

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

MATTHEW 24:36-51

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Just a few moments ago, Spencer read a passage from 1 Thessalonians 4-5, a passage where the apostle Paul encourages a brand new congregation to stay strong, and he gives that encouragement by telling them about the second and final coming of Jesus Christ, referred to in that passage as the ***“Day of the Lord.”*** According to Paul, the day of the Lord will come suddenly, like a thief in the night. On that day, the righteous will be taken up to ***“meet the Lord in the air,”*** and the wicked will be carried away to ***“destruction.”*** Of course, as we have discussed a little bit over the past several weeks, many people read these passages about the second coming, and they want to know, “When?” Many in the religious world, therefore, get caught up in the timing of these things. And that concern, of course, goes back to some of the Lord’s very first followers. They also wanted to know exactly when all of these things would happen.

That question goes back to the opening verses of Matthew 24. We’ve had some questions on this lately, so two weeks ago, of course, we looked at the Lord’s condemnation of the scribes and the Pharisees, going back to Matthew 23. In Matthew 23, of course, we find those ***“woes”*** on the Pharisees as the Lord comes down pretty hard primarily on their hypocrisy. And in that passage, the Lord refers to how some kind of judgment was coming on ***“this generation”*** (Matthew 23:36). So even back in Chapter 23, we start getting the idea that at least some level of punishment was coming on those who were living at that time.

And so last week, then, we moved ahead to the end of Matthew 23 as Jesus is just torn up over what was about to happen. He wanted to protect Jerusalem just like a hen protects her chicks, but they would have nothing of it. Well, at that point, the disciples start staring at all those huge buildings, but the Lord is not impressed, so the Lord says in Matthew 24:2, ***“Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”*** They cannot even imagine such a scenario. They assume that if it’s that bad, it must be the end of the world. So, in Matthew 24:3, the disciples ask Jesus, ***“Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”*** They thought the end of the temple and the end of the age were one and the same. The Lord, though, goes on to answer two very distinct questions. And last week we focused on the first question, the question concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. Concerning that event, the Lord gave them a series of signs to look out for. And the reason for the signs was so that they could make a run for it. Last Sunday’s lesson is on our website. So, if you want more of a review, I would send you there. But the key divide in Matthew 24 comes right in between verses 35-36. In fact, as I said then, if you have your own Bible, you might even want to put some kind of a line

between those verses. Starting in verse 34, the Lord is summarizing everything he has said up to this point, and he says, ***“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”*** And last week we looked at what actually happened. In 70 AD, the Roman army came in and absolutely demolished the city of Jerusalem. The Lord’s followers, though, saw the signs and ran. The Christians were not caught up in that destruction.

This morning, then, we move on to the rest of Matthew 24, and starting in verse 36, we pretty much have the Lord’s answer to the second question. We have the Lord’s answer to the question concerning the end of the age. We pick up this morning with Matthew 24:36 (p. 1000). Notice, please, the Lord’s answer to their second question, starting in Matthew 24:36,

³⁶ “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷ For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

⁴⁰ Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

⁴³ But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.

⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; ⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As we keep our thoughts focused on this passage over the next twenty minutes or so, I just want to try to reinforce this idea that nobody knows when Jesus is coming back, and I’ll just go ahead and tell you the main point of this passage right now, and that is: Since we do not know when the day of the Lord will be, that means that we must always BE PREPARED! We will look at these transition verses again, and then we will look at a series of examples.

But first, I just want to emphasize here at the beginning that **NOBODY KNOWS** when the Lord is coming back – not even the Lord Jesus Christ himself! And this is what just amazes me about this passage. All around us, people talk about signs that the end is near. People have been setting dates for the past 2,000 years. It seems, then, that everybody knows when the Lord is coming back...except for the Lord himself! So yes, there were signs leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, but concerning the end of time, nobody knows, not even Jesus! There will be no signs, because even the Lord himself had no idea when his own Second Coming would

take place. It would be a surprise. Like the Cleveland Browns winning the Super Bowl, the Lord's return will be completely unexpected.

And again for those of you who believe in marking your Bibles, I would point out one more interesting little difference between the first half of this chapter and the last half. Notice in verse 3 how the disciples asked when ***"these things"*** will take place, referring to the temple and not one stone being left on top of another. I would suggest underlining ***"these things."*** Then go down to verse 6 where the Lord talks about wars and rumors of wars and says that ***"these things"*** must take place. Again, underline ***"these things"*** in verse 6. Then go down to verse 19 where the Lord pretty much feels sorry for those who nurse babes in ***"those days."*** Underline ***"those days"*** in verse 19. Then in verse 22, we have a reference to ***"those days"*** twice in that verse. So, underline ***"those days"*** in verse 22. We have the same thing down in verse 29, another reference to the tribulation taking place in ***"those days."*** Underline ***"those days"*** in verse 29. Then in verse 33, we have a reference to seeing ***"these things"*** and knowing that He is near. Underline ***"these things."*** The first half of this chapter ends in verse 34, then, as Jesus says, ***"this generation will not pass away until all THESE THINGS take place."*** Again, underline ***"these things"*** in verse 34.

And then we have a shift. The Lord stops talking about ***"these things"*** and ***"those days"*** in the plural, and he starts speaking about the ***"day"*** of his return (a ***"day,"*** singular). And that is where we shift in verse 36, ***"But of THAT DAY and hour no one knows...."*** I would suggest underlining ***"that day"*** in verse 36. Then notice verse 42, ***"...you do not know which DAY your Lord is coming."*** I would underline the word ***"day"*** in verse 42. And then also in verse 50, the Lord refers to the master coming on a ***"day"*** when the slave does not expect it. Again, I would suggest underlining the word ***"day"*** in verse 50. So we have a contrast between the Lord's answers here. Up until verse 35, the Lord is referring to multiple days, a period of time when Jerusalem would be under attack. And that is what happened. The fall of Jerusalem actually took several years from beginning to the bitter end. But starting in verse 36, the Lord moves away from that and starts referring to the ***"day"*** of his own return, a single ***"day"*** (even a single ***"hour"***), as opposed to a prolonged event. But the point here at the beginning is that no one knows when that day will take place, not even the Lord himself.

Now that we have highlighted the shift that takes place in verse 36, I want us to move on and look at the illustrations Jesus gives to us in the second half of this chapter.

I. And we start in verses 37-39 with this reference to NOAH AND THE GREAT FLOOD.

And we find with this reference that Jesus was telling his disciples (and ultimately us) that life before his Second Coming would be completely normal in every way. In fact, people will be so caught up in everyday life that they actually forget or even ignore the warnings. In verse 38, we read about people eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. There is certainly nothing wrong with eating and drinking and getting married, so the Lord is emphasizing here that the day of his coming will be just like any other day. And that is the danger of it, we might say. Deep down inside us, we know that a Day of Judgment is out there on the horizon somewhere, but like the people of Noah's time, we are surrounded by distractions. It is so easy to forget that our lives are part of a much larger picture. We have the stuff of life pulling us in all different directions, and it takes a focused effort to overcome those distractions as we keep ourselves focused on what we really need to do. Think about Noah. Noah also had to eat and drink. Noah also got married. Noah also gave his sons in marriage. And yet Noah also spent 120 years getting ready for the day when that rain started to fall. He did not know WHEN the rain would come, but he knew that he needed to get ready for it, and so in faith, Noah spent his entire life building an ark, exactly as God had directed.

The lesson here, first of all then, is that we are not to get distracted by the day-to-day realities of life. The day he comes back will be a day just like any other, and the lesson from Noah is that we are to always be ready.

- II. As we move along to verses 40-42 we see the Lord painting a second picture for us here, and it's actually two very similar pictures making the same point. We read about the two men in the field and the two women grinding at the mill – one will be taken and one will be left. And the idea here is: The Lord's Second Coming will begin a time of ETERNAL SEPARATION.**

Coworkers will be separated. Families will be separated for eternity. Sudden and unexpected separation. And we find again here that this will happen on a day just like any other. So again, this doesn't mean that we need to quit our jobs and just stare up into the sky, waiting for Jesus to come back, but it means (again) that the Lord will come back on a day just like any other, and when he comes, it will be a time of separation.

We think of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16. At the point of death, both men were separated, not just from each other, but also from their families. And in the next life, we find that there is a great chasm, or canyon, between those who are saved and those who are lost. That is what the Lord is talking about here. For those who are still alive at the Second Coming, this is where the separation begins. In the next chapter, Jesus will go on to speak of the Judge separating the sheep from the goats. This is where that separation begins. One will be taken and one will be left. Even those who are working right next to each other will have completely different experiences once that day comes. One will be taken and one will be left.

So we have a reminder here that not everybody will be saved. A common thought today is that God is only a God of mercy and love, and so when the final day comes, God will just ignore sin and save everybody. But again, we have a reminder here that the Lord's Second Coming will, in fact, be a time of separation. One will be taken and one will be left. One will be saved and one will be lost.

- III. As we go back to our text, we find the Lord paints a third picture for us in verses 43-44 as he compares his Second Coming to the arrival of A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.**

That picture is repeated later on in the New Testament by Peter, by Paul, and also by John (in the book of Revelation). And the idea, once again, is that the Lord's return will be a complete surprise. It will be sudden and without warning – no signs, no wars and rumors of wars, no earthquakes, no famines, none of that! And to drive it home, the Lord states the obvious: If the homeowner had known when the thief was going to break in, he could have stayed up and prevented it! As it is, though, thieves try to show up when we least expect it.

Several months ago, I was at a neighborhood meeting where an officer was talking about some recent burglaries down on the southwest side of Madison. He explained that one night the thieves started at about 9 o'clock, just as people were settling down for the night. One resident would call 911 upon hearing a patio door open, and just as police were arriving on that call, a call came in from several houses down about someone breaking in, and just as police were arriving at that home, another call came in from one block over, and just as they were arriving at that home, another call came in from a few houses down. As far as I know, they never caught those two men, because they caught every single homeowner off guard. Now, if the thief had called ahead, then perhaps the police might have been able to do something. Madison Police have explained to me that they do not really protect us from crime, as we might like to imagine. Instead, they pretty much show up after the fact and write up a report of what happened. The police are usually not there to shoot the bad guy as he is standing there in your children's bedroom, but they will stop by later and take some pictures and ask some questions about what just happened. And that goes back to what Jesus said here: Thieves usually try to

catch us off guard, and the only real defense is being prepared at all times. We lock our doors, we leave our lights on, we stay alert, we learn to protect ourselves. And that is the lesson we take to heart here about the Lord's Second Coming. It will be a surprise, so we need to be prepared.

We prepare for the Lord's Second Coming for the same reason we have fire extinguishers, and life jackets, and insurance policies, and smoke alarms, and bike helmets, and spare tires, and first aid kits. We try to look ahead and prepare for the unexpected. As Jesus says in verse 44, ***"For this reason you also must be ready."*** We prepare by making sure that our lives are right with God at all times!

IV. As we come near the end of this passage, we have one more illustration in verses 43-44 as we find the picture of a master who heads out on a long journey, leaving a servant responsible for his house. And the main idea here is that the unknown delay in returning is actually A TEST OF THE SERVANT'S FAITHFULNESS.

And we have two pictures here. On one hand, there is the servant who faithfully does exactly what he has been told to do. He makes sure that the members of the household have their food at the proper time – day in, day out, over a long period of time – that is his job. But then there is the other servant who takes advantage of his master being away, and he just cuts loose. He beats his fellow servants; he eats and drinks with the drunkards. And the Lord explains here that the master will come at a time that is not expected and will cut that man into pieces and put him with the hypocrites, in a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Did you catch that about the hypocrites there? Jesus brings this around full circle now! Two weeks ago, we started with the hypocrites, and now we find that those who are not prepared for the Second Coming will be cast aside with those hypocrites. And so the question is: When the Lord returns, what will he find us doing? Will we be faithfully serving, or will we be out eating and drinking with the drunkards? Will we be serving God from the heart, or will we be like those hypocrites? When we really believe that Jesus is coming back, it changes the way we live! We feed the hungry, we give clothing to the poor, we take care of those who are sick.

Conclusion:

And so we find in this passage a reminder to always be ready. Since we so not know the date of the Lord's return, we need to always be ready.

- Like Noah, we need to avoid getting caught up in everyday life. We need to be ready.
- Like those who are pictured either grinding or out in the field, we need to understand that the Lord's Second Coming will be a time of separation, and so we need to be ready.
- Like the homeowner who needs to always be prepared for that thief in the night, so also we need to be ready for the Lord's return.
- And like the good servant, we prepare for the Lord's Second Coming by always doing what the Lord expects us to do.

What does being ready mean for us personally? Is there anything we might do differently if we knew that the end was coming six months from now, or a week from now, or even in the next few hours? Are there any relationships we need to repair? Would we perhaps explain the gospel to a friend or neighbor? Would our

enthusiasm in worship be any different if we somehow knew that the Lord would be coming back in the next few hours? Would we perhaps apologize to a friend or loved one for something we've done? Would we spend more time talking with our children? Would we make sure that we have made things right with God?

The Lord might be coming soon or he might wait another 2,000 years. We don't know. But we need to be living as if he could come back at any moment. As Christians, we are to be looking forward to it. The early Christians wanted the Lord to come back immediately. In fact, they had a word that they would use quite often. The word is **"Maranatha!"** It is an Aramaic word. Aramaic is the language, the dialect, that Jesus and most Jewish people spoke to one another on a daily basis. And the word **"Maranatha"** literally means, **"Oh, Lord, come!"** In other words, **"Maranatha"** is basically a one-word prayer. They wanted the Lord to come back right away. At the end of each worship assembly, the people would say, **"Maranatha!"** They wanted the Lord to return. And that is to be our attitude as well. Let us live in such a way that we can beg the Lord to come back sooner rather than later.

The Bible teaches that Jesus died in our place. We respond to that sacrifice with faith, faith in God's power to save us from our sins. In faith, we obey the good news. We have a change of heart about sin, we turn away from sin, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. We are briefly dipped under the water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions, please let us know. We would be more than happy to study the Bible with you. If you have anything we need to pray about, let us know. I would remind you that you do not need to be baptized in front of a large group such as this. Do not let these people stop you. Let me know, and it can be just the two of us. However, if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com