

JESUS ON THE DAY OF HIS COMING (Matthew 24:36-51)

I have a question for you. By a show of hands, how many of you think that Jesus will return to earth today, September 6, 2020? Hold your hand high if you feel quite certain that Jesus' Second Coming will be today.

Given your answer, I want you to look at one verse in today's text. Look at Matthew 24:44. That verse leads me to believe that Jesus' return could be today because He said, "The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." The mere fact that you don't expect Jesus to come back today tells me that it just might be today.

This morning, we will be looking at Matthew 24:36-51 in which Jesus talks about His own return. He refers to it as "that day." The way v. 36 begins leads me to believe that Jesus is changing the subject. Four times in this 24th chapter, before we get to v. 36, Jesus mentions "those days." Look at vv. 19, 22, 29.

So, Jesus was talking about "those days" plural, and now He turns to "that day" singular. *Those days* refer to the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman Army, along with its destruction, but *that day* refers to His coming, to His return.

Also, Jesus used a special word to refer to His coming. It shows up only four times in the Gospel of Matthew, and all four times, it is found here in chapter 24. It is found first in v. 3. That word means *appearing* or *presence*. It was used next by Jesus in v. 27. Then, Jesus used it twice in today's passage (vv. 37 & 44). In our English translation, the word *coming* is used eight times in this chapter, but only four times does Jesus use this special word. It is *Parousia* in Greek. It is used a handful of other times in the NT to speak of Jesus' return.

This special word is used by Paul in 1 & 2 Thess. to describe the return of Jesus. Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 3:13 about "the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

It was a word used in ancient days to describe a dignitary, such as the King, who returns to His capital city after winning a great victory. When the word reaches the city that the King is returning, the people don't just sit around waiting for Him to arrive. No. They go out to meet Him, and celebrate Him, and return with Him to the city.

That is how the NT depicts the return of Jesus.

Many Christians believe in a secret rapture in which Jesus comes back only half way. The believing church is then snatched away to be with Jesus. They suddenly disappear. Finally, after a certain amount of time, Jesus comes all the way back bringing with Him all those who are His.

Some find within today's passage support for their belief in the rapture. They read vv. 40-41 about two men being in the field; one is taken, and the other is left. The same happens with two women grinding at the mill; one is taken, and the other is left. They view the ones taken as those who are snatched away at the rapture.

When I look at this passage, I see no reason for believing that being taken as something positive while being left is negative. In fact, I think the opposite is the case. In the verse before, Jesus mentions that in the days of Noah, there was a flood who swept all away except Noah in his family. In that instance, being taken was not good and being

left was.

By the way, the word *rapture* is found nowhere in the Bible. You can search a concordance, and you won't find it anywhere. I also can't find a single verse that talks about a secret coming of Jesus. My Bible tells me that when Jesus comes back, He comes back noisily and visibly. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4 that when Jesus returns, there will be a loud command and the sound of a trumpet. Elsewhere, it says that every eye will see Him. Here in Matthew 24, back in v. 27, Jesus said that His coming is like a lightening flash from east to west.

At the moment Jesus returns, the dead are raised and given resurrection bodies, and the church goes up to meet Jesus, and then we come back down to this earth with Him, and Jesus will reign eternally as King. That is His *Parousia*.

Now, what can we learn from what Jesus says about His own coming? Let me share two central truths.

I. JESUS TELLS US WHAT THE DAY OF HIS COMING IS.

Everyone wants to know when Jesus is coming. Jesus says quite clearly that the day and hour of His coming is unknown. We don't know. The angels in heaven don't know. Even Jesus does not know. The only one who knows is the Father. When it is time, the Father will nudge the Son, and say, "It's time." A smile will cross His face. The trumpet will sound, and Jesus will come back victoriously.

1. The Day of His Coming Is Unknown.

Despite the fact that Jesus clearly taught that no one knows, that hasn't kept some through the years of making predictions and acting like they know.

When I was in seminary, I came out of class one day to discover that a paperback book had been placed under the windshield wiper of my car and every other car in the parking lot. The book was entitled, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. The book was written by Edgar Whisenant. He was a former NASA engineer turned Bible student who predicted the rapture would occur sometime between September 11 and September 13, 1988. Approximately, 300,000 copies of *88 Reasons* were mailed to ministers across America, and 4.5 million copies were sold in bookstores and elsewhere.

Just in case you are wondering, what he predicted didn't happen.

Twenty-six years ago today, September 6, 1994 was the day that a man named Harold Camping, a Christian radio broadcaster, author and evangelist, claimed would be Judgment Day. When it didn't happen, he revised the day to somewhere between September 29th and October 2nd of the same year.

Undaunted by that failure, in 2005, Camping predicted the Second Coming of Christ would occur May 21, 2011, at which time the saved would be taken up to heaven in the rapture, and that "there would follow five months of fire, brimstone and plagues on Earth, with millions of people dying each day, culminating on October 21, 2011, with the final destruction of the world."

When May 21 passed without the predicted events, Camping said he believed that a spiritual judgment had occurred on that date, and that the physical Rapture would happen on October 21, 2011, simultaneously with the final destruction of the universe by God. When none of those things happened, Camping quit making predictions.

If you ever hear someone making a prediction about when Jesus is coming back, quit listening to them. They are false teachers. Ignore them. Focus on the fact that Jesus is coming back not when He is coming back.

Jesus taught a related truth.

2. The Day of His Coming Is Unexpected.

In the earlier verses, when Jesus was warning about the destruction that was coming to Jerusalem and the temple, Jesus gave warning signs. He said that when you see this happening, you can know that the destruction is coming soon.

He did not say the same in regard to His return. In fact, He said just the opposite. He said that the day of His return would seem like just another normal day. He compared His coming with the flood of Noah's day. Noah had warned the people about the coming flood, but they ignored him. Up until the flood, every day was just a normal day.

In the same way, before Jesus returns, people will go about doing what they always do. There will be parties, and weddings, and people will conduct the business of buying and selling, and when they least expect it, Jesus will come back.

His return will be sudden and unexpected.

The year was A.D. 79 when the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were suddenly destroyed. Those cities were destroyed and every man, woman, child, and animal died when the nearby, volcanic Mount Vesuvius erupted. The destruction was so sudden that people died while following their daily routine. Men and women were at the market, the rich were in their luxurious baths, and the slaves were toiling away at their work. They died amid superheated gasses and volcanic ash. Even family pets suffered the same quick and final fate.

The saddest part is that these people did not have to die. Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers recorded. Weeks of rumblings and shakings preceded the actual explosion. Even an ominous plume of smoke was clearly visible from the mountain just days before the eruption. If only they had been able to read and respond to Vesuvius's warning, they could have retreated to a safe distance and lived!

It has been said that there are similar "rumblings" in our world: warfare, earthquakes, the nuclear threat, economic woes, breakdown of the family and moral standards. We could add, disunity, a breakdown in race relations, a world-wide pandemic. These things and others point to a coming day of Judgment. There is no reason for people to be caught unprepared. God warns and provides an escape to those who will heed the rumblings in our culture and our world.

II. JESUS TELLS US WHAT THE DAY OF HIS COMING DEMANDS.

While Jesus doesn't tell us when He is coming, He does tell that He is coming, and

having done so, He moves immediately to application. Look at v. 42. Here Jesus announces the first demand of His coming return.

1. We Are to Stay Awake.

Jesus emphasizes this need by telling a mini-parable in which the need of the hour was to stay awake. Jesus tells about a thief and a homeowner. The point is not that thieves come secretly. The point is that just as thieves come without prior announcement, so will Jesus.

Have you ever gotten a save-the-date card in the mail? I did several months ago. My brother has three sons. The oldest and the youngest are both married. His middle son is going to get married this fall. Weeks before sending an invitation, the soon-to-be wed couple sent a save-the-date card.

Before a thief breaks into your house, he sends neither a save-the-date card nor an announcement. The thief comes unexpectedly. Therefore, the need of the hour is to stay awake, to be on your guard, to be looking.

Years ago, I read a story that pointed out the difference between waiting and watching. Waiting is a passive term. Waiting really requires nothing of us. Watching, however, demands intentional activity.

The story I read was an old one about a Scottish fishing boat that was returning to port after being out on the sea for several weeks. The wives didn't know exactly when their husbands would return. As the boat sailed into the harbor, the skipper looked through his scope and saw several women on the pier. He said, "Tom, I see your wife, Margaret, on the dock. And Bill, I see Mary there. And James, your Anne is there waiting. And I see my wife, Elizabeth."

One fisherman was disappointed because his wife wasn't there. He left the dock with a heavy heart and walked up the hill to his cottage. As he opened the door, his wife ran to him and said, "I've been waiting for you."

He replied, "Yes, you were waiting, but you weren't really watching."

Are you waiting for Jesus to return or are you watching?

I still remember a story told by one of my seminary professors. He recounted a conversation he had on a plane with the passenger next to him. Based on the clothes the passenger was wearing, the professor could tell he was an observant Jew. During the conversation, he asked the Jewish man, "Do you still look for the Messiah to come?"

The man answered, "Every day, I look for Messiah. Every day, I expect Messiah."

Are you looking? Are you expecting? Don't let the comforts and concerns of this world lull you to sleep. Stay awake! Jesus is coming.

His coming demands a second thing.

2. We Are to Be Ready.

Look at v. 44. We find a second "therefore."

Before you come to church, you have to spend some time getting ready. Likely, you shower. Maybe you take a bath the night before. I make sure I am clean-shaven, and I put

on a clean pair of pants, and a clean dress shirt.

There are more important things I do to get ready for Sunday. I know you will come expecting to hear a message from God's word; so, I spend considerable time studying the text from which I will preach. I consult commentaries to glean truths I will not have caught on my own. I read what other preachers have said in their own sermons on the same text. I might steal an illustration or two. Then, during the Sunday School hour, I pray and go over my message.

I want to be ready for the service and the sermon.

What can you do to be ready for Sunday that goes beyond just your appearance? Let me encourage you to pray for me and for those who will be hear. Invite some people and pray for them. Come with the intent of hearing and responding to God's voice.

And what can you do to be ready for Jesus' return?

- Make sure that you belong to Him, that He is your Savior and your Lord.
- Stay prayed up and confessed up.
- Consult His word regularly.
- Talk to others about the Lord.
- Let others know you belong to Him.
- And be able to tell them why you believe what you believe.

There is a song in our hymnal entitled, "What If It Were Today." The first verse reads:

Jesus is coming to earth again—
What if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign—
What if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen Bride,
All the redeemed and purified
Over this whole earth scattered wide—
What if it were today?

If the return of Jesus were today, would you be ready? We need to get ready and stay ready.

There is a final demand upon us due to His coming. We find it taught in vv. 45-51.

3. We Are to Keep Working.

Following Jesus' short parable about the thief, Jesus tells a second parable that's just a little bit longer. It is not a story about two servants, one wise and one wicked. Rather, it's a story about one servant. We are shown what will happen if that servant is wise and is contrasted with what will happen if he proves to be wicked.

The wise servant knows his responsibility and keeps doing what is expected of him. So, when his master returns from a long trip, he finds that the servant has been faithful and true. Accordingly, the servant is both happy and amply rewarded.

If, however, that servant was to shirk his responsibilities and mistreat those under him, he would show himself to be a wicked servant. When his master returns, he will be found out, and he will be severely punished.

You and I get to determine what kind of servant we will be—wise or wicked.

I close with a story told by David Dykes, a pastor in Tyler, Texas. This story was told in a sermon he preached on the very text we are looking at today.

Once there was an elementary school where many of the students were lazy, and as a result, the class-rooms were messy. The school superintendent was especially concerned with the cleanliness of one classroom. As the superintendent inspected this classroom, he saw crumpled papers on the floor, books scattered and dog-eared, and pencil marks on the desks. So, the superintendent stood before the class and said, “Students, we’re going to clean our desks today, and I want you to try to keep them clean. To help you stay motivated, I’m going to return to the class one day, and the student with the cleanest desk will be given this \$100 bill. The catch is, I’m not going to tell you what day I’m going to return—it will be a surprise. Not even your teacher or principal will know the day.”

The students’ eyes lit up with the thought of that \$100 bill, so all of them started cleaning their desks. They filled the trash cans, stacked their books neatly, and lined up their paper and pencils. Every morning for the next few weeks, this classroom was the neatest in the school. The students were thinking this might be the day when the superintendent returned.

But before long, some of the students grew weary of the daily exercise, so they stopped cleaning their desks. After about a month some of the students said, “I don’t even think he’s coming back. He only offered us the money as a way to trick us to clean our desks.”

Before long, all the desks had reverted to their messy state, except for one. There was one girl named Susan who continued to inspect her desk and keep it clean. Soon, the other students started teasing her. They said, “You dummy! Don’t you know he’s not coming back? You are foolish to believe his promise.”

Susan didn’t argue with them, she just kept cleaning her desk every morning and afternoon before she left. Near the end of the school year, the students looked up and the superintendent was standing in the door of their classroom. There was a mad rush as the students started frantically cleaning up their desks, stuffing books and papers inside. But the superintendent held up his hand for them to stop. He asked all the students to stand by their desks for his inspection.

One after another, he rejected them for being messy. One boy blamed the teacher for not reminding them more often about the offer. Another blamed the superintendent for making them wait so long.

Finally, the superintendent arrived at Susan’s desk. It was in perfect order. He asked her name and she said, “Susan, sir.” After inspecting her desk, he called her up to the front of the classroom and handed her the \$100 bill. He turned to the other students and said kindly, “Boys and girls, Susan never stopped believing I

would return and give a reward, so she kept her desk clean every day. She didn't have to worry about what day or even what time of day I would arrive because she was always ready. Always ready.

I am here to tell you, Jesus is coming back. Are you ready? Will you be ready on the day of His coming?