

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 30: Be Ready: The Coming of the Son of Man

Matthew 24:36–51

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage marks Jesus' turn from the events surrounding Jerusalem's fall to His one final, personal return at the end of the age. The doctrinal heart of the lesson is the nature of that coming. Unlike the fall of Jerusalem, which had warning signs that allowed His people to flee, the final coming has no signs and no known date; not even the Son, in His earthly ministry, knew the day, only the Father (v. 36). It will come suddenly, like the flood in Noah's day and like a thief in the night, and it will divide humanity. Your task is to teach this clearly so students hold a sound view of the second coming and are protected from the speculation Jesus repeatedly warned against.

Guard your class carefully against the popular errors. The images of two in a field and two at the mill, one taken and one left, are not a description of a secret rapture; in the context of Noah's flood, those swept away are the unprepared, and the pictures simply teach that the day will come suddenly and divide people, not that believers will quietly vanish. Reject date-setting, premillennialism, a secret rapture, and a seven-year tribulation timetable. The New Testament teaches one visible, glorious return of Christ, at an unknown hour, followed by resurrection and judgment (Acts 1:11; John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Christ reigns now; His return is the next great event.

Beyond the doctrine, the passage is overwhelmingly practical, and it aims at the heart. Jesus does not tell us to predict the date but to be ready: awake, sober, and faithfully doing the work He has assigned. The difference between the faithful servant and the wicked servant is not knowledge of the timetable but faithfulness in the waiting. Aim to send students home both clear about the second coming and freshly motivated to live each ordinary day as those who long to hear, Well done.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus says that of "that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (v. 36). What does this tell us about the futility of date-setting and about the kind of coming Jesus is now describing, compared with the signs of Jerusalem's fall?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus draws a sharp line with the word "but": "But concerning that day and hour no one knows" (v. 36). Having spoken of events with signs that would happen within that generation, He now

speaks of a day that no one can date. This is the interpretive hinge of the whole discourse, so make the contrast clear.

Take seriously the statement that not even the Son knew that day, only the Father. In His earthly ministry Jesus willingly accepted the limitations of true humanity (Philippians 2:7), and the timing of the final day was kept in the Father's hand. If the incarnate Son did not announce the date, no preacher, author, or movement today can possibly know it.

Draw the obvious conclusion about date-setting. Every attempt in history to predict the day of the Lord's return has failed and has contradicted this verse directly. The believer is not called to calculate the date but to be ready at all times because the date is unknowable.

Help students see the contrast with the previous lesson. The fall of Jerusalem had signs precisely so God's people could escape; the final coming has no signs precisely so God's people will live ready every single day. Both serve God's purpose of preparing His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The day of the final coming known only to the Father (v. 36)
- The futility and presumption of all date-setting
- Jesus accepting the limitations of true humanity in His earthly ministry (Philippians 2:7)
- The contrast between the signs of Jerusalem's fall and the signless final coming

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that even the Son did not announce that day?
- How does this verse settle the question of date-setting once for all?
- Why might God keep the final day hidden from us?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus pictures people in Noah's day eating, drinking, and marrying, "unaware until the flood came and swept them all away" (vv. 38–39). Where are you most tempted to be lulled by ordinary life into spiritual unawareness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus reaches back to Noah. In the days before the flood, people were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," utterly unaware until the flood swept them away (vv. 38–39). The striking thing is that none of these activities is sinful in itself. The problem was not wickedness in every act but total unawareness of God and the coming judgment.

This is the self-examining question, so bring it close. The danger Jesus names is not dramatic rebellion but spiritual sleepiness, getting so absorbed in the ordinary good things of life, work, family, meals, plans, that God fades into the background and eternity drops off the radar.

Help students identify their own lulling agents. For many it is not gross sin but simple busyness, comfort, and routine. We can fill every hour with legitimate things and quietly stop living with any sense of God or of what is coming.

Point toward wakeful living. The answer is not to abandon ordinary life but to do ordinary life as people who remember God, keeping eternity in view, staying connected to His word, His people, and His purposes even in the routine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual unawareness, not only open sin, as the danger Jesus warns against (vv. 38–39)
- The way ordinary life can lull us into forgetting God and eternity
- Living ordinary life with God and eternity in view
- Wakefulness as a settled orientation of the heart

Discussion Prompts

- What ordinary good things most easily crowd God out of your awareness?
- How can you keep eternity in view in the middle of a busy week?
- Where have you let routine lull you spiritually to sleep?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus compares His coming to Noah's flood, which fell on a world going about business as usual (vv. 37–39). What does this teach about the suddenness of the Lord's return and the danger of assuming there will always be more time?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus emphasizes the suddenness of the flood: it came and “swept them all away” (v. 39). It did not send a series of escalating warnings to the unprepared; one day life was normal, the next day the waters fell. So, He says, will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Confront the assumption of more time. The people of Noah's day assumed tomorrow would be like today, indefinitely. We make the same assumption constantly: there will always be time later to get serious about God, to repent, to be reconciled, to obey. Jesus says that assumption is deadly.

Apply it soberly but hopefully. The suddenness of the Lord's coming, and the suddenness of our own death, which for each of us functions the same way, means today is the day that matters. We are never promised tomorrow.

Avoid manipulation; aim at wisdom. The goal is not to scare people but to help them live wisely, doing today what they would not want left undone if the Lord came tonight. That is simply realism in light of Jesus' words.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The suddenness and certainty of the Lord's return (vv. 37–39)
- The danger of presuming on future time (James 4:13–14)
- Today as the day of decision and obedience (2 Corinthians 6:2)
- Living wisely in light of an unknown hour

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you assuming you will have more time to get right with God?
- What would you do today if you knew the Lord were coming tonight?
- How does the suddenness of that day change your sense of urgency?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus says, "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (v. 42). What does staying spiritually awake look like in the ordinary rhythm of your week, and where have you been dozing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives the central command of the passage: "stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (v. 42). Spiritual wakefulness is the posture of the whole Christian life between Christ's first and second comings. This is a self-examining question, so make it concrete and practical.

Define wakefulness positively. It is not nervous date-watching but alert, attentive, faithful living: keeping close to God in prayer and the word, staying engaged with His people, doing the work He has given, and keeping the conscience clear.

Help students locate their dozing. Most of us are wide awake in some areas and half asleep in others. Perhaps we are faithful at the assembly but asleep in our family discipleship, or diligent at work but drowsy in prayer. Invite honest self-assessment.

Offer practical rhythms. Staying awake is sustained by ordinary habits: regular time in Scripture, consistent prayer, faithful gathering with the church, the Lord's Supper each first day that

recenters us on Christ, and honest accountability. Encourage one concrete step toward greater wakefulness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command to stay spiritually awake (v. 42)
- Wakefulness as alert, faithful living rather than date-watching
- The role of Scripture, prayer, and the assembly in staying awake (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24–25)
- Honest self-examination of where we are spiritually drowsy

Discussion Prompts

- In what area of life are you most spiritually awake right now?
- Where are you half asleep without realizing it?
- What ordinary habit could help you stay awake to the Lord?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus describes two in a field and two at the mill, “one taken and one left,” and a thief who breaks in unexpectedly (vv. 40–43). What do these pictures teach about the dividing, unexpected nature of that day, and why is it a mistake to build elaborate end-times schemes from them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus offers vivid pictures: two men in a field, two women grinding at the mill, one taken and one left (vv. 40–41), and a homeowner who would have stayed awake had he known when the thief was coming (v. 43). The point of all of them is the suddenness and the dividing effect of that day.

Address the rapture misreading directly but graciously. Many have built a doctrine of a secret rapture on the phrase one taken and one left. But read it in its own context: Jesus has just compared His coming to Noah’s flood, where the flood took away the unprepared in judgment (v. 39). The taking, then, naturally pictures being swept away in judgment, while the one left remains. Whatever the precise image, Jesus’ purpose is plainly to teach sudden division, not a quiet disappearance of believers years before a visible return.

Warn against system-building. People have constructed elaborate end-times timelines from these brief, illustrative pictures. That is exactly the kind of speculation Jesus warned against throughout this discourse. The images are meant to press one urgent point: be ready, because the day divides and comes without warning.

Anchor the truth positively. The New Testament knows only one return of Christ, visible and glorious, at which the living and the dead are gathered and judged together (1 Thessalonians

4:16–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). There is no secret, separate, earlier coming. The pictures here simply underline that this one coming will be sudden and decisive.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The suddenness and dividing nature of the Lord's coming (vv. 40–43)
- The flood context showing the taken as those swept away in judgment (v. 39)
- The error of building a secret-rapture doctrine from these pictures
- One visible, glorious return gathering the living and dead together (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)
- The danger of constructing elaborate timetables from illustrative images

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single point all these pictures are driving home?
- Why is it a mistake to build a detailed end-times scheme from them?
- How does reading these verses in the context of Noah's flood guide us?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus asks who will be found to be "the faithful and wise servant" doing his work when the master comes (vv. 45–46). In the responsibilities God has actually given you, where would He find you faithful, and where would He find you neglectful?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus poses the defining question of the passage: "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?" (v. 45). The blessed servant is the one the master finds doing his assigned work when he comes (v. 46). This is a self-examining question, so make it personal and specific.

Notice what faithfulness looks like. It is not spectacular; it is doing the ordinary, assigned work, caring for the household, at the proper time, day after day. The faithful servant is not distinguished by knowing the schedule but by being reliably at his post.

Help students inventory their actual responsibilities. God has assigned each of us a household: family, work, ministry, relationships, stewardship of time and resources. Ask where they are being faithful and where they are neglectful in the responsibilities God has truly given them.

Encourage faithfulness in the small and ordinary. Readiness for the Lord's coming is not a special spiritual project; it is simply being found faithful in what He has already given us to do. Invite one concrete area to recommit to faithfulness this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness in assigned responsibility as the mark of readiness (vv. 45–46)
- The ordinary, daily nature of true faithfulness
- Stewardship of the household God has entrusted to each believer
- Readiness as being found at our post, not knowing the timetable

Discussion Prompts

- In the responsibilities God has given you, where are you faithful?
- Where would the Lord find you neglectful right now?
- What is one area you want to recommit to faithfulness this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The wicked servant says in his heart, “My master is delayed,” and begins to mistreat others and indulge himself (vv. 48–49). How does losing a living sense of Christ’s return tend to corrupt the way a person treats others and handles their own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus shows the wicked servant’s downfall beginning with a thought: “My master is delayed” (v. 48). From that single assumption flow mistreatment of others and self-indulgence (v. 49). Losing a living sense of the master’s return corrupts both how he treats people and how he handles himself.

Trace the connection carefully. When the Lord’s return fades from view, accountability fades with it, and the heart drifts. We become harsher toward others and softer toward our own appetites, because we no longer live as if Someone is coming to whom we must give account.

Apply it honestly. This is not only about gross sin; it is about the subtle hardening that comes when eternity drops out of our daily reckoning. The way we treat the people under our influence, and the way we discipline our own desires, both reveal whether we are living in light of His coming.

Point back to hope. The remedy is to keep the Lord’s return real and near in our hearts, which produces both kindness toward others and self-control. Living as though He could come today is not grim; it keeps us tender and disciplined.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The corrupting effect of assuming the Lord is delayed (vv. 48–49)
- Accountability to the returning Lord as a restraint on sin
- The link between a living hope of Christ’s coming and how we treat others
- Self-control as fruit of living in light of His return (Titus 2:11–13)

Discussion Prompts

- How does losing sight of Christ's return change the way we treat people?
- Where do you see the assumption of more time loosening your self-control?
- How can keeping His coming near keep your heart both kind and disciplined?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus warns that the master will come on a day the servant does not expect and will assign him a place with the hypocrites, "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 50–51). How does the reality of judgment sober you, and how should it shape the way you live this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus ends the passage with a solemn warning: the master will come on a day the servant does not expect, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 50–51). This is sobering language, and we must not soften what Jesus deliberately made severe.

Teach the reality of judgment with both honesty and care. Jesus, the most loving teacher who ever lived, spoke more about judgment than almost anyone. He did so not to terrify but to warn, because what is at stake is eternal. To love people is to tell them the truth about where the two roads lead.

Help students feel the weight without despair. The warning is aimed at the careless, self-indulgent servant who presumed on the master's delay. For the faithful servant, the master's coming is joy, not terror (v. 46). The point is not to make believers live in dread but to take readiness seriously.

Turn sobriety into motivation. The certainty of judgment should make us more earnest, more compassionate toward the lost, and more diligent in our own walk. Encourage students to let this truth produce not anxiety but a holy seriousness about how they live.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality and severity of final judgment (vv. 50–51)
- Jesus' own frequent and loving warnings about judgment
- The contrast between joy for the faithful and judgment for the careless (vv. 46, 51)
- Holy seriousness, not dread, as the right response for the believer

Discussion Prompts

- How does the reality of judgment sober you?
- Why is it loving, not harsh, to take Jesus' warnings seriously?

- How can this truth make you more earnest and more compassionate?

Question 9

Student Question:

Putting verses 36 to 51 together, how does the Bible describe the one final coming of Christ, and why must we reject ideas like a secret rapture, a future earthly thousand-year reign, and any attempt to predict the date?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, gathering the whole passage into a clear statement of what the Bible teaches about the second coming. Teach it plainly and confidently. Jesus describes one coming, sudden and unknown in timing, that will divide all people and bring them to account. The rest of the New Testament fills out the picture: Christ will return personally and visibly, “in the same way” He ascended (Acts 1:11); at His coming the dead will be raised and all will be judged (John 5:28–29; 2 Corinthians 5:10); the living and the dead in Christ will be gathered to be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Now address the popular errors directly, the way the user’s congregation expects them handled. There is no secret rapture in which believers vanish years before a later visible return; Scripture describes one return, loud and visible, “with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). There is no future earthly thousand-year political reign of Christ to anticipate; the kingdom was established when the church began at Pentecost, and Christ is reigning now from the right hand of God until the end (Acts 2:30–36; 1 Corinthians 15:23–26; Colossians 1:13). And there is no knowable date; this passage forbids date-setting outright (v. 36).

Explain why getting this right matters. False end-times systems have distracted countless believers, fueled fear, produced failed predictions that embarrass the gospel, and shifted attention from present faithfulness to speculative timetables. The simple biblical picture, one personal return, one resurrection, one judgment, at an unknown time, frees us to live ready rather than to calculate.

Hold together the certainty and the mystery. We do not know when, but we know Who and we know what: the same Jesus, returning in glory, to raise the dead and judge the world, and to gather His people to Himself forever. That certainty steadies us; the mystery keeps us watchful.

Close by connecting doctrine to life. Because the coming is sudden and the day unknown, the only sane way to live is to be ready now. Sound doctrine about the second coming is not meant to satisfy curiosity but to produce faithful, watchful, hopeful lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One personal, visible, glorious return of Christ (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)
- Resurrection of the dead and final judgment of all at His coming (John 5:28–29; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Rejection of a secret rapture: one loud, visible coming, not a quiet disappearance
- Rejection of premillennialism: Christ reigning now, no future earthly thousand-year reign (Acts 2:30–36; 1 Corinthians 15:23–26)
- Rejection of date-setting, since the day is known only to the Father (v. 36)
- Certainty about the fact of His coming and mystery about its timing as twin motives for watchfulness

Discussion Prompts

- How does the New Testament describe the one return of Christ?
- Why must we reject the ideas of a secret rapture and an earthly thousand-year reign?
- How does a sound view of the second coming actually help you live better today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole passage, name one specific way you want to be found faithful and ready, so that the Lord's coming would be joy and not alarm for you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use the capstone to bring the whole passage to a personal point. Jesus' entire aim has been not speculation but readiness: be the faithful and wise servant found doing his work when the Master comes. Ask each student what it would mean for them to be found ready.

Frame readiness as joyful, not anxious. For the faithful servant, the Master's return is the best news imaginable; it means the end of waiting and the words, Well done. The goal is for the Lord's coming to be something each student longs for, not something they dread.

Press for one specific way to be found faithful. It might be a responsibility to take up, a relationship to make right, a habit of prayer or the word to restore, a sin to put off, or a renewed daily awareness that He is coming. Encourage a moment of quiet reflection.

Close in hope and worship. We serve a Lord who has gone to prepare a place and who has promised to come again (John 14:3). Lead your class to lift their eyes, to live ready, and to await His coming with confident, watchful joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Readiness as the practical goal of all teaching on the second coming
- The Lord's return as joy for the faithful (v. 46; 2 Timothy 4:8)
- Concrete, specific faithfulness as the fruit of genuine hope

- Watchful, confident joy as the believer's posture toward Christ's coming

Discussion Prompts

- If the Lord came today, where would you most want to be found ready?
- What is one specific way you will live more faithfully this week?
- How can we help one another await His coming with joy rather than dread?