

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS WILL ARISE

Matthew 24:24

The Lord Jesus taught that at the end of the age, many false prophets will appear and they will try to deceive people. They will be able to perform miracles so as to convince people that their claims are true. They will be so convincing that they might even fool God's chosen ones. Let's read this passage. Matthew 24:24.

Matthew 24:24. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

The elect

Here we are told that false Christs and false prophets are working together with one objective in mind: to lead astray the elect.

Who are the elect that might be deceived? The word 'elect (*eklektos*)' simply means 'chosen.' They are the 'chosen ones.' It is used in the Bible to differentiate those who believe in Christ from those who do not. In the preceding parable, the 'chosen' are those who have responded to the call of grace. *For many are called, but few are chosen*, Jesus said at the end of the Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:14). They responded to God's call through faith. Faith is the means by which we respond to God's invitation. And it is through faith that we become His chosen as we read in Matthew 24:31 (*They will gather together His elect...*). We become His when we respond in faith to His call.

In the OT, the Jews were called 'the chosen,' 'the elect.' Take the example of 1Chronicles 16:13: *O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his **chosen ones***. God chose Israel to be holy and to serve as His witness among the nations.

When we come to the NT, we find that the word 'elect' refers to the church, to the Christians, and not to the Israelites anymore. Speaking to those who have put on the new man, Paul said in Colossians 3:12, *Therefore, as the **elect** of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering*. The elect of God. Those who have put on the new man are of the chosen race.

So the goal of Satan and his allies is to mislead believers by performing spectacular signs. Let's read Jesus' statement carefully. *For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*. Notice the words 'if possible.' *So as to lead astray, **if possible**, even the elect*.

Is it possible?

Immediately, we have a question. Is it at all possible to deceive the elect?

Some interpreters affirm that the presence of the words 'if possible' implies that it is impossible. But we have to be very careful here. If one wants to argue on those lines, then we can say that Satan and the false Christs are wasting their time. If it is not possible to lead astray the elect, why even try? They would be engaged in a futile objective, with absolutely no hope of success.

Can the elect be deceived? I would like to argue that it is possible for the chosen of God to be led astray. I will explain my position from a linguistic perspective, i.e., we want to see how this expression, 'if possible,' is used in other passages of the NT. Is it used to mean that it can be possible? Or is it used to express the idea that it is impossible? You will see that whenever it appears, it never rules out the possibility that it can happen.

'If possible' in the NT

The expression 'if possible,' *ei dunatos* in Greek, occurs 8x in the NT. We have our passage in Matthew 24:24. There is the parallel passage in Mark 13:22 which has exactly the same phrase, repeating exactly the same thing.

Mark 13:22. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

The 3rd time is in Matthew 26:39 where we find Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:39. He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Was it possible for the cup of death to pass from Jesus? Was He in some way forced to drink this cup? Was it impossible for Him to avoid this cup? In other words, did God have to send Jesus to the cross?

We must be careful in our thinking here. If we take it from a strictly legal point of view, God was under no obligation to send His Son to die. In that sense, He was not compelled. If He were, then it would have cancelled out the other alternative. Jesus did not die because He loved us. He died because He had to die. He had no choice. Where there is no choice, love does not enter into the discussion. Take for example income taxes. I pay taxes not because I love the government so much. I pay taxes because I have to. It is an obligation. The law requires it of me. It is not a question of love.

But if the government says, 'We give you the choice. If you love this country, you will pay the taxes. If you don't love this country, you can do whatever you want. You don't have to pay any taxes.' Then my love is being put to the test. You can be sure that those who pay taxes love their country very much.

But if there is a legal obligation, then love does not enter into the discussion. If God is legally compelled, by some kind of law, to send His Son to die on the cross, then of course Jesus had to die. He had no choice. Talking about Jesus loving us becomes a very remote question because He had to do it anyway, whether He loves us or not. Maybe He did it out of love. Maybe He did not do it out of love. That is no longer an important question.

Now we know from the Scriptures that it is not at all the case. God did not have to send His Son in that sense. That leaves us with the other alternative. He had to send His Son because there is a

moral reason, namely His love. The compulsion is not the compulsion of an external force. It is the compulsion of an internal motivation.

Therefore in answer to this question in the garden of Gethsemane, 'Can this cup pass from the Lord Jesus,' the answer is, 'Certainly, legally speaking.' Jesus could say, 'I don't want to die. And I don't have to die for man.' But on the other hand, there is the inner compulsion of love. The love for the Father. The love for us. That constitutes the compulsion. But it is not a compulsion of the kind that cancels any choice. It is possible not to die. So here, the words 'if possible,' does not exclude the possibility for Jesus to have the cup removed from Him.

The expression 'if possible' appears a **4th time** in the parallel passage in Mark 14:35.

*Mark 14:35. And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, **if it were possible**, the hour might pass from him.*

Our comments on Matthew 26:39 apply also for Mark 14:35.

'If possible' is used a **5th time** in Luke 14:31. In this section, Jesus is talking about our commitment and comparing it to a number of persons. And one of these is a king who has to encounter an enemy.

*Luke 14:31. Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel **whether he is able** (ei esti dunatos) with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

The words 'whether he is able' are in Greek the same words as 'if possible.' The king has to consider whether his army of 10,000 is able to defeat twice that number coming against him. Is it possible? When we look at military history, we can find many battles where the smaller army has defeated a greater army. This is a known fact. When the Lord Jesus uses the words 'if possible', He has in mind that it is a possibility. It is possible to meet and to defeat an army of 20,000 with an army of 10,000. But what are the chances? This is what the king has to determine.

The expression 'if possible' is used a **6th time** in Acts 20:16.

*Acts 20:16. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, **if possible**, on the day of Pentecost.*

Here the context of 'if possible' has to do with Paul's intention to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. Clearly Paul thought that it was possible to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Therefore he decided not to spend time in Ephesus, but to go straight to Jerusalem. 'If possible' indicates that there might be some problems. The ship could be delayed by a storm for example. Its use in the phrase implies that it is not going to be easy, but it is certainly possible.

In the same way, it is not necessarily easy to lead astray the elect, but it is not impossible.

Let's look at the **7th occurrence** of 'if possible.' It is in Romans 12:18.

*Romans 12:18. **If possible**, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.*

Here the question is not whether it is possible to live peaceably with everyone. We all know that the preservation of peace is not always within our control. And in our imperfect world, there are many troublemakers. Therefore Paul limits his instruction by saying, 'If at all possible, to the extent that it depends on you.' 'If at all possible' means "by all means possible." Make every effort, by all

possible means, live peaceably with all men. Christians are not to be the cause of conflict. That, certainly, is possible.

The **8th and last occurrence** of 'if possible' is in Galatians 4:15.

*Galatians 4:15. What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, **if possible**, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.*

The Galatians loved and respected Paul greatly. They had received him with open arms and joyfully welcomed his message. Paul affectionately said, 'You didn't just treat me courteously. If it had been necessary, you would have plucked out your eyes for me.' Would they have gouged out their eyes? Paul knew that they would have made any sacrifice to meet his needs because they value him so highly. That is the meaning of 'if possible' in Galatians 4.

Having looked at how the expression 'if possible' is used in the NT, we see that it never carries the idea of an impossibility. It may not be easy, but it is still possible. It is possible to have the cup removed from Jesus. It is possible for a smaller army to beat a larger army. It is possible for Paul to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. It is possible to be peacemakers. It is possible, for the elect, to be led astray...

Who has bewitched you?

Specifically, what does the Scripture say about the deception of the elect? Can the elect be deceived? I would like to show you three passages.

In 2Corinthians 11:3, Paul warns the Corinthians that they can certainly be deceived. Let us read this passage from v. 2.

2Corinthians 11:2. I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.

*3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, **your thoughts will be led astray** from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Eve fell when she ate the forbidden fruit. She was cast out with Adam from the garden of Eden, from fellowship with God. And Paul is saying to the Corinthians, 'I fear that as Satan deceived Even, he is going to deceive you. You are going to be led astray, with the result that you will lose that communion with God which belongs only to the elect.' Can the Corinthian church be deceived? Yes, according to Paul in this passage.

In Galatians 3, Paul gave a strong rebuke to the Galatians for allowing themselves to be deceived.

Galatians 3:1. O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? (Who has bewitched you... In a way, Paul uses a word that is stronger than 'deceived'. Some Galatians have been bewitched, charmed, hypnotized. In other words, they lost possession of their faculties)

2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Then Paul goes on to tell them that they have been cut off from Jesus. This is what he writes in Galatians 5:4.

Galatians 5:4. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Those Galatians who have put their trust in the works of the flesh have been deceived by false teachings. They have been so utterly deceived that they have fallen from grace and have been alienated from Christ.

We can take one last example from the book of Revelation. In Revelation, we are told that a woman deceived the church of Thyatira.

*Revelation 2:20. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and **leads** My bond-servants **astray**, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

Jezebel, a woman from among the believers, claimed to have the gift of prophecy. She used her gifts and her influence to teach doctrines that were contrary to the word of God, leading astray believers. And the church did nothing to stop her.

Watch and pray

Foolish is the man who thinks that he cannot be deceived. This man does not understand the warnings of the Bible. All these warnings would not be necessary if the elect cannot be deceived.

Is there anything we can do to avoid this disastrous outcome? At the conclusion of His discourse on His return, the Lord Jesus said this in the gospel of Luke.

*Luke 21:36. Be always on the **watch**, and **pray** that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.*

Watch and pray. The believers are to keep their eyes constantly on the watch for the events of the end time. It is also necessary to pray for the strength to endure temptation that will come from the pressures that Jesus described. This watching and praying picture an attitude toward life that seeks to stay away from evil and to follow and obey Jesus. Only with a focus on Him can believers face the horrors to come. Only through obedience to Him will they be able to resist the devil.