

Signs of the Second Coming of Jesus: Part 2

Could Jesus Return at Any Moment?

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-51

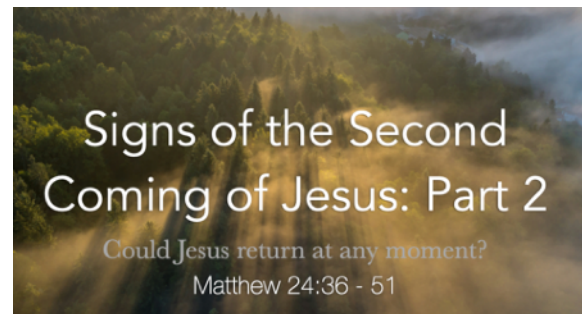
Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Second Coming, Rapture

I. Introduction

This morning we continue listening in on this private conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they are seated on Mt. Olivet.

The disciples have asked Jesus two questions. Jesus has already answered the first, which had to do with the destruction of temple. Now he is answering the second, which has to do with the *sign of his second coming and the end of the age* (Mt 24:3). Last week we considered part 1 of this portion of Scripture and this morning we will consider part 2. Along the way, we'll answer the question, Could Jesus return at any moment?



The central truth of this section is that the day and time of the second coming is unknown and will be unexpected. Jesus repeats this truth four times (vs.36, 42, 44, 50). In response to this, he gives his disciples two commands, to "*stay awake*" (v.42) and to "*be ready*" (v.44).

Thus, Jesus primary aim is to move his disciples toward being prepared for his return and away from any kind of spiritual laziness that might lead them into sin. Jesus will conclude this section by contrasting how the wise person responds to this truth and how the wicked person responds.

Pray.

II. Timing Known Only by the Father (vs.36-44)

Last week we ended with v.36 and this week we'll continue from there.

³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. **Matthew 24:36** (ESV)

The *timing of the second coming is known only by the Father in heaven*. This knowledge He has not shared with anyone in heaven or on earth. Angels do not know this and neither did Jesus during the time of his incarnation. As I said last week, I think Jesus now knows that timing, but at the time he was speaking with his disciples, he did *not* know this fact.

Thus, Jesus is teaching his disciples that they *ought not to be overly preoccupied with the precise timing of the second coming* since that is not something that the Father has chosen to reveal. This was a lesson hard for them to learn, because Jesus had to repeat it again immediately before his ascension into heaven. After the resurrection but before his ascension, the disciples asked him,

"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." **Acts 1:6-7** (ESV)

This is Jesus' main point in this portion of the discourse this is before us this morning (vs.36-51). Jesus repeats this point four times.

1. "...that day and hour no one knows..." (v.36).
2. "...you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (v.42).
3. "...Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (v.44).
4. "...will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know" (v.50).

Since no one knows the day and hour of the second coming, then the wise disciples of Jesus will daily live in a posture of readiness for his coming. Jesus now gives two examples of what happens when one fails to be ready.

A. As in the Days of Noah (vs.37-39)

Jesus goes back to the days of Noah. The people who refused to prepare for the coming judgment during the days of Noah were suddenly swept away by the flood waters and were destroyed.

Matthew 24:37-39 (ESV) ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they

were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Until the day Noah Enter the Ark. It took Noah about 50-75 years to build the ark.¹ While he was building it he was warning the people of the coming wrath of God (1 Ptr 3:20). They watched him prepare for the coming judgment, but they did not. They all ignored him. No one believed the message he preached. **No one prepared.** They simply went about their daily routines—eating, drinking, attending weddings—up until the very day that **Noah entered the ark** and then God shut the door.² And the flood waters of judgment came suddenly and unexpectedly and *swept them all away* to their destruction.

So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Just as the flood waters of God's wrath came suddenly and unexpectedly in the days of Noah, so also will the Son of Man come suddenly and unexpectedly. Therefore, don't fail to be prepared. Jesus is warning them beforehand so that they will be properly prepared. Jesus is giving a warning to his disciples. He is teaching them to be ready and not fail to be prepared.

Note: Jesus believes the flood is historical fact. Jesus believes the biblical account of the flood described in Genesis is real and true. He is using the flood as an illustration of the fact of God's judgment. If the flood described in Genesis did not actually happen in history, then Jesus' point here is toothless. But, if it did actually happen, then the point is powerful, for surely the wise person will not want to be swept away in judgment.

B. So Also at the Second Coming (vs.40-42)

To emphasize his point, Jesus offers a second illustration warning against the failure to prepare.

⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. **Matthew 24:40-42 (ESV)**

Some have seen in these sentences a reference to the rapture. However, whether or not that is true depends on the purpose of this paragraph in Jesus' argument and the meaning of the word '**taken**.' The interpretive key turns upon the meaning of the word "**taken**." Those who see a rapture here understand the word taken to be a word of comfort for they are 'taken' away to be with Jesus. However, is "**taken**" intended by Jesus to comfort or to warn? If the purpose is to warn, then those "**taken**" are taken away in judgment, while those left behind are then welcomed into the new kingdom.

The context clarifies the key. "**Taken**," in vs.40-41, is parallel to "**swept away**" in verse 39. Jesus' aim in the second illustration (vs.40-41) is the same as in the first (vs.37-39). Jesus uses examples of daily living in the first illustration (eating, drinking, attending weddings) and

¹ Genesis 5:32; 7:6.

² Genesis 7:16.

he uses similar daily activities in the second illustration (plowing in the field, and grinding flour at home). He has the same aim in both illustrations. The first refers to the days of Noah while the second refers to the day of his second coming. Jesus is aiming to warn his disciples. We know this because of vs.42, which calls for disciples to “*stay awake*” since they do not know when the Lord will come again.

If “taken” is aimed at giving comfort by teaching a quick escape is coming, then that makes the opposite point, for why would one need to prepare and stay awake if one is simply going to be plucked away at the end? Jesus’ point here is not to teach a secret rapture of believers, but rather to teach about the suddenness of judgment that comes for those who ignore him and fail to prepare for his second coming.

Optional: Support for this view can also be found in The Parable of the Weeds (Mt 13:24-30) where we find that the weeds (i.e. wicked people) are first gathered to be burned and then second the wheat (i.e. righteous people) is gathered into the barn. Jesus privately explained the parable to his disciples saying, “The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and law-breakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:38-43).

Summary. So far Jesus has clearly declared that only God the Father knows the day and time of the second coming. Neither humans nor angels know the day or hour. Therefore, the disciples of Jesus should always be ready for his return. They should not be caught unaware like those of Noah’s day, for his second coming will come suddenly and will take away those who fail to prepare. Therefore, the disciples of Jesus ought to stay alert and be ready.

III. The Readiness of the Disciples (vs.43-51)

The remainder of this portion of the discourse calls his disciples to remain ready for the second coming of Jesus by calling them to stay awake, stay faithful, and keep in mind the reality of the final judgment.

A. Stay Awake (vs.43-44)

Jesus now offers an illustration of readiness.

Matthew 24:43-44 (ESV) ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

If the master... had known... he would have stayed awake. Jesus’ point is that *wise man will prepare for trouble that he knows is coming.* A man who knows that a thief is planning to break

into his house at 2am, will not be sleeping at 2am. He will be wide awake with a plan already executed for how to prevent from breaking in, the thief he knows is coming to his house.

He will lock windows and doors and invite a few friends to join him in helping protect his house. He will have alerted everyone else in the house who will also be awake and alert and prepared to defend the house. They will not be sleeping, but they will all be awake and ready. If such is the case of readiness with a man and his house—which is merely wood and stone—how much more should be the case of readiness with a man and soul—which is eternal?

“Therefore, you must be awake and ready, for the sone of man *is* coming at an hour you do not expect!”

B. Wise Servant: Is Faithful, Blessed, & Rewarded (v.45-47)

Therefore, faithfulness and wisdom are the appropriate response. Such a response will be rewarded and blessed.

⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Matthew 24:45-47 (ESV)

The faithful and wise servant is the one who busy's himself with doing what his master has commanded him to do in his absence. If the master charges the servant with setting out the meal at a certain time—or any other task, then the wise servant will do exactly that. If the master has charged his servant with tending to the needs of the house, then the faithful servant will carry out those duties in the exact way his master has commanded him.

And when his master arrives *unexpectedly*, and finds his servant obeying his master's commands, then he will bless that faithful servant and put him in charge of even more of the master's estate.

C. Wicked Servant: Is Unfaithful & Condemned (vs.48-51)

The final prompt to remain in a state of readiness is the call to remember the reality of the eternal condemnation. Jesus now contrasts the wise and faithful servant with the wicked servant. The responses of the wicked servant is the opposite of the faithful servant. The wicked servant disobeys his master which leads him to being cursed and condemned.

Matthew 24:48-51 (ESV) ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an

hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

My master is delayed. The wicked servant sees the *delay* of the master as excuse to ignore his master's commands. The delayed return is seen as license to indulge in gluttony and drunkenness. The wicked servant does not do what the master told him to do. The wicked servant does the opposite of the faithful servant. Rather than obeying the commands of the master, the wicked servant grows violent. He begins abusing his coworkers and misusing the master's resources. He selfishly indulges himself. He does not restrain himself in any way. He eats and drinks and gets drunk and beats his fellow servants.

The Master... will come on a day he does not expect. The master *will* come. There is no doubt about the *fact* of his return, but rather only about the *timing* of his return. But he will certainly return. And when he returns and discovers the evil in which this wicked servant has been engaged, he will destroy him. He will cut him in pieces and throw him into hell. The "reward" of wickedness is curing and eternal condemnation.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, consider three invitations; don't get obsessed with trying to put a date on the second coming, don't be surprised, but do be prepared and do be faithful until he comes again.

1. Don't be obsessed with dates

God has chosen not to reveal the specifics about the timing of the second coming of Jesus. We must be content to not know this. When we are not content with this lack of knowledge, things go badly wrong. Many have thought they know better than Jesus on this point, and each of them have been proven wrong. Throughout history there have been scores of predictions of when the second coming was going to happen. Without fail, every single one of them have been wrong.

The most recent and most infamous person to make such a prediction was Harold Camping. He first predicted **Judgment Day** would come in September of 1994. He got that date wrong.

Then in 2005, he began predicting that the second coming of Christ would happen on **May 21, 2011**. As the time drew near, he and thousands of his followers engaged in a massive ad campaign using posters, billboards, and RV's to tell the world that judgment day was coming. When May 21 came and went, he changed the date to October 21 of that same year. That date also came and went and finally every one concluded that the man was obviously not hearing from God.

Jesus repeatedly tells his disciples not to be consumed with knowing times, seasons, days, or hours of the second coming. What he does repeated teach is that we ought to live in a place of readiness and preparedness.

2. Don't be surprised, but do be prepared

Let us listen to Jesus' words, which he spoke to the twelve disciples. "**Stay awake. You must be ready.**" So how do we do that? We should be studying what Jesus and his apostles have revealed about the second coming. *Has everything happened that must happen before Jesus return?* Has every thing happened that needs to happen before Jesus returns? I think the answer to that is no, not yet. Much has already begun, but there is still more to come.

1. **Tribulation in various places.** Jesus said that there will be famines, earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars that will happen in "*various places*" (Mt 24:6-7). He says these things are "*the beginning of birth pains*" (24:8). These have been happening and are still happening. These things are even intensifying. However, these are **not yet the end**, but yet worse is still to come. How much worse and how many more are to come? We don't know exactly.
2. **The gospel will be preached to all nations before the end comes** (Mt 24:14). There are still people groups that have not yet heard the gospel. This has not yet been completed.
3. **The man of lawlessness will come.** Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they should not be worried that they had missed the second coming, because the man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (ESV) For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

The "man of lawlessness" will be revealed after "the rebellion," and most likely this is the same person as the Antichrist, who will set up his image in the temple, which Jesus mentioned in connection with the "abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel" earlier in this discourse (24:15). This "man of lawlessness" has not yet been revealed. There have been those who point to this kind of evil person, such as Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.), but none have yet arisen who have completely fulfilled all of the prophetic details surrounding this man. This man has not yet been revealed.

4. **Cosmological events will be seen** (Mt 24:29). The sun will be darkened, moon dimmed, and stars shaken in the heavens. These seem to be real, observable cosmological events which Jesus is describing and which Peter appears to understand as actual, physical events (2 Ptr 3:10-12). These have not happened yet in conjunction with these other events.

These things have not yet happened, but they could happen in a very short span of time. Therefore, we should be ready and not think that there is so much time that one ought not prepare. Could Jesus return at any moment? No, but could he return very soon, yes! And the

wise person will prepare TODAY to meet him.

What has been revealed to the church about the end of the age, ought to be studied by the church, but the church ought not be obsessed about things that cannot be known. The exact timing of the second coming cannot be known, but there are things that have been revealed to the church that must happen before the second coming of Jesus, which have not yet happened. So let us not be surprised, but do let us be prepared.

3. Be faithful

The final invitation is, be faithful. Jesus commands his people to be faithful to the end.

1. ***Fix your faith in and on Jesus.*** Being faithful means keeping your faith fixed on the authority of Jesus and not in or on any human authority. Princes and presidents will rise and fall, but the words of Jesus will never pass away (Mt 24:35).
2. ***Live to please Jesus above all else.*** Being faithful to Jesus means your allegiance to Christ supersedes every other allegiance. Being faithful to Jesus means you live in such a way that you desire to please him more than any other human being. Being faithful to Jesus means you obey him when no one else is looking, because you know that HE is looking.
3. ***Keep testifying to the gospel of Jesus.*** Jesus has commanded us to testify of our faith in him to all nations so that those who do not yet know him and the goodness he gives, can know him. Therefore we must keep sharing with others the reasons we hope in Jesus. Keep sharing with others your joy in Jesus. That is all it takes to make disciples. Tell others why you love Jesus and help them understand how to obey the commands of Jesus.

For those who respond wisely to this teaching of Jesus, there is great blessing and eternal reward. For those who fail to respond or respond unwisely, there is terrible cursing and eternal condemnation.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Jesus' main point in this portion of Scripture (vs.36-51)? How do you know what his main point is?
2. What two commands did Jesus give in these verses?
3. Why did Jesus use the illustration of the flood in the days of Noah? What was he illustrating?
4. Do you think Jesus' purpose in vs.40-42 is to comfort Christians by teaching a rapture or to warn by teaching the suddenness of his second coming? Why? Explain your answer.
5. How would a wise person respond to Jesus teaching?
6. How would an unwise person respond?
7. What portion of this passage speaks to you? What might Jesus be saying to you through this Scripture?
8. What questions do you have?
9. Did you learn anything? If so, what?