

# Jesus speaks of his return



Matthew 24: 1–46

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*Jesus Christ explained God's redemption plan to his disciples and that he would have to die and leave them. But he would come again and take his own to him. Great signs would precede this day. These should cause great joy and be a sign that God's kingdom is at hand. He told the disciples to look forward and prepare for this day, the day of the first resurrection. (All passages which could frighten the children have been omitted or are merely touched on.)*

The children learn that Jesus Christ will return and that it is the goal of our faith to be ready and worthy on that day.

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oon the sun will set over Jerusalem. The long shadows cast by the cypresses indicate that it is already fairly late. A cool breeze has come up. It stirs the dry grass, rustles the leaves of the olive-trees and spreads the aromatic odour of herbs. Some men are making their way up the steeply ascending road which leads from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. It is the Lord Jesus and his disciples. The sun is no longer hot and they do not find the going too strenuous. They are silent, enjoying these peaceful moments. Having walked more or less halfway, they sit down around Jesus. They feel comfortable and secure in the company of their Master. They would love to remain here. Jerusalem with its great and beautiful temple complex on the Temple Mount is lying across the valley from them.

1

"How beautiful and impressive the temple is!" exclaims one of the disciples, breaking the silence. "And yet not a single stone will be left in place," remarks Jesus sadly. The disciples know that Jerusalem, including the temple, will be destroyed. Their Master has already told them. He has also explained to them that he will have to leave the earth before that happens. But he also promised that he would return. "That will be the end!" one of the disciples says in a shocked voice. Another one asks:

"Is the destruction of the temple the sign that you will return to us and that the kingdom of God will commence?"

The Lord Jesus does not leave his disciples in the dark as they have to spread the gospel—the teaching of Christ. Patiently he explains God's redemption plan to them. "No, that will not yet be the time. Hold fast to that which I have taught you. It will not be easy. You will also experience suffering and disappointments. You shall be mocked and scorned, persecuted and plagued. But do not fear! When all nations on the earth have heard the glad tidings of God's love and mercy, the time will be ripe: Then I shall return.

2

"But before this happens, many terrible and distressing things will happen on the earth. People will be extremely fearful. The love amongst the people will diminish, even grow cold. People will only think of themselves. But this should not confuse or deceive you, for I have warned you. Those who love me, need not fear, they have something to look forward to: the Son of Man will return with great glory and power. Rejoice when that happens, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

When Jesus renewed his promise to return, the disciples were very happy. It is indeed a wonderful and important promise. The Lord Jesus shall return, visible to all! Then he will take his own with him, up to heaven, where they may

dwell with him and his Father. There shall be only joy! The disciples are greatly impressed by this promise. They take these words deep into their hearts. Fearlessly and courageously they want to take upon themselves all the hardship which the future might bring. They are thankful that Jesus Christ has told them everything. Now they have only one more wish: They would like to know when their master will return to them. "When will it be?" they enquire. But now the Lord must disappoint them: "I cannot tell you the exact time, the day and hour not even the angels in heaven know. Only my Father knows that. But everything will happen exactly as I have told you. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. That is why you must re-



main watchful and prepared. I shall come when no one expects it."

The disciples are impressed by the earnestness with which the Lord Jesus admonishes them to remain alert and prepared. For only the child of God who awaits him can be taken with on the day of his return.

On this lovely, peaceful evening the Lord and his disciples remain together for a long time. No one minds that it has become dark. Each one of the disciples quietly thinks to himself how he can best remain watchful and prepared.

3



*The Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future. He promised to return to take the prepared souls with him up to heaven.*

- 1 The children look at and describe the picture and the photograph. We draw their attention to the beauty of the temple complex. At the same time we point out the transience of everything earthly. Jesus' discussion with the disciples has been adapted to the children's level of understanding.
- 2 Much of that which the Lord told his disciples has already happened. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed a few years after Jesus' death. What do the children think of the sentence: "When the gospel has been preached to all the nations of the earth, and they have received the glad tidings, then I will return." Chapter 10, lessons 3 and 4, deals even more explicitly with the activity of the apostles.
- 3 Jesus' promise is also valid for us. On the day of his return Jesus Christ shall take his own, i. e. those who are prepared for his coming, with him. We prepare ourselves for this day by being watchful and doing what Jesus expects of us.