

Is Jesus Really Coming Back?

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There is a small movement among churches of Christ which teaches that Jesus is not coming back. They teach that the general resurrection has already happened. They teach that *heaven and earth* have already passed away. They teach that all prophecy has been fulfilled. The doctrine is known by several different names - *Realized Eschatology*, *The AD 70 Doctrine*, *Max Kingism* - are just three. Let's define each of those so that we can get our minds around the teaching.

Realized Eschatology. The meaning of this title is that the end times, the final things, have already been realized or fulfilled.

The AD 70 Doctrine. The fundamental teaching that is done by those who hold this doctrine is that in AD 70, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem, Jesus made His return and He is not coming back again. They base their belief on the misuse of various passages, particularly Matthew 16:27-28 and Matthew 24.

Max Kingism. It is called this because of the man responsible for having promoted the doctrine in the 1970s via books, articles, and public debates.

Here's the question - *Does it matter?* Does it really make a difference if someone believes that Jesus has already returned? Does it really matter if a person believes that the resurrection of the last day has already occurred? To those who hold the *AD 70* doctrine, it absolutely does! To those who do not hold the doctrine, it absolutely does! Of interest, there were those in the first century that taught the resurrection had already passed. Paul wrote, "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Notice the language! Those who taught that the resurrection had already passed had "*erred*" from the truth and had "*overthrown the faith of some*." There were some at Corinth who denied that there would be a resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). It matters! The resurrection from the dead matters! The study of final things matters!

The resurrection from the dead and the final judgment is at the core of the Christian faith. Paul wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are

saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). While preaching in Athens he said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). Many more passages could be provided. Jesus taught about the resurrection and judgment. Peter wrote about the "*day of the Lord*" that would come as a thief in the night (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Paul wrote of the same (1 Thes. 4:13-5:4). It is more than obvious that the teaching of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment are matters that matter!

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There are three prominent characteristics of those who hold this teaching. First, they hold to a form of Gnosticism. Basically, Gnosticism says "*I have special knowledge that you don't*." Watching them debate, listening to their sermons, and seeing what they post on social media makes this very clear. Second, those who hold to *Realized Eschatology* are very adamant about public discussions or debates. Anytime their position is challenged they will respond with, "*How about we have a public debate?*" Many debates on this topic have been had over the years, by the way. Third, this is all they ever talk about. Their writing, preaching, and social media is constantly about AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, just recently, a part of this fragment had a lectureship entitled, "*The End WAS Near*."

As hard to believe as it is, this doctrine exists and is regularly pushed by its adherents. Their goal is to convert people to their system of belief. I have had one of them reach out to me in an attempt to change my mind on the subject. The next few editions of FCGN will address various aspects of this doctrine. An important point to understand about the AD 70 doctrine is that they have redefined many biblical terms. We must allow the Bible to define our terms and not men who hold a particular doctrine. This point will be covered in the upcoming editions.

Paul wrote, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24). In the first letter to the brethren at Corinth, the apostle Paul dealt with division, the misuse of miraculous gifts, sin within the camp, and other issues. In this section of the letter, Paul declares the gospel and allows a visualization of what occurs in the end. The "end" is *telos*, it is the conclusion, the finality. This word is used twice in Romans 6:21-22. What is the finality of the practice of sin and righteousness? In this Romans text, Paul states that the end to the service to sin is death, that being eternal death. The end of those who bear fruits of righteousness is life eternal. Does it remotely sound as if this end includes only the fall and judgment of Jerusalem or does it sound as if all nations will be affected by a great judgment? One can look at what is being discussed within the context of First Corinthians 15:24 to declare what this "end" or finality is referencing. The chapter begins by defining the gospel and declaring its power to regenerate and restore (v. 1-4). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation of the soul of every race of man, not just Israel (Rom. 1:16). The death, burial, and resurrection was confirmed and Christ, by His gospel, the resurrection of the faithful unto eternal life was assured.

First Corinthians 15:20-22 states that death came by Adam's disobedience (Gen. 3:11-24). Life was made possible by the obedient Christ (Heb. 5:9). A quickening by Christ occurs to those who obey in faith. They are restored back to the Father, forgiven of all sin which once separated (Isa. 59:2; Col. 2:11-13). In verse 23, the coming of Christ is introduced with this "end." Christ raised first, which already occurred, an aspect of the gospel. Then, those who are His, those who have obeyed the gospel (Rom. 6:3-6), are raised with Him. The resurrection in that day does not determine salvation, the Judge will determine. All will be raised (Jn. 5:28-29). All will be judged (Matt. 25:31-49; 2 Cor. 5:9-11). Those pronounced faithful are resurrected to eternal life. The disobedient are resurrected to eternal damnation. The resurrection of those who belong to Christ is being considered here. The resurrection of the unrighteous and unprepared are not mentioned because their resurrection will be to eternal damnation. With this resurrection being considered, "the end" is mentioned in verse 24. The end takes place after "that," being the resurrection just discussed. The kingdom, the body of Christ, which consists of the saved (Acts 2:47), who have submitted

by faith to the Lordship of Christ, who have been quickened and forgiven, are being delivered to God to this eternal life. At this time of deliverance, Christ, who has all authority (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:30-33; Eph. 1:21-23) ends His rule of the kingdom and turns it over to the Father. This rule does NOT end until the last and greatest adversary is destroyed. This adversary is death, a result of Satan's work. Hebrews 9:27 reads, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The end will occur when there is no more physical death. If no physical death, then the physical life which is accompanied by death has ended. This is "the end." The end described here is not meant to reference the end of Judaism, or of physical Jerusalem, but the end of physical life and the world as we know it. First Corinthians 15:24-26 are verses that, without any doubt to the serious student of the Bible, describe the end as a time when life is over, when all will arise from their respective graves, and when all will be judged according to what they have done in this life. Those who are prepared are resurrected to life eternal. Those who are not prepared, and have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, are resurrected to flaming fire and eternal vengeance in that day (2 The. 1:7-10).

"All will be raised (Jn. 5:28-29). All will be judged (Matt. 25:31-46)."

In conclusion, that day, the judgement day (2 Pet. 2:9, 3:7; Jude 6), the resurrection day, is the last day (Jn. 6:44, 54; 7:37; 11:24; 12:48). It is the last day the earth will exist before being destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:10). If "the end" is simply referencing the destruction of Jerusalem and is passed, absurd conclusions arise, including: (1) The kingdom/church has already been delivered up to God; therefore, the kingdom/church no longer exists on Earth (v. 24). (2) Christ has relinquished all rule, authority, and power; therefore, He is no longer reigning as King (v. 24). (3) He is no longer reigning, so all the enemies of Christ are destroyed, yet evil still abounds (v. 25). (4) Physical death has been destroyed yet death still occurs to everyone who lives (v. 25). (5) Dying spiritually has been destroyed yet people are still sinning but are no longer separating themselves from God which is spiritual death. (6) If death has been destroyed, there is no need for the new birth and regeneration (v. 29). (7) If the final judgment is passed, not every man will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). First Corinthians 15 is speaking of the power to soul salvation and the end times when Christ returns in the future and will judge the world. It is not speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem is not the finality or end of the gospel age, nor was it the final judgment.

The nighttime can be very scary. Darkness, the unknown, and feelings of loneliness often occur. When you add in a thief, the anxiety can be ten times worse. The mannerism of a thief is to unlawfully take away the goods of another person. Thieves do not consider the damage that their actions leave. Often times, thieves feel they have done no wrong. They hide their true purpose and are destructive to peace and safety. They illegally take what does not belong to them while operating under the cover of night.

The Apostle Paul used “*A Thief in the Night*” as a figure of speech to describe the second coming of Christ. The purpose was to warn of the dangers people of God face by being unprepared. Just like the nature of a property owner is to be vigilant over valuable goods, the Christian should be just as vigilant over his soul. Most homeowners would spend hundreds of dollars on a security system to keep valuables in their home safe. Why not consider spending valuable time preparing your soul for the coming of Christ? We need to be vigilant and watchful because no one knows the hour or day of Christ’s return. A nonchalant attitude could bring you home to an empty house that has been cleaned out by a thief. No responsible individual would leave their home wide open for an intruder to come in and just take what they want. You work hard to achieve nice things and it would only make sense to safeguard them from harm. Spiritual neglect is just as devastating as an unlocked door. It can also lead to spiritual loss by failing to study the scriptures as stated in Second Timothy 2:15. Just like we put emphasis on keeping worldly possessions safe, we must also keep our guard up when it comes to our soul’s salvation.

False doctrine can come as a thief in the night. Paul stated in Galatians 1:6-9, that he was amazed that after they had been taught correctly the gospel of Christ and had obeyed the gospel of Christ, the Galatians were being led astray by false teachers (thief). He warned them that even if an angel from heaven preached any other gospel, he should be accursed. A Christian should be able to spot a false teacher by the words that he speaks. You should put so much energy into knowing and understanding the Bible that a smooth talker would not be able to steal your soul. Christians must always be on guard and ready to contend for the faith. Perilous times will come, therefore don’t let your present condition deceive you into slothfulness just as the apostle Paul stated in Romans 13:12-14, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand therefore cast off the works of darkness

and let us put on the armor of light”. We are to walk in the light (1 Jn. 2: 8-11) and put on faith and love (1 The. 5: 6-8).

Jesus will come as a thief in the night. In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus tells the parable of 10 virgins. Five were prepared and five were unprepared. Those that were prepared He called wise and the unprepared were called foolish. The five foolish virgins thought that having just enough oil in their lamps would be enough to save them. They did not take into account the timeline of the bridegroom (Christ). When they realized their condition, they tried to get in by the merits of those who were prepared. That was a foolish mistake. Each of us is responsible for our own salvation. We must be prepared to meet the Lord at any moment (Lk. 12:35-40). Jesus wants us to stay ready. This can be referenced in Matthew 24:43-44, Luke 12:39, and Revelation 3:3.

The judgement will come as a thief in the night. Do not let worldliness blind you to the reality of the judgement (Lk. 21: 34-36). Jesus warns us to stay ready. The apostle Peter states in 2 Peter 3:9, “The

Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. Being

slothful can cause you to be unprepared at the judgement. The judgement will be universal. On that day, everyone will receive their just recompense. It will not matter if you are a Christian or not, everyone will be judged. How you will be judged depends solely on whether you obeyed the gospel and lived accordingly (Jer. 10:23). Were you cognizant of your duties as a Christian, or did you take for granted each day thinking that you had more time? Walking after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despising the government will label you presumptuous, self-willed and evil. We all must realize that Second Corinthians 5:10 applies to us all, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad.”

In conclusion, many are blind to the false doctrines concerning salvation. It is the responsibility of the Christian to guard his soul. The Christian is not a mindless sheep. You have a choice. You will be held accountable for what you know and what you don’t know. Make no mistake about it, Jesus is returning to receive his bride, which is the church (Eph. 5: 23-27). Will you be ready to face the judgement when Jesus comes? Or, will you be caught unprepared to meet thy God (2 The. 1:7-9)?

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- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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