

Text: Matthew 24:28-51

Section 1

28"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. (Matthew 24:28)

I have discovered at least two possible valid interpretations for this verse. One I shared last week, in which the Lord Himself is the "corpse," and the "vultures"—or "eagles" in some translations—are believers. The Bible does state that Christ, through His sacrifice, will draw men unto Himself. Everyone that comes to Him in faith and repentance will receive eternal life.

32"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. (John 12:32-33)

14"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Another interpretation is that the "corpse" is the spiritually dead nation of Israel, and the "vultures" are the Roman armies that were to soon come and destroy Jerusalem and scatter the Jews. As we read previously, Jesus predicted this in a parable recorded in Matthew 22. The destruction of Jerusalem was God's punishment for the rejection of the Messiah.

1Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3"And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4"Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" 5"But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7"But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. (Matthew 22:1-7)

The reference to the non-believing Jewish people as a "corpse" is appropriate, because everyone that has not been regenerated through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is, indeed, spiritually dead.

9If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. 10The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. 11And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:9-12)

Also, on another occasion in Scripture God referred to an invading army that He had ordained to visit His wrath upon the Jews, in this case the army of Babylon, as an "eagle" or "vulture."

**6"Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.
7"They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.
8"Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. (Habakkuk 1:6-8)**

It is difficult to know which one of these interpretations the Lord intended by His statement. Either is viable when cross-referenced with other Scriptures, and neither stands in contradiction with the overall message of God's Word. Perhaps further study will reveal the correct answer.

Section 2

29"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:29-31)

The word “*immediately*” causes problems for some folks, since Jesus appears to be saying that His return would come immediately following the events described in the previous verses. Yet, I have been saying that the previous verses are referring to the destruction of Jerusalem less than 40 years after Jesus spoke, not events far off. Some interpreters answer this difficulty by suggesting that the entire chapter is referring to events that have not yet occurred—this may be a correct interpretation. Others answer it by suggesting that all of the events referred to in this chapter, including “*the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY,*” etc. have already happened—this cannot be a correct interpretation, as it requires the reader to allegorize events that, I think, will someday literally occur.

One answer to this dilemma lies in a facet of prophecy and prophetic interpretation that we discussed last week. Consider this passage again:

**6For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
7There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

Here, events that occurred in one time (the birth of Christ) are grouped together with events that are yet to occur in another time (the consolidation of His reign). Since this is a frequent occurrence in Biblical prophecy, it should not be surprising that the Lord would discuss near-term and far-off events in a single prophetic discourse.

Still, the word “*immediately*” is present. Another answer to this is to consider the “*tribulation*” to be encountered by God’s people to be ongoing. Think about it. False christs, false prophets, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of believers...and the preaching of the Gospel have been occurring since the time of Christ until now. In a certain respect, the word “*tribulation*” can refer to the entire “church age,” after which Christ will indeed come.

This chapter is a difficult passage, and I won’t pretend to have all the answers. I am doing my best, however, to present several alternatives while focusing on what I think has been the most traditionally held interpretive position on this chapter.

Moving on, the Book of Revelation tells us that the Lord’s return will be preceded by cataclysmic events.

12I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17)

Rather than rejoicing at His appearance, however, most of the world’s inhabitants will mourn. Remember, the unregenerate do not love Christ, because His righteousness exposes the filthiness of their own sin.

16"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (John 3:16-21)

Romans 1 is very explicit about the results of rejecting Christ and choosing sin. The return of Christ will mean that the ability of people to live like this with impunity is over. Therefore, they lament His return.

18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19**because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. **20**For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. **21**For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. **22**Professing to be wise, they became fools, **23**and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. **24**Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. **25**For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. **26**For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, **27**and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. **28**And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, **29**being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, **30**slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, **31**without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; **32**and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:18-31)

When Christ comes, those that rejected Him can anticipate only an eternity in torment.

11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. **12**And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. **13**And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. **14**Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. **15**And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

For believers, however, the anticipation of Christ's return is a great comfort, because instead of eternal torment, we anticipate eternal life.

16For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17**Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. **18**Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

Fortunately, all that will repent and believe in Christ will experience the joy of eternal life with Him, escaping forever the eternal punishment that each of us deserves.

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **10**for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. **11**For the Scripture says, "**WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.**" **12**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; **13**for "**WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.**" (Romans 10:9-13)

Section 3

32"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; *33*so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. *34*"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. *35*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (Matthew 24:32-35)

"*This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*" That sentence has been the subject of so many varied interpretations! Which generation? And, which things? First, let's revisit the disciples' original question to Jesus that started this discourse.

1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." 3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3)

Jesus told them of the impending destruction of the Temple, and the disciples asked when that would occur, along with His coming and **"the end of the age."** The disciples could not comprehend a world in which the Temple did not exist. Therefore, they combined in their minds the two events: the Temple's destruction and Christ's coming. Jesus answered them by talking about both events, even though they were to be separated by a great length of time.

The easy, and traditional, answer is to say that *"this generation"* means that the generation then alive would not pass away until the destruction of Jerusalem was complete. Although many of the disciples were dead by that time, John was not, nor were many others that were then alive—remember, the destruction of the Temple occurred 40 years or less after Jesus gave this discourse. This answer, however, ignores the fact that some events referenced in Matthew 24 are yet to occur. John Calvin has a very interesting answer to this dilemma, stating that *"this generation"* means that those then living will see the beginning of these things, including the destruction of Jerusalem, yet the Church will endure them for generations to come. His is, I think, a very reasonable answer.

34. *This generation shall not pass away.* Though Christ employs a general expression, yet he does not extend the discourses to all the miseries which would befall the Church, but merely informs them, that before a single *generation* shall have been completed, they will learn by experience the truth of what he has said. For within fifty years the city was destroyed and the temple was razed, the whole country was reduced to a hideous desert, and the obstinacy of the world rose up against God. Nay more, their rage was inflamed to exterminate the doctrine of salvation, false teachers arose to corrupt the pure gospel by their impostures, religion sustained amazing shocks, and the whole company of the godly was miserably distressed. Now though the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession for many ages afterwards, yet what Christ said was true, that, before the close of a single *generation*, believers would feel in reality, and by undoubted experience, the truth of his prediction; for the apostles endured the same things which we see in the present day. And yet it was not the design of Christ to promise to his followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time, (for then he would have contradicted himself, having previously warned them that *the end was not yet*;) but, in order to encourage them to perseverance, he expressly foretold that those things related to their own age. The meaning therefore is: "This prophecy does not relate to evils that are distant, and which posterity will see after the lapse of many centuries, but which are now hanging over you, and ready to fall in one mass, so that there is no part of it which the present *generation* will not experience." So then, while our Lord heaps upon a, single *generation* every kind of calamities, he does not by any means exempt future ages from the same kind of sufferings, but only enjoins the disciples to be prepared for enduring them all with firmness. (John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Vol. XVII, Reprint: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005. 151-152.)

Jesus said His *"words will not pass away."* Remember, Jesus was and is God Incarnate. God cannot lie, and He cannot be mistaken. Everything He says will come to pass will indeed come to pass!

8"Remember this, and be assured;

Recall it to mind, you transgressors.

9"Remember the former things long past,

For I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is no one like Me,

10Declaring the end from the beginning,

And from ancient times things which have not been done,

Saying, 'My purpose will be established,

And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:8-10)

Section 4

36"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38"For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41"Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. 42"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43"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. 44"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. (Matthew 24:36-44)

We don't know when Christ is coming. Therefore, we must live each day as if it will be the last day on earth until He comes. If you're not saved, repent and believe *now* and be saved—tomorrow it might be too late! Beyond that, even if Jesus doesn't come back tomorrow, you might not live to see it. At our age, we typically expect to live another 50-60 years. Lord willing, that will indeed happen. But, it might not. Don't find yourself in the situation Jesus described in the following parable, in which a man absorbed in

acquiring worldly wealth was suddenly dead and, apparently, unsaved. His wealth didn't follow him into death, and it certainly didn't save him!

13Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." **14**But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" **15**Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." **16**And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. **17**"And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' **18**"Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. **19**'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" **20**"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' **21**"So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:13-21)

Everyone that dies without Christ will find himself immediately in torment. Yes, at the end of the world all unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire, but until then the place where they go isn't great either. Jesus told his hearers what may have been a true story and not a parable about such an individual.

19"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. **20**"And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, **21**and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. **22**"Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. **23**"In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. **24**"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' **25**"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. **26**'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' **27**"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--**28**for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' **29**"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' **30**"But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' **31**"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." That's a statement worth talking about for a moment. Nowadays there is no end of authors and evangelists promoting some new method, based on the "latest research" that is guaranteed to bring lost people into the Church and, supposedly, into God's Kingdom. Abraham, however, told the rich man that "**Moses and the Prophets**," in other words, the Word of God, was the only thing that could convince a sinner to repent. Paul said something similar:

17So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

Beware of anyone that has some "new" means of evangelism that ignores this important truth. God saves people by using us to confront them with the Truth of His Word. That means that we will share, from God's Word, who He is, who we are, our sin and the consequences thereof, and the means to salvation. If they won't repent and believe after being confronted with the Word, nothing else will do better.

Section 5

45"Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? *46*"Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. *47*"Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. *48*"But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' *49*and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; *50*the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, *51*and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:45-51)

Henry and Calvin agree that these last verses are discussing pastors and teachers—those that are to lead and instruct His people. James warns us that few should accept the role of teacher, since being in such a role brings "**a stricter judgment.**"

1Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

While Jesus commends those pastors and teachers that faithfully "feed" His people, he spends more time harshly condemning those that abuse their position and His people. Such individuals, perhaps those that preach a false gospel or, worse, deliberately pervert His

message for the sake of financial gain (at the expense of those that follow them), are “**false prophets**,” and are destined for Hell if they don’t repent and believe the true Gospel.

15"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16**"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? **17**"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18**"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19**"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20**"So then, you will know them by their fruits. **21**"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. **22**"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' **23**"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; **DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.**' (Matthew 7:15-23)