

Matthew 24:36

Keep on Watching and Be Ready for Christ's Return

Only the Father Knows when Jesus will Return

Jesus stated clearly and emphatically that no one knows the day and hour when He will return except His heavenly Father. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36). The return of Jesus Christ is near, even at the door, like a thief in the night. He may come through the door any moment. But let's make it very clear, "No one knows that day or hour."

History is littered with individuals who think they know more than Jesus. Yesterday was no exception, and there will be more who will come out of the closet before Christ returns. God the Father did not leave the door ajar for some arrogant Bible student with a calculator or computer or some Bible code through whom to reveal the date of Jesus' return. He emphatically said: No one knows the day or the hour when I shall return. Only the Father knows and He has chosen not to reveal the day or hour.

Jesus Christ will return to gather His elect and judge the world. Because we do not know when that time will be, therefore we must be ready.

Date fixing is eliminated with Jesus' statement. "That day and hour no one knows." "The hour remains unknown until it arrives; and then the cleavage is sudden, absolute, and irreversible," notes D. A. Carson.

Moreover, "no one" clearly states the impossibility of any human or angel discovering by whatever means when the day and hour of His return. Date fixing is absolutely impossible. No one in the whole human race will ever know ahead of time when Jesus is coming. It is completely out of the realm of human knowledge.

Jesus stated "not even the angels of heaven" know the date or time of Jesus' return. The time of Jesus' coming is not even discussed in heaven. "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Mark 13:32).

The most surprising thought in Jesus' statement that "the Son" does not even know the timing of His return.

Then who is in the know? "The Father alone" knows when Jesus will return. The precise time no one knows but the Father only. In the Greek text the adjective "only" is made emphatic. The emphasis of the text is "but only the Father knows" or "it is only the Father who knows" or "but the Father knows, and He alone" (Newman and Stine, *A Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 754).

The comprehensive statement of Jesus makes it explicitly clear that no human being on this earth will ever know the time of Jesus' appearance until every eye shall behold Him. A. T. Robertson notes: "It is clear that Jesus has in mind the time of His second coming. He had plainly stated in verse 34 that those events (destruction of Jerusalem) would take place in that generation. He now as pointedly states that no one but the Father knows the day or the hour when these things (the second coming and the end of the world) will come to pass." He adds, "Most people are either indifferent about the second coming or have fanciful schemes or programs about it. Few are really eager and expectant and leave to God the time and the plans." "It is useless to set the day and the hour for Christ's coming. It is folly to neglect it" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, pp. 194-5).

Why do arrogant individuals think they are privy to such intimate knowledge of God the Father? Why is it that they think they are more righteous than Jesus? Why should they ever think they are more intimate with the heavenly Father than the one and only unique of a kind Son of God?

This verse reveals the self-limitation of the real Incarnation of the Eternal Word. As a fully human individual, Jesus learned things as other human beings learn them, yet Jesus was fully God, and as God, He had infinite knowledge. In the passage before us He speaks in terms of his human nature. John Broadus wrote: "This statement of our Lord as to Himself can be explained only by referring to the ignorance of His human mind. . . . Indeed, a finite mind could not contain all knowledge. If there was to real Incarnation of the Eternal Word, then

the body He took must be a real body, and the mind a real mind. How His divine nature could be omniscient, and His human mind limited in knowledge, both being united in one person, is part of the mystery of the Incarnation, which we need not expect to solve (cf. Phi. 2:7). But to be limited in knowledge, does not necessarily involve erroneous information or conceptions. The human nature of the Incarnate Deity was infallibly preserved from sin, and so, we may believe, from error of judgment" (*Matthew*, p. 493).

Moreover, Broadus wisely concludes: "This saying ought to repress all curious inquiry as to the precise time of His second coming, to prevent reliance on any arithmetical calculations, and also to foster confidence in Him. The disciples greatly wished to know the precise time; in every age many have been eagerly seeking to determine, and some fancying they have ascertained it, only to be disappointed; but He expressly warned against this from the outset, and impliedly bade us to reconcile to an ignorance shared by the high angels, and by the Son Himself. . . . And if the God-man, the Mediator, left this and many other things, to the Father alone, how cheerfully should we His followers rest in ignorance that cannot be removed trusting in all things to our heavenly Father's wisdom and goodness, striving to obey His clearly revealed will, and leaning on His grace for support" (*ibid*).

WE ARE TO PRAY AND WATCH FOR HIS COMING

We are commanded to watch continually for the coming of Christ.

In the context of Matthew 24:36 Jesus spoke of a series of events that will precede His return, but the precise moment of that great event has not been revealed to anyone. The Father alone knows the time and in His infinite wisdom He has chosen not to reveal it.

The angels stand in a very close relationship with God the Father and will be associated with Christ's return, but they too do not know the hour of His coming (Matt. 13:41; 24:31).

What the angels do know is this: Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority . . . And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

T. R. Glover wrote: "No day is named, that every day may be hallowed by the sense of the possibility of its being the day of His Advent. It helps to hallow each day of life, to realize that before its close we may be in the presence of Christ's glory."

Jesus will Come Unexpectedly (Matt 24:37-44)

Jesus illustrated this with the illustration of Noah's flood. "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 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, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

Noah was busy building his ark and warning the people of the coming flood (Gen. 5:32-7:5). Men will not be thinking about His coming when it arrives. They will be preoccupied with their own pursuits of life as in the time of Noah. They refused to heed the warnings of God. Only those who are prepared will escape the sudden and unexpected destruction. It will be with suddenness that Jesus will appear.

What will be the condition of the world when He returns? Jesus and His disciples writing in the New Testament make it very clear there will be total depravity, exceeding wickedness and even apostasy in the church when He comes back. It will be an evil day. Jesus will be despised and hated by the vast majority of people all over the world. It will be like in the days of Noah.

Are you ready for Jesus' coming?

Intimate associations will be separated by the Unexpected Coming of Jesus (Matt. 24:40-41).

Furthermore, Jesus said: "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left" (Matthew 24:40-41).

From this illustration it is evident there will not be a second chance. Every opportunity to be saved is gone forever. One is taken, and the other is left behind. I take these words of Jesus to mean the believer will be taken with Christ at His return. Those individuals who have an intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ will be separated by the unexpected coming of the Lord.

What will you do with Jesus Christ? What is your personal relationship with Jesus?

The coming of the Lord Jesus will be clearly manifest. There will be no need of prophets to announce the fact that He has come, or invite men to come and see Him. Every eye will behold Him. And then it is too late to believe on Christ as your savior.

The Bible does not teach annihilation or universalism. It does state clearly that mankind has a simple choice. What will you do with Jesus Christ? Your eternal destiny depends upon that personal decision. Not everyone will be saved. You must believe on Jesus Christ or be eternally lost, and separated from a holy God in hell. Are you ready?

BE READY FOR JESUS' COMING

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). Be constantly on the alert. Keep your eyes open. Keep wide awake! Be watchful or be vigilant means to live a sanctified life, consciously aware of the coming judgment day. The just shall live by faith in Jesus Christ. The true believer is looking forward to the coming of the Bridegroom and King.

The picture is the coming of our glorious, powerful King clothed with authority and majesty.

"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. 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" (Matthew 24:43-44). The figure of the thief is chosen to illustrate the one point of the unexpected stealthy approach. The coming of Christ will catch men sunk in spiritual slumber. But there is also the reward of watchfulness. The faithful servant will steadfastly continue to fulfill his call of God to faithful service.

You do not know on what day your Lord is coming. He compares Himself to a burglar in the night. "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). Jesus told the church in Sardis: "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you" (Revelation 3:3). Later Jesus told John on the island of Patmos: "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame" (Revelation 16:15).

The stress of the whole passage in Matthew is you must be ready for Jesus' coming, because He will come when you do not expect Him. No one knows at what time or during what watch the thief will come. Therefore keep on watching. Be ready. No one can predict when He will come.

Jesus admonishes us, "Be ready." "Be on the alert." You do not know when the thief will come, but He is coming. Are you prepared in mind and heart? Are you ready for His coming?

DATE SETTING IS A MOCKERY OF GOD

Keep in mind the words of the apostle Peter when he wrote: "you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:2-4). The current false date setting by the cults only throw more fuel on the fire of the mockers of evangelical Christianity.

Yes, the Day of Judgment will come. It is appointed by God who is a righteous Sovereign.

Why is the Lord patient even with the arrogant who refuse to believe His Word? "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:8-13).

In the context of this great passage in Matthew chapter twenty four, "Everything predicted from verse six to verse twenty-two was fulfilled to the letter in connection with the Fall of Jerusalem within a generation," notes G. Campbell Morgan. Having accurately foretold these events, he then told them what would be the manner of His coming. "From beginning to end of the prophecy He emphasized the fact that none knew, nor could know, when, that coming would be, but the fact of it was certain" (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 286).

It is like Jesus has been saying, "Do not ask Me to tell you the date of My coming. God the Father has not revealed it; not even to Me." But I am coming back.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away," are steadfast words of Jesus. Yes, the world as we know it will come to an end, but the Word will remain for all eternity. He will judge every individual. The apostle John wrote, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea" (Revelation 21:1). That day will come.

Are you ready for that day? If you were to die today and stand before Him face to face, and He would ask you "Why should I allow you into My heaven? What would you say? What do you think you would say? Your eternal destination depends on that answer. "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. The precise day when Jesus will return is wholly unrevealed, and known only to God the Father.
2. All attempts to set dates and times when Jesus will return are in vain. How can sinful man in his arrogance think he knows more than the Son of God?
3. There is a definite day on which Christ will come to judge the world. "Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). But make it very clear: You do not know that day and I do not either. Only the Father knows.
4. There is great assurance for the believer, indeed, our blessed hope in the coming of Christ. "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).
5. What are His faithful servants to be doing until He returns? "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). I hear

excuses from people all the time about why they are not personally involved in world missions. There can be no excuse. Make yourself available to the Lord to do in and through you what He chooses to do, and then what how He will work in your life to fulfill His eternal purpose.

6. Our great concern is to be ready when Jesus comes. "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

7. Be ready to give an account when Jesus returns.

The apostle Paul declares vividly for us the next great event in history. Listen carefully to his words. They give us hope, encouragement and a stark warning. "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Are you ready?

Let me share you how you can be right with God. God loves you and wants you to experience His peace and life. He desires to have a lasting intimate love relationship with you. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you. Christ did this by paying the penalty of our sins when He died on the cross and rose from the grave. The Bible says, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).

But you know what? We have a severe problem. We are separated from God because we choose to disobey Him. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Nothing we can do will get us across the gulf that separates us from God. Good works, church membership, baptism are all short bridges to nowhere. Our problem is serious. We are not capable of saving ourselves. We are so sinful that we cannot reach up to God. He is holy and we are depraved sinners. You see, that is exactly why God sent His Son to die in our place. "God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23)

God is offering you the free gift of salvation or eternal life. It is a gift that was paid in full by Jesus Christ when He died in your place on the cross. You can do nothing to merit it or earn it. To try to pay for it is an insult to the grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How are you saved? How do you receive eternal life? The Bible is very clear "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

It is not psyching yourself up to some emotional experience. We are saved by simple faith in Christ. We take God at His own word when He says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." You know everything you need to know to be saved. Take God at His word and trust Jesus Christ right now.

Will you turn from your sins and unbelief and by faith receive Jesus Christ into your heart and life? You can use the following prayer if it comes from your heart. "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I know that I cannot save myself. I now believe that Christ died in my place on the cross in order to forgive me of my sins. I know that

Christ rose from the dead and lives today. I confess my sins to you, and I repent and put my faith in you to save me. I want You to save me for all eternity. Thank you for giving me eternal life. Amen."

Some individuals will experience a great deal of emotion of joy or sense of forgiveness or deep inner peace. The Bible says, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Are you ready for His return?