

Matthew 24:36-44 “Be Ready for Christ’s Return” December 1, 2019
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“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Introduction

The shovels were ready. The snow blower was set to go. The car was winterized. Your winter clothes are easy to reach. You were ready for winter this last week ... right? If not, are you ready now?

Are you ready for Christmas? It’s less than a month away! Time will pass quickly.

More importantly, are you ready for Christ’s return? When one considers the implication of this, it is important that we take to heart today’s God saying to us, **“Be Ready for Christ’s Return.”** Three things Jesus emphasizes in connection with this command are these: **1) We don’t know when it will be. 2) We do know what’s at stake. 3) We can be ready every day.**

1. When – When Will Jesus Come?

When will we get there? When are you going to do this? When will you pay me? “When?” is a question Jesus’ disciples asked him. The time is Holy Week. Jesus had been in the temple. As he left he told his disciples that the time would come when the temple would be destroyed. Later, on the Mount of Olives the disciples asked Jesus, **“When will this happen?” “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”**

Jesus explained long-range signs that would precede his return and the end of the world – false Christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution of Christians, lovelessness, and many falling from faith. But, Jesus also said that the gospel would be preached throughout the world. He then mixed in prophecies about the siege and fall of Jerusalem as well as the destruction of the temple that would take place in the late 60’s and 70 A.D.

After this he explained, **“Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ³⁰“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (24:29-31).”**

After hearing these things, the natural question the disciples asked was, “WHEN?”

Jesus' answer was, **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. “** How puzzling! After all, if Jesus is God, then he knows all things. Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one person. From eternity, Jesus' divine nature had knowledge of all things. But according to Philippians 2:6,7, in his humiliation, Jesus chose not to flaunt those qualities including his knowledge. Then Jesus

chose not to know the time or day of his return. Now he does. But we don't.

Jesus said that when he returns it will be like in the days of Noah. The wicked world at that time didn't pay any attention to God's warning of impending doom and call to repentance. God gave them 120 years to see their wickedness and turn from it. But people just went on with life as if nothing was going to happen. So, everyone perished in the Great Flood except for Noah and his family.

In emphasizing the fact that he will return, Jesus warns us not to be like the people of Noah's day. Don't think that he won't return just because it's been a long time since his first coming. Don't get so wrapped up in this world that you're unwrapped in his forgiveness, his righteousness, his eternal life that are yours through faith in him. Even though we don't know when he will come, believe that he will return and that it could be any day.

While we don't know when Jesus will return, we do know what's at stake when he returns.

2. Why – Why Does It Matter?

When he returns Jesus will raise the dead reuniting their bodies and souls. All people will be gathered before him. For those who raised from the dead, what the Lord decided about their eternal destiny at death will be extended to their resurrected body. For those alive at his return, Jesus will declare whether they will go to heaven or hell. What makes the difference is faith in the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and in Jesus as one's Savior. Believers will go into eternal glory, the new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness. Unbelievers will go into eternal separation from God, his love, and his blessings – eternal punishment.

Jesus gives two examples. One is of two men working in the field. One who believes in Jesus, will be taken into eternal glory; the other who doesn't believe in Jesus, will be left for eternal separation from God. The other example is of two women grinding grain in a mill. One who believes in Jesus, will be taken into eternal glory; the other who doesn't believe in Jesus, will be left for eternal separation from God.

Are you familiar with millennialism? There are many versions of it but one version maintains that before the Great Tribulation Jesus will secretly come and take all true believers into heaven. Then will come a seven-year tribulation followed by Jesus' visible and physical return to earth where he reigns for 1000 years with his temple restored in Jerusalem. In recent decades supporters of this view such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LeHaye of the "Left Behind" movie and book series, have used these passages about the two men and two women to support their view that believers will be raptured before the tribulation.

But in Matthew 24:22 Jesus said of the last days or tribulation, **"If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."** In Revelation 7 as John sees heaven he describes people he sees in heaven, **"These are they *are coming (literal translation of Greek NT) out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"** They are not spared the tribulation. Jesus also emphasized, **"The kingdom of God does not come with careful observation nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:20,21)."**

So these verses do not support the Rapture. They do remind us of what's at stake when Jesus returns. For those who have died and whose destiny was determined at death in view of their faith or lack of faith in Jesus, he will make public the destiny into which they entered at death. For those who are alive, their destiny will be determined and declared. This judgment will be final – no appeals, no recounts, no lawsuits – final.

Therefore, in view of what's at stake, **Be ready for Christ's return.**

3. How – How Are We Ready?

As Jesus spoke to his disciples he emphasized that we can be ready every day – ⁴² **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."** ⁴³ **But understand this: If the owner of the house**

had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Being ready begins with believing Jesus could come any day at any time. When you get up in the morning, do you stop to think that by lunch or supper or bedtime you could be in glory? If you don't think this way, Jesus is emphasizing that it's time to start.

When you start your day take a little time to thank the Lord for the rest and renewal of the past night or if the past night wasn't so good, ask him get you through and bless you in the new day. But take time to remember who you are by nature and in reality – sinful and unworthy of being God's child. Acknowledge that to God and recognize the offense that this is to him. If there is some sin or sins that weigh heavy on your heart, confess those to God – he welcomes you to do so.

But then remember Jesus – God's Son. He so loved you that he became just like you but was without sin. Remember Jesus as he perfectly lives for God, perfectly loves people, and completely fulfills God's law for you. Remember Jesus as he humbly and willingly goes to the cross for you. Remember who he suffered and died to pay for your sins and remove sin's curse. Remember how he came to life to show you all is finished, death is defeated, and because he lives, you too shall live. Remember how God assures that **"He who believes will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)."** Think of how God in his grace bless you with saving faith and made you his child. All this is because of God's love. With this mindset you will be ready.

But then let the love of God and the life that awaits you move you into God's word daily in your personal life and weekly in your worship to reinforce God's love for you and to guide you in making godly decisions so that the devil cannot lead you away from Christ. Receive communion often to be reinforced in the fact that God forgives you your sins. Remember your baptism because it reminds you that as a child of God you wear Christ's righteousness but also have a responsibility to live to his glory. Gather with your fellow Christians for fellowship and encouragement. In Hebrews 10:25 God directs us, **"Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."**

Be ready for Christ's return.