

“Why We Believe in an Optimistic Future, Part 5”
(Matthew 25:1-13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We’ve seen that Jesus right now
 - a. Is in absolute control of the world/universe.
 - b. We’ve seen He has a promise
 - (i) That His Father will subdue
 - (ii) All His enemies under Him.
 - c. We’ve seen the Bible indicates
 - (i) That this will have
 - (ii) A profound impact on the world.
2. We’ve also seen that passages
 - a. That seem to indicate troubled times ahead –
 - b. Such as Daniel 9, the Olivet Discourse, and the book of Revelation –
 - c. Were really referring to a judgment on Israel
 - d. That took place in 70 AD.
3. So far there’s every indication
 - a. That the Lord intends
 - b. To do something wonderful in this world
 - c. Before Jesus comes again
 - d. To put an end to human history.

B. Preview.

1. Tonight, I want us to look
 - a. At one more thing that seems to stand
 - b. In the way of an optimistic future –
 - c. The imminent return of Jesus Christ.
 - (i) The idea that He could come at any minute
 - (ii) To bring an end to the world.
 - (iii) If that could happen
 - (iv) Then what we see could be as good as it gets.
2. We’ll look at two things:
 - a. First, why some believe Jesus could come at any minute.
 - b. And second, what these passages that seem to indicate this are really talking about.

II. Sermon.

A. First, why do some believe Jesus could come at any minute? The reasons, of course, are varied:

1. Charismatics, especially Pentecostals

- a. Believe that the supposed restoration of spiritual gifts
 - (i) That in their view began at the Azusa Street Revival
 - (ii) In Los Angeles in 1906
 - (iii) Signaled the beginning of the last days.
- b. This is what they believe
 - (i) Peter was speaking about on the Day of Pentecost.
 - (ii) “But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy’” (Acts 2:14-18).

- c. In their view, these last days are the final days
 - (i) Before the coming of the Day of the Lord,
 - (ii) Which begins with the coming of Christ
 - (iii) To rapture His church, just before the tribulation
 - (iv) And continues until the final judgment:
 - (v) Peter goes on to say, “AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED” (vv. 19-21).

2. Most Charismatic/Pentecostals are part of a larger group

- a. That believe in the imminent return of Jesus Christ
- b. Known as Dispensationalism.
- c. John MacArthur – who is a Dispensationalist, though not a Charismatic,
- d. Sums up their view in the opening words of his essay,
 - (i) “Is Christ’s Return Imminent?”
 - (ii) He says, “Christ could come at any moment. I believe that with all my heart – not because of what I read in the newspapers, but because of what I read in Scripture.

- (iii) “From the very earliest days of the church, the apostles and first-generation Christians nurtured an earnest expectation and fervent hope that Christ might suddenly return at any time to gather His church to heaven. James, writing what was probably the earliest of the New Testament epistles, expressly told his readers that the Lord’s return was imminent:
 - (iv) ‘Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for *the coming of the Lord is at hand*. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, *the Judge is standing at the door!* (5:7-9, emphasis added).’
 - (v) “Peter echoed that same expectation when he wrote, ‘The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers’ (1 Pet 4:7). The writer of Hebrews cited the imminent return of Christ as a reason to remain faithful: ‘Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching’ (Heb 10:24-25). He wrote, ‘Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry’ (v. 37). And the apostle John made the most confident pronouncement of all: ‘Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour’ (1 John 2:18). When John recorded his vision in the book of Revelation, he prefaced it by saying these things ‘must shortly take place’ (Rev 1:1).
 - (vi) “The New Testament writers often wrote of Christ’s ‘appearing,’ and they never failed to convey the sense that this could happen imminently. ‘And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming’ (1 John 2:28; cf. 3:2; Col 3:4; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4).” (TMSJ 11/1, Spring 2000, 7-8).
- e. This belief in Christ’s imminent return has only escalated since 1948
 - (i) When Israel was reconstituted as a nation –
 - (ii) They believe as the fulfillment of the fig tree putting forth its leaves ().
3. Amillennialism doesn’t necessarily hold that Jesus’ return
- a. Could have been at any time since His ascension.
 - b. Louis Berkhof writes, “According to Scripture several important events must occur before the return of the Lord, and therefore it cannot be called imminent. In the light of Scripture it cannot be maintained that there are no predicted events which must still come to pass before the second coming” (Systematic Theology).
 - c. However, that may no longer be the case
 - (i) Since almost 2000 years have elapsed

- (ii) Since the ascension of Jesus Christ.
- (iii) Many Amils today
- (iv) Believe Jesus could come at any moment.

4. All this is to say
 - a. That the imminent return of Jesus Christ
 - b. Has and continues to have a profound influence on the church.
 - c. It might be affecting you as well.

- B. So let's consider for a few moments
 What these passages that seem to indicate
 He could come at any moment
 Are really talking about.

1. First, let's briefly consider the Acts 2 passage.

- a. The longer I live the more I see
 - (i) That you can't take anything for granted.
 - (ii) Even the clearest passages in Scripture
 - (a) Can be understood by some or many
 - (b) To mean just about anything.

- (iii) Either our culture has lost the ability to understand English,
- (iv) Or we've just gotten into the habit
 - (a) Of making the Bible say
 - (b) What we want it to say
 - (c) Rather than listening to what it has to tell us.

- b. What is Peter actually saying in Acts 2?
 - (i) First, he's not talking about the future –
 - (a) About sometime nearly 1900 years away
 - (b) That would begin on Azuza Street, Los Angeles.
 - (ii) He's actually talking about
 - (a) What was happening then in Jerusalem –
 - (b) Why it was that these were speaking in other languages.
 - (c) He says, "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel" (vv. 15-16).
 - (d) That event was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy,
 - (1) Not what supposedly happened
 - (2) At the beginning of the last century.

2. What about the passages John MacArthur pointed to,
 - a. Passages such as our meditation, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be

broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*" (Matt. 24:42-44),

- (i) Our text, "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (25:13),
- (ii) And many more like it that all seem to indicate
- (iii) That the coming of the Lord is very near?
- (iv) That it could have happened at any time?

b. There are two possibilities:

- (i) One is that the writers of the New Testament
 - (a) Didn't fully understand what they wrote regarding the future
 - (b) Any more than the Old Testament prophets
 - (c) Fully understood what they were writing.
 - (d) Peter writes, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet. 1:10-12).
- (ii) The other possibility, which is more likely,
 - (a) Is that they were speaking of the coming of Christ in 70 AD
 - (b) To destroy the temple and disperse the Jews.

c. We've seen this already in the book of Revelation

- (i) And the Olivet Discourse.
- (ii) The parable of the Ten Virgins
 - (a) Actually follows the Olivet Discourse
 - (b) And the warning of Matthew 24:42-44,
 - (c) In which Jesus is telling His disciples
 - (d) To be ready for His coming.
 - (e) Notice He is speaking to them, "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (25:13), not to a future generation.

d. MacArthur pointed out one passage that more than the others

- (i) Shows just how close this event was to them: "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).
- (ii) Jesus had warned, "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" (Matt. 24:5).
- (iii) John says many antichrists –
 - (a) Literally, those who claim to be Christ – have appeared.

- (b) That's how he knew it was the last hour.
- (iv) If they were not only in the last days,
 - (a) But it was the last hour then,
 - (b) How can it be that the final hour hasn't come
 - (c) Nearly 2000 years later?
- (v) John and Jesus –
 - (a) And others who were warning the church
 - (b) Of this catastrophic event that was close at hand –
 - (c) Weren't speaking about our days,
 - (d) But of 70 AD.
- 3. One thing that isn't often mentioned
 - a. Is the fact that the Lord also said things
 - b. That imply a long time before He could return.
 - (i) In the parable of the talents,
 - (a) Jesus says, "Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them" (Matt. 25:19).
 - (1) A long time doesn't imply
 - (2) That His coming could have been at any time.
 - (b) He could have been referring
 - (1) To the time frame between 30 and 70 AD.
 - (2) But even if that's what He meant,
 - (3) It's still eliminates the idea of "at any time."
 - (ii) In Matthew 21:41 and 43, in the parable of the Vineyard,
 - (a) Jesus tells the Jews the kingdom will be taken away from them –
 - (b) That they would be destroyed –
 - (c) And that it would be given to another people
 - (d) That would produce its fruits.
 - (e) This implies time –
 - (f) Perhaps a great deal of it.
 - (iii) In the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21,
 - (a) Jesus says something else that implies
 - (b) An indeterminate amount of time, "For there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (vv. 23-24).
 - (iv) If what we saw this morning is true –
 - (a) Regarding the Lord sending His messengers/angels
 - (b) To gather His elect from the four corners of the earth –

- (c) If that is the evangelization of the world
 - (d) That's currently still underway
 - (e) That certainly implies a long time.
- c. All this is simply to say
 - (i) That there isn't anything in Scripture
 - (a) That demanded that Jesus had to come soon then –
 - (b) So soon as to exclude the possibility
 - (c) Of the expansion of the kingdom
 - (d) And the subjection of His enemies
 - (e) In this world, prior to His Second Coming.
 - (ii) We may still pray and labor to this end
 - (a) In the hope that the Lord will use our efforts
 - (b) To build up His kingdom,
 - (c) Which is on the heart of every true believer.
- d. The fact that portions of the church
 - (i) Have read these soon coming passages as they have
 - (a) Have given many unbelievers a reason
 - (b) To reject the Gospel and ridicule the church.
 - (1) "Jesus said He was coming back soon
 - (2) Two thousand years ago.
 - (3) He must not have been who He said He was."
 - (c) Whatever those who believe this
 - (1) Thought they might have gained
 - (2) For the sake of the Gospel
 - (3) They've lost in credibility.
 - (ii) Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:3-4, 7-8,
 - (a) "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' . . . But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."
 - (b) It seems as though Peter
 - (1) Was answering the argument of those
 - (2) Who thought Jesus claimed His Second Coming was imminent.
- 4. Having said all this, let me close on this note.
 - a. The imminent return of Jesus
 - (i) Is often seen to be necessary
 - (ii) For the sanctification of the church.

- (a) The implication is that if Jesus could come at any moment,
 - (b) You need to be ready at every moment.
 - (c) If you remove His imminent return,
 - (d) It only encourages sin.
- b. Don't forget that there is more than one coming of Jesus:
 - (i) He is coming again bodily sometime in the future
 - (ii) To bring an end to the world.
 - (iii) But He is also coming – in a manner of speaking –
 - (a) To collect your soul at your death.
 - (b) That is something you must be ready for at all times
 - (c) Because once you're dead, it's too late!
- c. How can you be ready?
 - (i) It's not by tucking the sinner's prayer
 - (a) In your back pocket until you arrive at your death bed.
 - (b) You're not guaranteed a death bed.
 - (ii) It's by trusting Him now,
 - (a) Turning from your sins now,
 - (b) By listening to His Word
 - (c) And doing what He tells you to do now.
 - (d) That's the only way you can be ready. Amen.

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