

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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Matthew 24:32-51 “Are You Ready for the Return of Jesus?”

Intro. Have you ever been caught unprepared? Perhaps you were given a pop quiz and you were totally unprepared and failed it. Perhaps company dropped in unannounced, and your house was a mess, and you had nothing to serve them. Or have you ever had an I.R.S. audit, and you were caught unprepared because you didn't have all the documentation you needed. Or what if you were told that you have less than six months to live, and you have not made any preparations to care for the needs of your family, not even a will?

Well there is a major event that could take place in the near future that will catch billions of people totally unprepared. That prophetic event is the return of Jesus Christ. And the consequences will be far more serious than a lower grade, or some embarrassment, or financial loss. I'm talking about the eternal loss of your soul, or for the Christian, the possible loss of reward. So let's look into our text and learn more about this major event of prophecy, and how we should be prepared for it. The time to make preparation for His return is *now*. If you wait until the event itself, it will be too late.

Now the first truth I want to share with you is this:

I. THE RETURN OF JESUS IS CERTAIN

Jesus said in v.34, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place,” and that includes the return of Jesus. Now the main point I want to make is the fact that Jesus says that “all these things [shall] take place.” All that He predicted up to this point in chapter 24 either has taken place or will surely take place. The end time events culminate in the return of Christ. That is the climax of history. He is surely coming again. How do I know this? Well Jesus went on to say in v.35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” Likewise, Jesus said in John 10:35, “The scripture cannot be broken.” Jesus said He would return, and even though almost 2,000 years have come and gone, I believe with all my heart that He will return. I know this, for all the prophecies of the Word of God will indeed come to pass.

In the 1860's in England, there was a leader whose name was Benjamin Disraeli. He was born a Jew, and he faced discrimination because of this fact. One time, he rose to address Parliament, but he was booed and heckled to the point where he could not speak. Finally, he raised his voice as loud as possible and said, “Though I sit down now, the time will come when you *will* hear me.” How true that was, for he became Prime Minister of England in 1868 and again in 1874. I want you to know that this world rejected Jesus Christ. They crucified Him. He has gone away. But this world hasn't heard or seen the last of Him. He is coming again as King of kings, and Lord of lords, and “every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

Now since the return of Jesus is certain, that gives us great hope. As I look at the world today, I am not optimistic. I do not have hope that science will solve our greatest problems. This past year has caused me to have less trust in science! I certainly do not have hope that the United Nations will solve our greatest problems. But I am optimistic regarding the future, for Jesus

promised to come again! He is the only One who can solve the problems that humanity faces today. He will put an end to war, hunger, and disease. He will establish justice and peace.

So in our text Jesus tells us that His return is certain. But the second truth I see is this:

II. THE EXACT TIMING OF HIS RETURN IS UNCERTAIN

This truth is first stated in v.36, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”¹ He’s making it very clear that nobody knows in advance the day nor the hour when He’s going to come again. I don’t know. You don’t know. No Bible teacher on God’s earth knows when Jesus is coming. And so, the next time you see a book that is predicting the year and the date that Jesus Christ is coming, just go and put it in the trash can. That’s where it’s going to end up anyhow. In fact, some guy wrote a book that said that Jesus was coming again in September of 1988. Well, I’ve got news for you, in October of 1988, you could have bought a hundred of those books for a dime.

Now even though we can know that this period is drawing *near* when the days of fulfillment are actually upon us, we will not know *in advance* the exact day or hour of His return. It is futile and even sinful to attempt to predict the date when Jesus will return. Then Jesus said in v.43, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.” Thieves do not announce their arrival. I mean you don’t get a phone call from someone that says, “Listen this is your neighborhood thief. I’m going to be making some house calls tonight. I wonder if 11:00 o’clock would be suitable for me to break into your house?” No, they come unexpectedly.

Even so, Jesus says that His coming will be unexpected, like a thief in the night, especially to unbelievers. That’s why He says in v.44, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man² is coming at an hour you do not expect [or think, suppose].” This is why Paul said in 1 Thess. 5:2, “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

Have you ever wondered why God made the timing of the return of Christ so unpredictable? Well if God announced when Jesus was coming, people would tend to wait until that date to get saved. Furthermore, the uncertainty should make us always watchful and ready for His return.

Cheryl and I take overnight trips from time to time to various conferences or meetings. When our boys were old enough to be left at the house overnight, we would not always tell them exactly when we would return. We hoped that the uncertainty would keep them on better behavior all the time. And that really leads to my next point:

III. THE PURPOSE OF HIS RETURN IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Jesus *is* coming again. You don’t know when. And you should be concerned about what is going to happen when He does return. You see, the purpose of the return of Christ is both good

¹ How could Jesus Christ, who is God, not know something? That’s easily explained if we understand some facts about the incarnation. When He became a man, He voluntarily restricted the use of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:6-8). In His incarnation, Christ restricted the use of His omniscience to those things that the Father wanted Him to know. Probably after Christ was resurrected, the day and hour of His return became known to Him.

² The title “Son of man” is essentially a title associated with Christ’s relationship to the earth, a fitting use of the title in light of His return to earth.

news and bad news. It is good news for those who have repented of sin, placed their faith in Christ, and are living for Him. But it is bad news for those who have not been saved. For one purpose of His coming is to judge both the living and the dead. And there are two judgments spoken of that will take place in conjunction with the return of Christ. First of all:

A. Believers Will Be Examined and Rewarded - He will not judge our sins, because these have already been judged on the cross (Rom. 8:1-4). But He will judge our works and will give rewards to those who have earned them (1 Cor. 3:9-15). This is alluded to in vv.45-47, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods." V.45 may especially apply to preachers and teachers whom God has called to give spiritual food to others. Now if I am wise, I will spend many hours every week studying, preparing to give spiritual food on the table for the household of God. For over 40 years now I have sought to be faithful to my Lord, to do what He has called me to do. Week by week I open the Word of God and seek to proclaim the Gospel and give spiritual food that will help believers grow in their faith. I am retiring from the rigors of full-time ministry, but I am not going to stop preaching. I hope that I will be faithful to serve the Lord all the way until He comes again.

Even so, if *you* are faithful in what God has called you to do in this world, you will be blessed (v.46), for you will receive an eternal reward. Notice again what He says in v.47, "Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods." The reward for obedient service is the capacity for greater service in the Kingdom of God. If you have been faithful to serve the Lord in this life, then you will be given greater opportunity to serve the Lord in the next life. So you and I ought to live our lives in the light of the fact that we are going to stand in the presence of Christ someday.

Now Christ is not only coming again to examine and reward believers, but we also see in our text that:

B. Unbelievers Will Be Judged and Condemned - Notice what Jesus says in v.37, "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Now what happened in the days of Noah? God saved Noah and his family, who were righteous, and then God judged the rest of the world with a flood. The Flood is the only event in human history that comes close to illustrating what will happen in the end times. We read in v.39 that the flood "took them all away." They were swept away with a flood of judgment.

Then Jesus said in the last of v.39, "so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." The judgment of the Second Coming will not be a flood of water, but it will be just as devastating. Just as the righteous and wicked were separated in Noah's day, so shall it be in the days when Christ returns. God's people will be saved, and unbelievers will be swept away in judgment.

Notice what will happen according to vv.40-41, "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left."³ Now is this talking about the rapture of believers or the judgment of unbelievers? Well consider the context. Who was taken away in the days of Noah? It was the unbelievers. If so, this pictures many unbelievers being carried off to judgment. Judgment was looming in the days of Noah, and it is looming now. However, some commentators say that this refers to the

³ Luke 17:34 gives another example, "I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left."

rapture of believers. This is based on the fact that the word translated “taken” (*paralambano*) is usually used in a positive way, such as the Lord’s return for His own in John 14:3. Four times in Matthew’s gospel it means “take to safety” (2:13, 14, 20, 21).⁴ On the other hand, the word “left” in Matthew often means to “abandon” or “forsake” (4:20, 22; 8:22; 19:29; 23:38; 26:56). Also, in v.31 we read of believers being taken and gathered out of this world at the time of the return of Christ. Biblically, both are true, so it doesn’t matter than much which group is taken in these particular verses.

Jesus gives another warning of judgment in vv.50-51. Notice what will happen to those who have not repented of sin, and made preparations for His return, “the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Those who are swept away in judgment at the return of Christ will end up in a devil’s hell. It is clear that once this final day arrives, every opportunity to be saved will be gone forever.

Notice who will be judged at the return of Christ. First, such a person’s attitude is described in the last of v.48, “My master is delaying his coming.” He really doesn’t believe that Jesus is coming again, or if He is, it’s a long way off. Is that the way *you* view the return of Christ? Then in v.51 Christ describes such a person as a hypocrite. He claims to be a Christian. In fact, in v.48 he even refers to Jesus as “My Master.” But he lives like the world. In fact, look at v.49 and see how such a person lives: he “begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards.” He mistreats people and lives for worldly pleasure. Do you mistreat people? Do you live for worldly pleasure? If so, you better check yourself out and make sure you are saved! Otherwise, you will be swept away in judgment when Christ comes again.

Judas Iscariot is a vivid example of this passage of Scripture. Judas Iscariot was known as one of the Lord’s disciples. He was present with the disciples when the miracles of Jesus Christ were performed. He heard the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, all of it was like watering a dead stick. There was no life in Judas Iscariot. Then he died a horrible death, and the Bible says he went to his own place. He was a hypocrite.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is one thing to *profess* faith, it’s another thing to *possess* faith. I wouldn’t say that I’m saved just because you have been baptized and joined a church. You better make sure your faith is real. As I taught Wednesday night, faith without works is dead according to James. In fact, he said it three times! (2:17, 20, 26). You can fool me and other church members, but you can’t fool Jesus!

Another application of this truth about the coming judgment is the fact that we need to do all we can to win people to Jesus while there is still opportunity. If we wait about telling someone about Jesus, it may be too late.

So we have seen so far that Jesus *is* coming again. We do not know when. And when He comes, He will judge unbelievers and also examine and reward believers. Now in light of these truths, Jesus drives home His point:

IV. THEREFORE, WE MUST BE READY & WATCHING FOR HIS RETURN

⁴ However, there are a few cases where *paralambano* is used of taking someone with hostility, as the soldiers did to Jesus (Mt. 27:27; John 19:16).

Jesus says in v.44, "...be ready..." Since you don't know when the Lord is coming, and since the consequences of His coming are so serious, you should *always* be ready and prepared for His return.

How should you be prepared for His return? Well I want to apply this point to 2 groups of people:

A. Unbelievers Need to Be Saved *Now* - If you aren't a true believer, you aren't ready and prepared for Christ's return. So how can you be ready for the return of Christ? It is by repenting of sin, and trusting in Christ as your Savior. And don't think that you can bypass repentance. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Don't be like the person described in vv.48-49, "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards." This is the person who is not saved. He has not repented of his sin, but keeps on sinning as before. He thinks he has plenty of time to be saved. Do you want Jesus to come again and find you in some bar? Do you want Him to come again and find you in bed with someone who is not your spouse? Do you want Him to come again and find you looking at pornography on the Internet?

And don't be like the people of Noah's day. They refused to take to heart what Noah was doing and saying. Remember, Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). Yet in spite of his preaching, warning of the coming judgment in both word and deed, they were unconcerned. They simply ignored Noah's warning and continued to live "as always," eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage (v.38). They failed to realize their perilous situation until it was too late. I can just picture many people banging on the door of the ark, asking to be saved from the rising flood. Similarly, people during the end times will notice all the signs and wonders going on around them, but many of them won't consider what's happening and why. Many people will not believe what they hear until it's too late.

You better make sure that you have truly repented of your sins and that you have received the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior. Don't imagine that you have plenty of time to be saved. Don't think that you can wait until you see and hear the return of Christ to be saved. As someone said, "Eternity is too long to be wrong." If you are not saved by the time this service is over, it is not very likely that you will be saved later.

Now God's Word to the unsaved is, "Be ready." Now I want to close with God's Word to the saved:

B. Believers Need to Watch for His Coming, and Live Accordingly - This is the point that Jesus drives home in v.42, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." This includes an attitude of always being mindful that the Lord may come soon, and so you are always expectantly watching for His return.

If you are ready and watching, you will make sure that you are living right when Jesus comes again. You will not want Him to find you living any other way. Indeed, if you and I really lived each day watching for Jesus to come, it would radically affect our behavior every day of our lives. 1 John 3:3 says, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." You see, if you knew Jesus was coming today, what would you do? Are there any accounts you would want to settle? Are there any disputes you would want to reconcile? Is there anybody you have mistreated you would want to ask forgiveness of? Is there any secret sin in

your life you'd want to deal with if you knew Jesus Christ was coming today? Would you want Christ to come again at a time when you haven't attended church in years?

You may rightly wonder, "How do we watch for His return?" Surely Christ is not saying that we are to constantly watch the sky, looking for His return. No, I believe our text gives us the clues we need to determine how we are to watch. We are to watch for His return by looking for the signs of His return. And as we do so, we are more mindful of the fact that Jesus is coming again soon.

This truth is illustrated in vv.32-33, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" (Cf. Luke 21:28). The new leaves on the fig tree are analogous to the signs preceding the Second Coming. I have already shared with you in my previous 2 messages what are some of the other signs of the times. All of the signs mentioned in vv. 5-12 have been fulfilled. V.14, which talks about proclaiming the Gospel to all nations, that is close to being fulfilled. V.15ff talks about the tribulation signs, and these are yet to be fulfilled. However, we are now living in the days in which these signs certainly *could* be fulfilled.

Christ may be giving another sign of His coming in v.34, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." Now what does He mean by "this generation"? We know He was not talking about His own generation, for they did not live to see the fulfillment of *all* these things. "This generation" (*genea*) can mean "race" or "family" and so it can refer to the nation Israel, especially if the "fig tree" reference in v.32 is symbolic of Israel (see Judges 9:10-11; Jer. 24; Hos. 9:10; Luke 13:6-10). If so, Jesus is predicting that the Jewish race will survive and see the fulfillment of all these prophecies. So many other ancient peoples have lost their identities and have merged into other people groups. But the Jews have survived to this very day, just as Jesus and the Bible predicts. The rebirth of the state of Israel in our lifetime is an extraordinary miracle, and it is one of the signs of the times. It is a sign that the long winter of Christ's absence is about to end.

On the other hand, it could refer to the generation that will be living at the time these predictions begin to come to pass. If so, then Jesus is saying that once these end time prophecies begin to take place, then the return of Jesus will take place within one generation. The WWII generation witnessed the rebirth of the state of Israel. I will not be surprised one bit if the return of Christ takes place before that generation completely comes to an end.

There are more signs implied in our text. Notice with me v.37, "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." This is another interesting sign of the times. Do you see any parallels between Noah's day and our day? In Noah's day there was a population explosion (Gen. 6:1), as in our day. In Noah's day there was an increase in violence (Gen. 6:11) and corruption (Gen. 6:12). The days of Noah were also characterized by gross immorality—every thought and imagination of man's heart was only evil continually (see Gen. 6:5). We are living in such a sexually perverted society. History is repeating itself. And Jesus warns that even a world-wide judgment will be repeated at the time of His return.

Do you see the signs of the times? Are you ready for His return? Are you saved? Are you watching, longing for His return? Are you faithfully living for the Lord, and serving Him. If He returned today, would it be a joyful celebration, or a time of just condemnation?

Conclusion: I want to close with a poem that has a familiar sound to it:

'Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house
Not a creature was praying, not one in the house.
Their Bibles were laid on the shelf without care
In hopes that Jesus would not come there.

The children were dressing to crawl into bed,
Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head,
And Mom in her rocker with baby on her lap
Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.

When out of the East there arose such a clatter,
I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!

When what to my wondering eyes should appear
But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here!
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray
I knew in a moment this must be THE DAY!

The light of His face made me cover my head
It was Jesus! Returning just like He had said.
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth,
I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.

In the Book of Life which He held in His hand,
Was written the name of every saved man.
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name;
When He said, "It's not here," my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written in love
He gathered to take to His Father above.
With those who were ready He rose without a sound
While all the rest were left standing around.

I fell to my knees, but it was too late;
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.
I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight;
Oh, if only I had been ready tonight.

In the words of this poem the meaning is clear;
The coming of Jesus is drawing near.
There's only one life and when comes the last call
We'll find that the Bible was true after all! [Author unknown].

Are you ready for the return of Christ? If not, repent of your sin, and trust in Christ today. Don't put it off another day. You are not promised tomorrow. Do it today!

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John MacArthur, Jr., *Signs of Christ's Return: Matthew 24-25* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on vv.40-51); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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