



What Do Presbyterians Believe about the Second Coming?



Session 1

Matthew 24:1–31

Session Objective

Participants will explore the different eschatological viewpoints held by contemporary believers and the apocalyptic genre found in Matthew in order to learn about the Reformed understanding of Jesus' second coming.

Faith Statement

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

—Nicene Creed



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Where have you heard or seen the phrase *second coming*?
- What films or television shows have portrayed or discussed the second coming of Christ?
- Do you think the second coming will happen in our lifetimes? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Matthew 24:1–31. After reading each section of text (vv. 1–8, 9–14, 15–28, 29–31), explore the following:

- In one word, describe your reaction to this passage.
- What does this section of text teach us about Jesus' return?

Explain the following:

- Amillennialism holds that the one-thousand-year reign of Christ is not to be taken literally, but figuratively describes Christ's reign in the church and throughout history.
- This approach affirms that our broken, sinful world will be changed into a world that reflects the promises of God when Christ returns.
- Reformed theology—which forms the basis of Presbyterian doctrine—holds to an amillennial position. While we believe the world is a broken, sinful place, our belief in ultimate redemption is fundamentally founded upon hope.

Ask: How can we interpret Matthew 24:1–31 in light of an amillennialist understanding of Jesus' return?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- How does discussing Jesus' return affect our lives as people of faith?
- Which aspects of Jesus' return are potentially scary? Are you scared by these things? Why or why not?
- How are we called to respond to the news of Jesus' return?
- In what ways can you live your life joyfully anticipating the future?



Exit

Close with a prayer thanking God for time together to delve deeper into our faith questions.





Will I Be Left Behind?



Session 2

Romans 8:18–24, 38–39; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Titus 2:11–13

Session Objective

We live into the faith that Christ came to save all. Participants will explore what this means for all of humanity and how this statement affects how we live our lives.

Faith Statement

Q. 38. Will all human beings be saved?

No one will be lost who can be saved. The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does *left behind* mean?
- Do you believe that all people are saved? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that we can choose whether or not to be saved? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that we can lose our salvation once we've received it? Why or why not?
- Where do your beliefs of salvation come from?



Explore

Explain the following:

- The term *left behind* refers to one aspect of the rapture, which is part of the premillennial dispensationalist viewpoint of the end times.
- According to this view, in the rapture Jesus will take all of the true believers up in the air with him, while leaving behind people who do not truly believe in Christ.
- Most people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do not subscribe to this viewpoint and instead hold an amillennialist viewpoint, which affirms that our broken, sinful world will be changed into a world that reflects the promises of God when Christ returns.
- The word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible. However, the concept is presumably based on a passage from 1 Thessalonians.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and explore the following questions:

- How would a premillennial dispensationalist interpret this Scripture passage?
- How would an amillennialist interpret this Scripture passage?

Read Titus 2:11–13 and explore the following questions:

- What does this Scripture passage teach us about Jesus' return?
- How is the "blessed hope" (v. 13) of Jesus' return different from your understanding of the rapture?

Read Romans 8:18–24 and explore the following questions:

- What does this Scripture passage teach us about Jesus' return?
- What does verse 24 teach us about hoping in our salvation?

Read Romans 8:38–39 and explore the following questions:

- What do these verses teach about our salvation?
- According to these verses, who will be left behind?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- How does it feel to be secure in your salvation?
- How can you live your life in a joyful response to your salvation in Jesus Christ?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Are you going to be left behind when Jesus returns?"



Exit

Invite each person to share one tangible way that he or she can express the belief that God loves everyone and everything. Close with a prayer asking for God's help in practicing all of the ideas that have been mentioned.



Session Objective

Participants will explore how Scripture gives us the clues for knowing who is a false prophet by applying the Reformed belief that only Scripture is the proper interpretation of Scripture.

Faith Statement

But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves . . . and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and man's salvation.

—Second Helvetic Confession (5.010)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What or who is the false prophet?
- What does the Bible say or not say about who the false prophet is?
- What images of the false prophet exist in films and television shows?



Explore

Read 1 John 4 together and explore these questions:

- According to this passage, what are the characteristics of a true prophet?
- What is the difference between a cult and a religion or a faith?
- What is the key to knowing if a person is a false prophet or not?
- How does learning Scripture help us with the question "How will we know who the false prophet is?"



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- In what ways is it important or not important to understand what is meant by the term *false prophet*?
- How would you respond if someone asked the question "How will we know who the false prophet is?"



Exit

Close with a prayer that God will help the participants discern the answers they are searching for and hear God's voice in the midst of all the others.



Session Objective

Participants will discuss how the true message in understanding the end times is a message of hope in that we are called to live for a time that we may not see in our lifetimes. Participants will also explore the ways we watch for that time in our acts of service and mission. We live the change we want to see.

Faith Statement

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"
—A Brief Statement of Faith (lines 72–76)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Do you think Jesus will return in your lifetime? Why or why not?
- Are you looking forward to Jesus' return or are you worried about it?
- Do you wish that you could know the exact date of Jesus' return? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Matthew 24:3–44 together and explore these questions:

- What signs that indicate when Jesus will return are found in verses 3–28?
- What signs that indicate when Jesus will return are found in verses 29–35?
- What signs that indicate when Jesus will return are found in verses 36–44?
- Which, if any, of these signs have already happened?
- Are any of these signs happening now?
- Can we actually know when Jesus will return? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Jesus shared these teachings with his disciples? What was he really trying to say?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- How would you respond if someone asked you, "When do you think Jesus will return?"
- How important is it to know when Jesus will return? Why?
- How does the theological concept of hope affect your life and faith?

Read the faith statement and explore these questions:

- In what ways can you serve Christ in your daily tasks?
- How can you live a holy and joyful life?



Exit

Give each participant an opportunity to share one thing they can do to spread God's love as they actively wait for Jesus' return. Close with a prayer asking for God's help in our commitment to the coming of the kingdom.

