

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 30: Be Ready: The Coming of the Son of Man -- Matthew 24:36–51

There is a moment in every household when someone says, “He could be home any minute.” And suddenly the energy shifts. Dishes get done. Toys get picked up. The half-finished project gets finished. Nobody knows the exact minute the car will pull in, and that uncertainty is precisely what keeps everyone ready. Jesus tells His disciples that this is exactly how they are to live in relation to His return: not knowing the day, and therefore always ready.

After describing the signs that would mark the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus now turns a corner. “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (v. 36). This is a different kind of event. The fall of Jerusalem had warning signs; this day has none. It will come like the flood came in the days of Noah, while people were eating and drinking and marrying, going about ordinary life with no idea that everything was about to change.

Jesus piles up the images. Two men in a field, two women grinding at the mill, and in each case one is taken and one is left. A thief who comes in the night, when the house is asleep. A master who returns to find his servant either faithfully at work or drunk and abusive, sure the master is delayed. The point of every picture is the same: be ready, because you do not know when. The day will come suddenly, and it will divide.

This is not meant to frighten us into anxiety but to wake us into faithfulness. Jesus does not tell us to stare at the sky or calculate the date. He tells us to be the faithful and wise servant He finds doing his work when He comes. The Christian life is lived in the tension of a sure promise and an unknown hour, and that tension, rightly embraced, is not dread. It is the steady, joyful readiness of people who love the Master and long to hear, “Well done.”

Group Discussion: Jesus says no one knows the day or hour of His coming, not even the angels or the Son, but only the Father (v. 36). Why do you think God has chosen to keep that day hidden from us, and how is the not knowing actually meant to help us live well?

Personal Reflection: Jesus describes a servant caught either faithfully at work or carelessly assuming the master is delayed (vv. 45–51). If the Lord returned today, in what part of your life would you most want to have been found ready, and where are you living as though He is far off?

Read Matthew 24:36–51

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, the day of the Lord coming like a thief, and the call to stay awake and sober; 2 Peter 3:8–14, the Lord’s patience and the certainty of His day; Acts 1:9–11, the promise that Jesus will return as visibly as He left; Luke 12:35–40, the call to be dressed and ready with lamps burning; 1 John 2:28, abiding in Christ so we may have confidence at His coming.