

## Matthew 24G

- We're studying the coming of the Lord, that mysterious day Jesus describes in Matthew 24 which He says will be a part of the events of the last days
  - This day arrives suddenly without warning and it comes during circumstances that Jesus said would be like the days of Noah
    - The days of Noah were days of intense evil on earth, with the unbelieving world unknowingly careening toward judgment
    - But they are also times when the believing world will understand the end is near and will be preparing for a rescue
  - So will be the circumstances surrounding this future day, and now we're ready to move to Part 2 of Jesus' teaching about this day
    - In Part 2 we study the manner in which this day unfolds
    - Jesus didn't provide those details in the Olivet Discourse, preferring to wait for His discourse at the Last Supper
    - But Matthew doesn't include Jesus' teaching on the coming of the Lord in his version of the Last Supper, so we go to John
  - We find Jesus remarks in John 14, at the beginning of the Last Supper

**[John 14:2](#)** "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

**[John 14:3](#)** "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

**[John 14:4](#)** "And you know the way where I am going."

- Jesus was to die in a few hours and He knew that after His death His relationship with these men would change dramatically
  - Up to this point, they had walked with Jesus face-to-face, enjoying His company, watching Him work, sharing in His life
    - But after Jesus died, resurrected and ascended to the Father, these men would need to learn a new way to work with Jesus
    - They would lose access to His physical presence for a time but in return they would gain a much greater access to Him spiritually

- Most of all, they needed to understand that Jesus' departure didn't mean the end of ministry...it was just the beginning
- And eventually, these men would follow in Jesus' footsteps once more by completing a similar departure
- So now in His final hours, Jesus announces to these men that He is leaving and one day they will follow
  - And this passage in John 14 we find Jesus' promise to His Church that one day He will return for all of us
  - That moment is the day Jesus called the coming of the Lord, the day when Jesus is reunited with all His disciples
- Looking at the promise, Jesus says in v.2 that He's going to His Father's House soon to prepare a place for the Church and then He will return to claim us
  - To fully appreciate what Jesus is saying, it's necessary to recognize Jesus is speaking euphemistically here
    - He's comparing His return for the Church to the Jewish wedding traditions of His day
    - Marriages in Jesus' day were typically arranged with the father selecting a bride for his son
    - Once a bride was identified, each family committed to the marriage by entering into a betrothal agreement
  - But the marriage didn't take place right away, because the groom must first prepare a home for his bride-to-be
    - The son would work under his father's guidance to build an extension onto the father's home
    - This new room would be the future home of the son and his wife after the wedding took place
    - Only after the room was ready would the father permit his son to go claim his bride and marry her
  - When the father deemed the groom ready, the groom would travel to the bride's home, claim her, and bring her back home for the wedding
    - That was typically the first time the groom and bride would see each other face-to-face

- Later after a week or so, the couple would travel back to the bride's home to celebrate the new marriage with her family
- That is the ancient style of wedding that Jesus is alluding to here with His choice of language
  - Jesus is borrowing from that Jewish wedding tradition to help us understand the coming of the Lord
  - Jesus is expecting us to recognize Him as our Groom returning to claim us, His Bride, after a period of delay
  - So let's make that comparison as we consider what Jesus says in John 14
- First, Jesus says in v.2 that He goes away to prepare a place for us, which is obviously a reference to Jesus' ascension into Heaven
  - Jesus left the earth and entered into the presence of the Father, and Jesus is now preparing a home for His Bride to join Him
    - But just as obviously, Jesus isn't literally building additions in Heaven with wood, sheetrock, etc.
    - Jesus prepares room for us in Heaven spiritually speaking as the Author and Perfecter of our salvation
  - In Chapter 9 of Hebrews the writer explains that Jesus mediates a better New Covenant for us in a better tabernacle in Heaven
    - So Jesus is our blood propitiation applied to the Heavenly tabernacle to remove the wrath of God
    - And He is our intercessor seated at the right hand of the Father, reconciling us to God
    - So by that comparison, we understand Jesus left us for a time to prepare a place for us in Heaven, like a groom leaving his bride
  - Nevertheless, we remain in a covenant with Jesus in the meantime, just as a bride and groom are bound while they wait for their wedding
    - Because marriages didn't begin with an engagement but with something far more serious and binding: a betrothal
    - A betrothal was a preliminary form of marriage and a covenant itself, and like all covenants a betrothal was not easily broken

- In fact, a man and woman who were betrothed had to seek a legal divorce if they wanted to call off the wedding
- We see that in the story of Mary and Joseph, who was prepared to divorce a pregnant Mary though they were only betrothed
- So today we are “betrothed” to Christ by our faith and we have entered into the New Covenant with Him
  - Christ is our Groom and we are His Bride, and our Groom is not going to break His word to return to us
    - In fact, the groom’s effort to prepare a home for his future bride is the best proof that he intended to return and claim her
    - A man didn’t spent all day and everyday building a home for a bride-to-be only to decide not to claim her in the end
  - Similarly, the fact that Jesus has gone to Heaven to prepare a place for us tells you all you need to know that He will return for us one day
    - Jesus wouldn’t have done the work of redemption, of lowering Himself to take the form of man and of dying in our place...
    - Of ascending to cleanse the Heavenly tabernacle and of interceding for us continually as Hebrews says...
    - He wouldn’t have done the work of preparing for His Bride if He intended to abandon Her in the end
    - Or as Paul tells us:

**Phil. 1:6** For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- But like a groom claiming his bride, the timing of the coming of the Lord will always be a mystery
  - In the Jewish wedding, a groom couldn’t know when he would claim his bride because the father made that determination
  - He permitted his son to claim the bride only after the father was satisfied that his son’s work on the bride’s home was complete
- The son worked quickly to complete the room, but the father had the final word on when it was done

- So the betrothal period might last months or even a year or more
- And all the while the bride waited at her home not knowing when the groom would appear
- This explains why Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 that the exact timing of the coming of the Lord was unknowable even to Jesus
- Next in v.3 of John 14, Jesus says as He comes, He will receive us to Himself
  - Last week in Matthew 24 Jesus illustrated how this day would unfold from the perspective of those on earth using two everyday illustrations
    - He said there would be two men in the field, one would be taken, one would be left
    - And there would be two women at the mill, one would be taken and one would be left
  - But I mentioned that the original Greek actually reads “two men in the field, one is *received*, one is left”
    - The Greek says they are “received” meaning the man and the woman move away from the earth
    - And now in John 14 Jesus uses that same Greek word, *paralambano*, as He says He “receives” us to Himself
  - And then at the end of v.3 Jesus adds that after He has received us to Himself, we will be with Him where He *was*
    - We know Jesus departs Heaven to receive us off the earth, so that means we return to where He was...in Heaven
    - So the coming of the Lord is Jesus returning from Heaven to remove His Bride from earth and return Her to Heaven
  - That detail is proof Jesus is talking about a day that’s different than His Second Coming
    - The Second Coming of Jesus is a completely opposite set of circumstances from what we’re reading here in John 14
    - At Jesus’ Second Coming, He also moves from Heaven to earth, but when He gets here, He stays on earth to rule the Kingdom

- And Revelation 19 says when He comes, Jesus brings His Bride with Him, which means we started in Heaven with Him
- Those details are the opposite of what Jesus is describing here, which confirms this is a different day
- That leads us to our next passage from a letter by the Apostle Paul where he elaborates on the manner of this coming day

**1Th. 4:13** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

**1Th. 4:14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

**1Th. 4:15** For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

**1Th. 4:16** For 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.

**1Th. 4:17** 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.

**1Th. 4:18** Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- How do we know Paul is talking about the same day here that Jesus has been describing in Matthew 24 and John 14? There are two reasons
  - First, notice in v.15 Paul calls this day the coming of the Lord, which is the same term that Jesus uses in Matthew 24
    - Secondly, all the direction of movement Paul describes here is the same as the movement Jesus describes in John 14
    - Paul says Jesus returns from Heaven, then believers are caught up (or received) to Jesus and we remain with Jesus after that
    - So we know Paul is speaking of the same day here
- Paul gives us three new details in this passage, beginning with dramatic signals that announce the moment
  - The first, Pauls says, is that an archangel will shout – and he is probably speaking of the archangel Michael
    - So believers across the earth will suddenly hear an angelic voice announcing our day has come

- Then there will be a heavenly trumpet sound, which links this event to the Jewish feast of trumpets called Rosh Hashanah
  - As with the shout, I believe this trumpet will only be heard by those included in this moment
  - So the man and woman who are received in Jesus' example will hear these things while the man and woman left behind will not
  - And these signals are not signs that the event is coming, rather they are announcements that the event is already underway
- The second thing we learn is that the Lord doesn't return all the way to the earth
  - In v.17 Paul says that when Jesus comes for His Bride, He never actually visits the earth but instead meets us in the clouds above the earth
    - This explains why we must be "received" to Jesus...we cannot go to Him on our own because our meeting place is off the earth
    - Jesus will be in the clouds, out of sight of the world, so the world will never know Jesus came
    - That fits Jesus' earlier description of two men in the field and then suddenly only one man remains
  - Paul's description confirms once more that we're talking about a day very different than the Second Coming of Jesus
    - Because the Second Coming is Jesus returning to live on earth again, not to stay in the clouds
    - In fact, we call that moment Jesus' "second" coming because it will be like His first coming
    - At His first coming, Jesus lived on earth, and so it will be at Jesus' Second coming: He will live on earth again in the Kingdom
  - In describing our movement off the earth, Paul says in v.17 that we are caught up with Jesus, and the word for caught up is *harpazo* in Greek
    - The word *harpazo* means to "snatch away" and it was later translated into *raptura* in the Latin version of the Bible
    - That Latin translation is responsible for giving this day its more common name

- Because in English *raptura* becomes *rapture*, and so the coming of the Lord has come to be known as the Rapture
- Finally, Paul tells us that the coming of the Lord won't just be a moment for those believers who are alive here on earth on that day
  - Paul says in v.14 that when Jesus comes on that day He brings with Him those who are "asleep" in Jesus, meaning believers who died previously
    - The Bible tells us that when a Christian dies, the spirit of that person leaves the dead body to enter into the presence of Jesus
    - They enter Heaven fully conscious in spirit form only yet without a physical body
    - And Paul says these bodiless believers will be included in the events of this day
    - They leave Heaven with Jesus to participate in the coming of the Lord by "rising" first Paul says in v.16, followed by living Christians
  - The Bible uses the term "rise" to refer to a literal, physical resurrection, therefore the coming of the Lord is our resurrection moment
    - Which is why Paul says the coming of the Lord will be a moment of resurrection for both dead and living believers
    - All believers need physical bodies to live in the physical Kingdom on earth, and this is the moment Jesus gives us that new body
    - And it's only fair that those who have died already will be first in line for their new body since they have been waiting the longest
  - It's one thing to hear spirits of dead believers receiving new bodies, but it's another thing to consider living believers gaining a new body
    - But Paul says in v.17 that those believers who are still alive and remain on the earth will also be resurrected in this moment
    - So how can someone who is still alive be resurrected?
- And that leads us to our final passage explaining how God will resurrect the living Church saints at the coming of the Lord

**1Cor. 15:50** Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[1Cor. 15:51](#) Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

[1Cor. 15:52](#) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

[1Cor. 15:53](#) For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- In this chapter Paul is defending the reality of a future, physical resurrection to a church that had been deceived into thinking resurrection was impossible
  - And at this point in the chapter Paul is explaining how the Lord will resurrect believers who are still alive when Jesus returns for the Church
    - He begins in v.51 acknowledging this moment has been a mystery, meaning God hid this truth from prior ages
    - You may have encountered from time to time believers who doubt the teaching of a future rapture
    - And one of the arguments they make is that this notion is not in the Bible and was invented in the 1800s or something like that
  - Obviously, the coming of the Lord is found in the Bible, but they assume this is a reference to the Second Coming of the Lord not the rapture
    - Moreover, they fail to appreciate the nature of a biblical mystery...it's intentionally obscured until God reveals it
    - And unless we are paying attention and approach the Bible with a teachable heart, we will miss the truth of mysteries like this one
    - I believe that's how God tests us to see whether we are teachable and submitted to His word
  - I should add that if a Christian tells you they don't believe in a Rapture, then they are making the same mistake as did this church in Corinth
    - They are unknowingly denying the resurrection, because that's what the Rapture is: the moment the Church is resurrected
    - It's the moment we all receive new eternal bodies, and certainly every Christian should agree that we are promised resurrection
    - So when someone denies the Rapture that simply demonstrates that they don't understand how we will be resurrected

- Resurrection is the process of a dead person coming to life again, and the best example of resurrection, obviously, is that of Jesus
  - When He died, Jesus' spirit left His body and His body became lifeless
    - Then three days later, Jesus' spirit returned to His physical body and He returned to life...that's resurrection
    - Jesus's spirit never ceased being alive or conscious...only His physical body ceased living
  - And when believers die today, their spirit leaves behind a lifeless body and enters into the presence of Jesus
    - But Heaven isn't our permanent home, because we are destined to return to this earth to live in a physical Kingdom
    - So one day we must be resurrected, meaning our spirit must be reunited with a physical body
    - But unlike Jesus, we don't receive our old body back, because it was corrupt, so we get a brand new body in its place
  - And now Paul reveals a mystery to the Church, that not all believers are destined to die before they will be resurrected into new bodies
    - As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4, not all believers will be required to sleep – which is a euphemistic reference to death
    - Not all believers will experience a physical death because those who are still alive when Jesus comes skip that step
- Instead, Paul says they will be “changed,” and the Greek word for changed is *allasso*, which literally means an exchange of something
  - What is being exchanged? Specifically, living Christians on this day will exchange their present body for a new, eternal body
    - Simply put, they will be resurrected but without first experiencing the death of their current body
    - And in v.52 Paul says that this exchange is instantaneous happening in a moment
  - The Greek word translated “moment” is *atomos*, from which we get words like “atom”

- The word means something so small that it can't be divided further
- So the exchange of our old body for the new body happens in a moment so brief, so instantaneous, that time can't be divided further
  - One moment we're in the field or at the mill, and then instantly we will be with Jesus in the clouds in a new body
  - If you blink, you will miss it, and in fact Paul says it happens in the blink of an eye
  - And then it will be over...a man will be left standing in the field wondering what happened to his workmate
  - And a woman will be left working in the mill wondering where her coworker went
- But above the world, unnoticed in the clouds, will be a celebration unlike anything the Creation has ever known
  - The eternal Bride will have been united with Her Groom, and an uncountable number of saints will be rejoicing together
  - We'll be rejoicing that we are with Jesus, and that we are together with all our brothers and sisters
  - And we will be marveling at our new bodies, free from disease and pain...and most of all free from sin and death
  - And you'll be marveling at how much my new body resembles Brad Pitt
- That's how the coming of the Lord will play out...suddenly, dramatically, instantaneously, gloriously
  - That is very different from the other events Jesus described in Matthew 24
    - The end of the age is announced to us over centuries with signs that build slowly with ever-increasing cataclysmic events
    - And you can mark Jesus' Second Coming on a calendar since it comes at the end of a seven-year period of Tribulation
  - But this moment happens in an instant with no warning and no signs and its place in God's plan was a mystery until Jesus and Paul revealed it

- And in Matthew 24 Jesus told us this day is not associated with any signs, and therefore it could have happened anytime
- So every generation of believers should live with the expectation that this moment could transpire in their lifetimes
- And now that the signs of the end of the age are appearing, we have all the more reason to live with that expectation
- Every moment of every day of your life, you are just an *atomos*, an instant away from finding yourself celebrating in the clouds in a new body
  - That day will be so sudden it will interrupt not only your plans for that day but for the rest of your life
    - It will be so sudden, it will even interrupt your thoughts
    - One moment you will be worrying about something, or fearing some calamity or being weighed down by some worldly desire
  - And then in a flash, all that will be over and behind you, and you will be facing Jesus and on your way to Heaven
    - Suddenly, as you marvel at your new body, you will feel endless strength and boundless joy
    - You notice you're completely free of evil thoughts and sinful desires
    - You'll experience an overwhelming love for God moving in and through you, untainted by selfishness or deceit
    - And you will behold the One scriptures call Beautiful, in His full glory just as a Bride looks upon Her Groom on her wedding day
  - And in that moment I wonder what we will say to ourselves as we reflect on the life we're leaving behind?
    - Will we wonder at how absorbed we allowed ourselves to become in the worries and sadness and struggles of this world?
    - Will we regret the time we spent chasing that world below the clouds, the world fading behind us and under judgment?
    - What were we worrying about? What were we striving for?
    - When a bride is betrothed to her groom, how much does she concern herself with the matters of the family she leaves behind?

- Now we know why Jesus told us not to fear and not to worry and not to store up things on earth
  - He wasn't merely telling us to maintain a positive attitude, as if our attitude makes a difference to our eternal future
    - Having a positive attitude doesn't change your resurrection day...the day of the Lord comes for all Christians the same way
    - The fearful and sad and grumpy Christians are resurrected just as assuredly as the peaceful, joyful contented Christians
    - And some of you are probably thinking "praise the Lord"
  - The reason Jesus counseled us to resist giving in to feelings of worry or sadness or insecurity is because they are a waste of our time
    - Fundamentally, they are evidence that we've taken our focus off of our eternal future and moved it onto a lost and dying world
    - Look, we all live in this world, so we all have to contend with whatever trials come our way
    - And those trials will discourage us or frighten us or anger us or tempt us into sin
  - But we can't let those experiences and the emotions that provoke us define our outlook in life
    - We should consider how we will feel in that moment we're caught up to the clouds
    - Consider how you will reflect on the life you're leaving behind, and ask yourself now what do you want to remember?
  - If you've spent the better part of your adult life preoccupied with matters of this life, won't you feel like you wasted time and opportunity?
    - As you look upon your new, eternal, sinless body that never grows old and never wears out, won't you wonder why you spent so much time trying to preserve a body destined to be replaced?
    - As you learn of your eternal treasure stored up for your Kingdom life, won't you question why you spent so much time storing up treasure on an earth destined to burn up?

- We don't have to enter that moment with so many regrets, because the word of God has revealed this mystery to us precisely for that reason
  - Next week we will consider the purpose in this day, and why the Lord has included it in His plan for the Church
    - But here's a preview of what we will learn...
    - It's summed up in the phrase you hear me using from time to time...live with eyes for eternity
  - In other words, think about your future, think about the fact that the coming of the Lord could happen any second
    - Any second you could be with Jesus, in the clouds, in a new body
    - So live every second ready for that moment
    - Let the reality of that future influence how you live now
  - And if you are thinking well I might die before the Rapture happens, that may be true but it changes nothing
    - Because in the moment your body dies, you enter into the presence of Jesus, and that moment is only a heartbeat away
    - So whether we die or live until the Rapture, either way we ought to live with eyes for eternity
    - We will pick this conversation up again next week as we continue in our study