supported interesting by the tech So it's not just about what you believe right, but how you got there exactly. How did you arrive at that belief? It's a good point. Yeah, so speaking of different viewpoints and interpretations, we've got to talk about the rapture, the rapture, the big one, the big debate, this event where? Christians are suddenly snatched up to heaven.

All right, and I know there are a lot of different views on when and how that happens. Oh, yeah. Does dr.

Keener talk about that? He does, okay, and he does it really respectfully. Okay, for those who hold those different views, good. I like that. Yeah, he explains the pre-tribulation view, the mid-tribulation, the post-tribulation, even the amillennial viewpoint, right, near the symbolic rapture. And I think it's interesting how he actually kind of traces the historical evolution.

He does of these interpretations. Yeah, showing that our understanding isn't static, right? It's evolving. It changes through dialogue and study, exactly. That's cool, yeah, but I'm sure he doesn't just present all the viewpoints.

No, he doesn't and then leave it at that. He has his own take, his own perspective. He does. What is it? He believes that the rapture occurs simultaneously Okay with the second coming.

Okay, so not as a separate event, not a separate event. Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, and what evidence does he use to support that? Well, he actually turns to the Apostle Paul. Oh, wow. Specifically his letters to the Thessalonians.

Okay, and he argues that Paul, who was writing just a few decades after Jesus, right? Seems to echo Jesus's teachings about the end times. Okay, but places the rapture firmly at the second coming. Oh, so there's continuity there. Yeah, there's a lot of continuity between what Jesus said and what Paul understood. Yeah, and he points out Paul just didn't see it as a separate event.

Not a separate event, yeah, he points out parallel themes and specific details like the coming in the clouds, right, the gathering of the chosen ones, the sound of the trumpet. Yeah, all of these elements that are found in both Jesus' and Paul's letters, right, and he even goes into the original Greek word. Oh, wow, Paul uses for meeting. Okay, arguing that it implies a meeting as Christ is coming down, not as believers are being taken up. Wow.

Yeah, this is biblical detective work. It is so, if Paul, who was so close to Jesus's time, right, understood it that way, yeah, why did later interpretations diverge from that? That's a great question. And that's what Dr. Keener is wrestling with too. Yeah, he suggests that this idea of a separate Pre-tribulation rapture is actually a relatively recent development in Christian history. Okay, so are we saying that the pre-tribulation rapture view is wrong? Well, not necessarily.

I mean the point isn't to say one view is right and one is wrong, right? It's to encourage you, the listener, to grapple with these questions yourself. Okay, go back to the scriptures and explore the historical context, consider the different perspectives, right, and form your own informed conclusions. He's advocating for a more thoughtful approach to faith. He is I like that. Yeah, okay, so let's move beyond the rapture debate now, okay, and dive into the heart of Jesus's teachings in Matthew chapter 25, okay, where he shares these three powerful parables: oh, yes, the parable of the ten virgins, yeah, the parable of the talents.

Yes, and the parable of the sheep and the goats the sheep and the goat yeah- each of them offers a unique lens to view exactly the call to readiness and the criteria for judgment. So we've talked about fleeing and signs of the end. Yeah, and the rapture, but how does that connect to the idea of being ready for Jesus's return? That's a great question. Yeah, so let's unpack these parables. Okay, the parable of the ten virgins. That's a really memorable story. It is, you know, ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom.

Yeah, who represents Jesus, of course, of course. Five are wise and prepared with oil for their lamps, right? And the other five are foolish and unprepared, and when the bridegroom arrives, only the ones who are ready get to enter the wedding feast. Yeah, what an image? Yeah, what a powerful image. Dr. Keener points out how important the cultural context is for understanding this. Okay, you know, in ancient Jewish weddings being a bridesmaid was a huge honor. Oh, wow, and to be unprepared would have been a major social faux pas. Yeah, I can imagine. I mean, imagine the shame of those foolish virgins.

Oh, locked out of the celebration. Well, everybody else is inside. Oh, man, I'm joining. Yeah, but beyond the social implications, right? What's the deeper point? What's the oil? What's the oil? We need to be prepared, right? It's not just about having literal oil in our lamps. It's about cultivating a life of faithfulness, a heart that's aligned with God's will. It's about being so in tune with God that we're ready to meet him at any moment.

So it's not about passively waiting around. Yeah, it's about actively living, living, yeah, in a way that reflects our commitment, exactly. That makes sense. Yeah.

Okay. What about the parable of the talents? Well, that one goes beyond just preparedness, okay; it focuses on stewardship of resources, and the cultural context is key here again. Okay.

How so? Well, Dr. Keener explains that financial investments and Responsible stewardship.

We're huge in that era. Okay, it was a way of proving your trustworthiness. Your ability to handle this is not just about making money, right? It's about character. It's about character, responsibility. Exactly.

Okay, and so the parable draws this contrast between the servants who invest wisely and multiply what they were given- and the one who buried his talent out of fear, out of fear and laziness. Yeah, and that, of course, has implications for us. It really challenges us to think about what talents God has given you. Yeah, what resources has God given us? Are we using them wisely? Are we investing them in ways that honor him? Yeah, and it's not just about Financial investments, right? It's about our time or skill, our energy, everything. Yeah, everything we've been entrusted with.

That's right. Okay, and that brings us to the parable of the sheep and the goats. Oh, yeah, this one gets a little intense. This one's a little scary. It's about judgment, judgment day, you know, the sheep representing the righteous, right, the goats representing the unrighteous, and it's that final separation and division, eternal division.

Yeah, but what determines which side we end up on? That's the question: what distinguishes the sheep from the goats? That's right. And this is where Dr. Keener offers a really interesting interpretation.

Okay, I'm listening. He suggests that it's not just about general good deeds, okay, or religious rituals. It's about how we treat.

Okay, the least of these, the least of these. Yeah, that's a powerful phrase but also a bit mysterious. It is: who are the least of these? That's where the debate comes in. Okay, some people interpret it as the poor and marginalized. Okay, others see it as a broader call to compassion towards anyone in need. Okay, but Dr. Keener offers a more specific interpretation.

Okay, he argues that in the context of Matthew 25, it's referring to those who are spreading the gospel. Oh interesting. Yeah, and he points back to other passages where Jesus identifies his disciples as his brothers and sisters. Okay, so caring for the least of these could be caring for those who are carrying out the mission, exactly spreading the gospel.

I see the connection. Yeah, but why would these messengers of the gospel be in need? That's a great question. Shouldn't God be taking care of them? You would think so, right? But this is where Dr. Keener points us back to Matthew 10.

Okay, where Jesus sends out his disciples with very specific instructions. Okay, he tells them to rely on the hospitality of those who welcome them, but he also warns them that some

will reject them, refuse to listen, and even persecute them. Oh, wow. So they're going out there kind of vulnerable. Yeah, very vulnerable with very little support, sometimes trusting that God will provide through the generosity of others. Yeah, and we see that throughout the New Testament.

We do all his missionary journeys. He faced imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, all kinds of opposition, everything as he was spreading the gospel. Yeah, it wasn't an easy road. No, it reminds us that following Christ isn't always easy.

It's not comfortable; it often requires sacrifice. Yeah, yeah, so caring for these messengers. Yeah, it wasn't just about meeting their physical needs, right? It was about supporting the mission itself, exactly, standing in solidarity with them. Yes, as they're risking their lives.

Yeah, it's like coming alongside them. Yeah, in the trenches. Yeah, and say, hey, we're with you.

We're with you. We believe in you. We believe in what you're doing, and we're going to help, and we're going to help you, you know. And there's that powerful verse in Matthew 10. Oh, yeah, where Jesus says Yeah, whoever receives you receives me that's powerful, and "Whoever receives me receives Him who sent me that's right, and anyone who receives a prophet. Yeah, because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, a prophet's reward, and anyone who gives even a cup of cold water wow, even a cup of cold water- to these little ones.

Yeah Truly I tell you that person will certainly not lose their reward Wow, so it's like this ripple effect it is, you know by showing kindness and generosity to those spreading the gospel Yeah, we're aligning ourselves with God's purposes just participating in his work Yeah, and it brings a whole new significance to even the smallest acts even the smallest acts of service and support That's right. Wow, and it brings us back to the criteria for judgment in Matthew 25, right? It's not just about ticking off a list of good deeds. It's about how we respond- yeah- to those who represent Christ himself, right? Those who are carrying his message to a world that needs it, to a world in need, yeah. So this is a call to action.

It is: look around, who's sharing the gospel, and see who's sharing the gospel in your life. How can you support them, and how can we support them? Yeah, and that support can take many forms, you know. Maybe it's partnering with a local ministry. Maybe it's supporting missionaries. Yeah, prayer, encouragement, financial assistance, just being a listening ear. Yeah, just being there for them. Yeah, but I think it goes even deeper than that. It does.

It's not just about the outward actions, right? It's about how we receive the message ourselves. Yeah, you receive it. Do we listen with open hearts? You let it transform you do we allow the gospel to transform our lives? Yeah, and then in turn do we become messengers? Do you become a messenger of that? Good news? Yeah, and that's where Dr.

Keener's emphasis on personal scripture study comes full circle. It does, you know, by engaging deeply with the scriptures, you equip yourself. We equip ourselves to understand the gospel and to discern truth from error. Yeah, and to live it out and to live it out in a way that honors God exactly.

So it's not about blind faith, right? It's about using our minds, engaging your mind, our hearts, your whole self, your whole self. Yeah, in the pursuit of truth. That's powerful. It is, and you know that pursuit of truth.

Yeah, should be characterized by humility. It should recognize that we don't have all the answers. Yeah, there's always more to learn. There's always more to learn, and God can speak through a variety of Perspectives and traditions, exactly. Yes, it's about being open to learning from others, even when they disagree with you, even when they disagree with us. Yeah, you know, engaging in respectful dialogue, challenging each other, challenging each other's thinking, and growing together in our understanding of God's word.

That's beautiful. So we've been unpacking. Yeah, Dr. Keener's insights and interpretations, but it's important to remember this is just one scholar's perspective. Yeah, this is just one perspective. There are many other interpretations out there, and we encourage you, the listener, to dive in yourself.

Yeah, do your own research, wrestle with these concepts, wrestle with the text, and form your own informed conclusions. Don't just take our word for it. Go for it. This is meant to be a springboard, a springboard for further exploration. Not the final word, not at all.

So as we kind of wrap up this part of our discussion, yeah, I want to pose a question to you, the listener. Oh, good. How has this exploration of the least of these, yeah, challenged your thinking?

What are your takeaways? What new insights have you gained? How do you see it applying to your life? How do you see these teachings applying to your own life? Yeah, your relationships. Yeah, that's good stuff. Yeah, those are great questions to ponder, and we are going to delve into those reflections and explore some final takeaways in part two of our deep dive.

I know, me too. So stay tuned. We'll be right back. Welcome back to the deep dive.

Oh, we're continuing our exploration of Matthew chapters 24 and 25 and focusing on this really intriguing idea of the least of these. Yeah, it's uh, it's a phrase that's really powerful. It is powerful, but also a bit mysterious. Yeah, and as we discussed before the break, Dr. Keener's interpretation of this phrase as referring to those spreading the gospel really adds a unique dimension. It does, but I'm wondering, though, yeah, isn't caring for the poor and marginalized important, too? Of course, and that seems like a pretty central theme in the bible. Absolutely.

So is Dr. Keener saying we shouldn't focus on those needs? Well, no, not at all. He's not downplaying the value of any form of compassion. Okay, he's simply highlighting.

Okay, a particular emphasis within this specific passage, okay, of Matthew 25. You know, it's about understanding the context and the specific point that Jesus is making, okay. So how does he arrive at this interpretation of the least of these as Messengers of the gospel? Well, he starts by looking at how Jesus himself defines brothers and sisters, oh, okay, in other parts of Matthew's gospel. Okay, for example, in chapter 12, Jesus points to his disciples and says, okay, here are my mother and my brothers and sisters.

Wow, whoever does the will of my father in heaven? Is my brother and sister and mother so it's not a biological family tie, right? It's a spiritual kinship. It's about spiritual kinship. It's about aligning your life with God's will exactly. I like that, and then in chapter 28, okay, after the resurrection, Jesus tells the women at the tomb, right, to go and tell his brothers, right, to go to Galilee, right? And it's clear from the context that he's referring to his disciples, his disciples, the ones who will continue his mission, right? Okay, so if Jesus identifies his disciples as his brothers and sisters, then caring for the least of these, yeah, in Matthew 25, could very well be about caring for those.

Okay, who are carrying out that same mission Okay spreading the gospel it makes sense But why would these messengers of the gospel be in need in the first place, right? Shouldn't God be taking care of them? Well, you would think, right? Yeah, but this is where Dr. Keener directs our attention back to Matthew 10. Okay, where Jesus sends out his disciples with very specific instructions. Okay, he tells them to rely on the hospitality. Okay of those who welcome them.

Yeah, but he also warns them. Oh, that some will reject them, right? Refuse to listen to their message and even persecute them, so they're going out there vulnerable, very vulnerable, with very little support, trusting that God will provide through the generosity of others. Exactly. Yeah, and we see that theme of vulnerability throughout the New Testament all the time, especially with Paul. Paul's missionary journeys, you know. Yeah, imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, you name it.

He faced it all: opposition, hardship. It wasn't an easy road. No, it wasn't. It reminds us that following Christ isn't always easy or comfortable. Absolutely not; it requires sacrifice, a willingness to suffer. Yeah, yeah, so caring for these messengers wasn't just about meeting their physical needs, right? It was about supporting the mission itself. Exactly, standing in solidarity with them, standing with them as they're risking their lives to share the good news. It's like coming alongside them.

Yeah, in the trenches and saying we're with you. We're with you. We believe in you. We believe in what you're doing, and we're going to help, we're going to guide your back. You know those words of Jesus in Matthew 10, powerful words. They're so powerful. Yeah, whoever receives you receives me; whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

That's right. And anyone who receives a prophet? Because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward and anyone who gives even a cup of cold water Even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones. Yeah, who is my disciple? Truly I tell you that person will certainly not lose their reward. Powerful, it's like this ripple effect, you know, by showing kindness and generosity to those spreading the gospel. Yeah, we're aligning ourselves with God's purposes; you're participating in his work. Yeah.

Yeah. Wow, and it gives a whole new significance, a whole new level to even the smallest acts of service and support. That's right, and it brings us back to the criteria for judgment in Matthew 25. Yeah, it's not about just ticking off a list of good deeds, right? It's about how we respond to those who represent Christ Yeah, those who are carrying his message to a world in need to a world in need Yeah, so it's a call to action.

It is to look around and see who's sharing the gospel in your life. How can we support them? How can we support them? Right, and that support can take many forms. It can, you know, maybe partnering with the local ministry, supporting missionaries overseas, financial support, prayer, encouragement. That's being a listening ear, just being there for them. Yeah, but I think it goes even deeper than that. It's not just about the outward actions, right? It's about how we receive the message ourselves.

How do you receive it? Are we listening with open hearts? Are you letting it transform you? Do we allow the gospel to transform our lives? Yeah, and do we then become messengers ourselves? Do you become a messenger of that good news? That's the question. Yeah, and that's where Dr Keener's emphasis on personal scripture study comes full circle. It comes full circle, you know, yeah, by engaging deeply with the scriptures. You equip yourself; we equip ourselves to understand the gospel, to discern truth from error, and to live it out in a way that honors God.

Absolutely. It's not about blind faith, right? It's about engaging our minds, using our mind, our heart, our whole self. Yeah, in the pursuit of truth. Beautiful. It is beautiful, and you know that pursuit of truth.

Yeah, should be characterized by humility. Absolutely, recognizing that we don't have all the answers. There's always more to learn, always more to learn, and God can speak, yeah, through a variety of different perspectives and traditions.

Yeah. Yes, it's about being open to learning from others, even when they disagree with you, even when they disagree with us. Yeah, engaging in respectful dialogue and challenging each other's thinking, growing together, growing together. Yeah, in our understanding of God's word. Beautifully said, so we've been unpacking. Dr Keener's insights and interpretations we have, but we need to remember just one perspective.

This is just one perspective, one scholar. There are many others out there, many, and we encourage you, the listener. Yeah, to dive in yourself. Do your own research, wrestle with the text, wrestle with these ideas, and form your own informed conclusions. Don't just take our word for it. This deep dive is meant to be a springboard, a springboard for further exploration.

Yeah, not the final word, not at all. So as we wrap up this part of our discussion, okay, I want to pose this question to you, the listener. All right, how has this exploration of? The least of these, yeah, challenged your thinking. What are your takeaways? What new insights have you gained? Yeah, and how do you see these teachings applying to your own life? Yeah, your relationship and your relationships.

Yeah, those are good questions. Those are great questions, and we're going to explore those reflections and final takeaways in part three of our deep dive. Can't wait. So stay tuned. Welcome back to the deep dive. It feels like we've been on this incredible journey.

It has been a journey through Matthew chapters 24 and 25, unpacking all these layers of meaning about Jesus's teachings on the end times. Yeah, really going deep, and you know, I think Dr. Keener has given us some really great insights. Oh, he has some great insight to help us understand all this. He's given us a new set of lenses.

Yes, to look at this stuff with a new set of lenses, to view these passages. Yeah, what would you say is the most? Significant takeaway for you, you know, for me. It's this combination of urgency- okay- and empowerment: urgency, empowerment that we see in Jesus's teachings. He's not just, you know, giving us a laundry list of future events, right? He's saying Live be ready, be ready.

Yeah, not just in some distant future, but in how we live each and every day, so it's not about escaping this world now, but living in it, but living in it with purpose, with intention. Yeah, with our eyes fixed on eternity. Yes, it's about making the most of the time and talents God has given us, right? It's not about stockpiling supplies or predicting dates, right? It's about cultivating a life Yeah cultivating a light that reflects our commitment that reflects your commitment to Christ and that means Spreading the gospel using your resources wisely using our resources wisely showing compassion to those sharing the message Yeah, it's like we're called to be those wise virgins Yeah, keeping your lamps trimmed keeping our lamps trimmed and filled with oil ready to meet the bridegroom at any moment Yeah, but it's also about being those faithful servants. Yeah, the ones who invest their talents and multiply what they've been given for God's glory. You know, those parables really challenge us.

They do to move beyond complacency. Yeah, get off the couch. Get off the couch and really live out your faith. Yeah, and embrace that active, engaged faith. Yeah, and it's not just about our individual readiness. It's about caring for those who are carrying the message the least of these, the least of these, right, you know, and Dr. Keener's interpretation of that, referring to those spreading the gospel, really resonated with me.

It's a powerful concept. It is following Christ isn't a solo mission. No, it's not; we're in this together. We're all in this together.

We've got to support each other, and even the smallest act of kindness towards those sharing the good news can have a huge impact. It can have a ripple effect. Yeah, that we may never see, so we need to expand our definition of love and compassion.

Yes, it's not just about feeling good or doing good deeds. It's about aligning your actions with God's heart. Yeah, recognizing Christ in those unexpected places and showing grace and extending that grace, yeah, to those who are carrying out his mission. Beautiful, and that's where I think personal scripture study. It's so important. It's so vital, you know; you've got to immerse yourself in the word.

We've got to immerse ourselves in it. That's how you understand God's character. Yeah, his purpose, his purposes, his call on your life. Yeah, so it's not just about reading the bible, right? It's about wrestling with it, wrestling with the text, asking questions, asking hard questions, and allowing the holy spirit to guide us. Let him lead you to a deeper understanding, a deeper understanding of truth. Yeah, and Dr. Keener emphasizes that while Jesus's teachings about the end times are focused on future events, they have implications for how we live now. It's not about living in fear or anxiety about the future; it's about living with purpose, with hope, and commitment.

Yeah, to making a difference in the world today, right now. So as you go about your week, ask yourself, how can I live in a state of readiness not just for some future event? But for today right here, right now, right here, right now. How can I make the most of the time and talents God has given me, and how can I extend love and compassion and support to those who are sharing that message of hope? With the world beautiful, that's what it's all about. So thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Matthew chapters 24 and 25. It's been a privilege. It has been a privilege, and remember this is just the beginning. This is just the start. Keep seeking, keep growing, keep diving deep into the truth that sets us free. Amen, and we'll see you next time on the Deep Dive as we explore another fascinating topic, uncovering hidden truths and connecting the dots in a way that only the Deep Dive can