

Matthew 24:36-25:30
Genesis 6:9-7:24
Psalm 29

What Do You Do When You Don't Know When? Sept 6, 2015

Jesus will say that his coming will be like the days of Noah.

In the days before the flood,
they were eating and drinking – marrying and giving in marriage.
Sure, they probably knew about that crazy Noah
out there building this massive boat!
They knew that Noah had said that God was coming in judgment to destroy the world.
But they didn't care.
After all, my best friend is getting married next Saturday...

In the same way people today know about Jesus – the Son of Man.

They know that Jesus said that he would come again to judge the world at the last day.
But they don't care.
After all, my best friend is getting married next Saturday...

Whose voice matters to you?

The voice of your friends?
Or the voice of the LORD?

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 29 –
a song about the power of the voice of the LORD!

Sing Psalm 29

Read Matthew 24:36-25:30

What do all these people have in common?

The people eating and drinking in the days of Noah?
The wicked servant who think that his master is delayed?
The foolish virgins who do not bring enough oil?
Or the wicked and slothful servant who fails to invest his master's wealth?

They are all oriented towards their own short-term pleasure.

They are longing for a taste of heaven –
but they are unwilling to listen to one person who can get them there!
They have a longing for glory –
a longing for transcendence – for meaning – for something bigger –
but they “scratch the itch”
in a fundamentally selfish way.

This is at the heart of humanity's problem!

Jesus told us in the first part of chapter 24 that the destruction of the temple in AD 70
will be a sign of the end of the age, because the temple itself (as Hebrews 9:8 tells us)

was designed as a picture of the relationship between this age (the holy place)
and the age to come (the most holy place).
Every year, once a year, on the Day of Atonement,
the high priest would enter the "age to come" -- symbolic time travel! --
as he entered the Most Holy Place.
As such, the temple became the place where earth and heaven met.

When Jesus – the Son of Man – entered the heavenly Most Holy Place,
the earthly sanctuary became a symbol of the futility and failure of this age.
Therefore, Jesus says that the destruction of the temple
would be the sign of the destruction of this age.

We still live in "this age" –
this futile and failed age that continues to long for a taste of the heavenly,
even as it fails over and over again.
And the same longing for glory is present in every human heart –
and what Jesus did in his resurrection provides the only answer that satisfies –
indeed, the only answer that does not end in death.

Our passage today demonstrates that Mathew did not know when Christ would return
and bring the final judgment.

We saw last week that Matthew *did know* when the temple would be destroyed –
because Jesus gave all the signs that would lead up to it.
Anyone who pays attention to Jesus will know when the temple would be destroyed.

But as we saw last time, even as Jesus describes the destruction of the temple,
he focuses his attention on what will happen to his disciples –
because *Jesus knew* (and so now Matthew knows)
that the church is now the place where God dwells with his people.

But Matthew doesn't know when Jesus will return –
even Jesus didn't know (while he was on earth) when he would return.

So what do you do when you don't know?
Last week Jesus gave us an immense amount of detail
to help his disciples understand when the temple would be destroyed.
In our passage today, Jesus gets really simple!

When you don't know *when* something is going to happen,
Jesus tells his disciples to stay awake and be faithful –
and then he illustrates these two points with two stories
about staying awake and being faithful!

- 1. You Do Not Know When Your Lord Is Coming (24:36-51)**
 - a. "Stay Awake": The Days of Noah and the Parousia of the Son of Man (v36-44)**

³⁶ “*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son,^[b] but the Father only.*”

We saw last time that Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple in terms of “those days” or “these things.”

But the disciples’ question included two things:

the destruction of the temple and the sign of your coming and of the close of the age.

The destruction of the temple *is* the sign of Jesus parousia and of the close of the age.

It is a picture – a foreshadowing of the end.

As we saw last time, the book of Hebrews tells us that the two parts of the temple signified the two ages.

The first part of the temple – the holy place – signified “this age” (the Adamic world of sin and misery).

The second part of the temple – the most holy place – signified the age to come (the restored world redeemed by Christ).

All through the Old Testament period, the earthly holy of holies was the *one place* where the age to come could be found on earth.

And so the destruction of the temple would mean destruction for all humanity!

But when Jesus entered the heavenly holy of holies – the true most holy place – the earthly picture became a sign of futility and failure.

Because, after all, salvation did *not* come to Israel through the earthly temple!

Salvation did *not* come through wood and stone.

Salvation came when the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Salvation came when God himself took on flesh and blood – when Jesus came as the living temple!

And so Jesus has told his disciples that the destruction of the temple will be his coming to the Father (coming on the clouds of heaven – as Daniel had said) that signals the establishment of his kingdom.

And Jesus has explained to his disciples in verses 4-35

the five steps that will predict when the temple will be destroyed:

1. wars, rumors of wars, and disasters would be the beginning of the birth pains
2. persecution and tribulation would come upon the church – so that many would fall away
3. then would come the Abomination of Desolation, as the temple would be desecrated by the Romans, which would signal the destruction of the whole world
4. but rather than destruction of the whole world, the coming of Jesus to the right hand of God will signal the sending forth of the gospel to the ends of the earth.
5. and finally Jesus says that all of this will happen before this generation passes away (indeed, it happened 40 years later)

So far, Jesus is saying “watch for these signs and you will know”
(and Eusebius, the early church historian, said that the early Christians *did* figure it out!)

But now, in verse 36, Jesus says:

³⁶ “*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son,^[b] but the Father only.*”

The opening words of verse 36 “but concerning” strongly suggests a change of subject.

This phrase marks a shift in the topic.

In verses 1-35, Jesus used the plural “those days” –

but now he shifts to the singular: “that day.”

“Those days” – referring to the destruction of the temple and all that led up to it –

are a sign *pointing* to that day –

but must be distinguished from that day.

In other words, Jesus is saying,

I have given you detailed instructions about the *sign* of my parousia –

the destruction of the temple –

but as for my final coming, only the Father knows that day and hour.

When Jesus says that only the Father knows that day and hour,
he is teaching us something about the incarnation of the Son.

Jesus is fully God (we have seen throughout Matthew’s gospel

that Jesus regularly says and does things that only Israel’s God could say or do:

he forgives sins by his own authority –

he does not say “thus saith the LORD” – but rather, “I say to you” –

he is not just a prophet like Moses,

but he is also the LORD who spoke to Moses!)

And yet Jesus is also fully man.

He was born of a woman.

He eats and drinks.

He grows weary – was thirsty –

and here, he demonstrates that he operates with a truly human knowledge.

It’s one of the great mysteries of the incarnation:

according to the properties of his divine nature, he knows all things;

but according to the properties of his human nature, he cannot know all things!

A finite human mind cannot grasp *everything* all at once!

So when the Word became flesh,

he veiled his glory (it’s not that he *ceased* to be God,

but that he veiled his deity with humanity).

Then in verses 37-39 Jesus compares the *parousia* (the coming of the Son of Man)

to the Flood in the days of Noah:

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

So Jesus says that the judgment that comes upon the earth in “that day and hour” will be like the judgment that came upon the earth in the days of Noah.

Those who are “taken” will be swept away by the flood of judgment!

This gives a whole new meaning to the idea of being “left behind”!

I grew up as a dispensationalist – thinking that this was talking about the “rapture” – but if you look at what Jesus says,
you *don't* want to be taken!

When judgment comes – when the Flood of God’s wrath is poured out –
you *want* to be left behind!

⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

That’s why Jesus says, “stay awake”...

⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The Son of Man is coming in judgment –
and you don’t know when.

Therefore, *always be ready.*

God did not call Noah to predict when the flood would come.
God called Noah to build an ark.

In the same way, Jesus did not call us to predict (or guess) when he will return.
He called us to fill the ark that Jesus himself (as the Son of Man) is building.

Think about Noah – building a boat on dry land – nowhere near the sea.
People all around him were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage –
life as normal – business as usual –
and there’s the crazy guy over there building a boat!

In the same way, the disciples of Jesus will have very different priorities
than those around us.

Jesus is building a boat!

We gather on Sundays to hear sermons, to pray, to partake of the Lord's Supper.

We gather as we are able in each other's homes

to study the scriptures, to pray, to break bread together.

We challenge each other to put into practice the teachings of a first century Jewish rabbi,
who taught us that the trappings of earthly power –

and the methods of earthly wisdom –

are not the way for us.

Jesus' method of making disciples –

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you –

may seem a little strange.

It may seem like building a great big boat far from the sea!

But that's okay –

because Jesus didn't tell us to come up with fancy marketing strategies!

He told us that while the rest of the world continues with their ordinary lives,

we need to be about *his business*.

And that is the central point of verses 45-51:

b. Be a "Faithful and Wise Servant": Do What Jesus Has Told You to Do! (v45-51)

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant,^[c] whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants^[d] and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Notice that Jesus does not explain the illustration in verses 45-51.

He doesn't need to.

The point should be obvious!

Do what Jesus has told you to do!

Now, we should remember that Jesus is talking to his disciples privately.

These are the future leaders of the church.

Jesus is going to set them over his household.

Pastors, elders, and deacons have been set over *their fellow servants*.

We are not *masters* of Jesus' household.

We are your fellow servants whom Jesus has appointed to feed you.

If we do what Jesus says, then we will be blessed.

If we don't –
if we beat you and go off and party with the world –
then Jesus will destroy us.

So, Jesus' basic point is that you cannot know when he will return.

Therefore, focus on doing what he told you to do.

Don't worry about how long it may take.

It may feel at times like he has been delayed!

Stay awake. Be ready. Be faithful.

Jesus then illustrates this with two stories at the beginning of chapter 25.

2. So, What Should You Do? (25:1-30)

a. The Wise and the Foolish Virgins: Watch Therefore! (v1-13)

25 *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps^[e] and went to meet the bridegroom.^[i] ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’*

This may sound odd.

Shouldn't the wise virgins share with the foolish virgins?

Wouldn't that be the kind thing to do?

I'm sure that the engineers among us

would be trying to figure out how to make the oil go around.

But there is no way for the wise to share with the foolish in this case.

After all, what *is* the oil that is in their lamps?

Well, pay attention to what the bridegroom says:

¹⁰ *And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

When they say, “Lord, lord, open to us”

the bridegroom answers, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.”

This should remind us of Matthew 7:21-23, when Jesus says

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name,
and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’

And then will I declare to them,
‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

The foolish virgins are people who *say* that they believe in Jesus,
but they do not watch, they do not obey.

Yes, both the wise and foolish virgins fell asleep because the bridegroom was delayed –
but the wise virgins had been about their master’s business;
the wise virgins had plenty of oil.

Maybe they were simple, ordinary folk –
maybe they didn’t have an impressive resume –
but Jesus knew them!

They were ready for Jesus!
They longed for his coming – and so they had the one thing they needed!
They had oil for their lamp!

What is this “one thing”?
If you are going to be ready for Jesus,
then you need to do what he tells you to do!

If you wait until Jesus shows up before you decide to do what he tells you,
it will be too late.
Because on that day, Jesus will say, “I do not know you.”

Next week, when Jesus explains to us the Final Judgment,
Jesus will highlight what it means to do what he tells you:
feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked,
visit the sick and those in prison.

You may be starting to see a pattern in Jesus’ teaching here in this passage!
Yes, there are two parts: be ready, and do what Jesus says.
But the way to be ready is by doing what Jesus says!

And Jesus gives us yet another picture in verses 14-30:

b. The Faithful and the Slothful Servant: Do Your Master’s Business! (v14-30)

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants^[g] and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents,^[h] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

Verses 14-15 describe how the master gave to each of his servants according to his ability.
Then verses 16-17 explain how each servant used the gold that was entrusted to him:
the first two invested and traded – and eventually doubled their money;

the third simply dug a hole in the ground and hid the money.

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. ^[i] You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

When the master returned, the first two servants report on their investments – and the master praises them in words that reveal the true import of Jesus' parable:

'Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.

Enter into the joy of your master.'

Jesus will reward the faithful servant who is about his master's business.

But then comes the third servant.

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Let's just be straight about this:

Why does *Jesus* treat this man this way?

Why does Jesus say that this man should be cast into the outer darkness?!

Remember what his task was?

The master entrusted this servant with one talent (that's like saying "\$1 million").

The servant's job was to *do something* with that million dollars.

What has the servant been doing for all the years that the master was away?

The million bucks has been buried in the back yard.

What has he been doing with his time?

"You wicked and *slothful* servant!"

What have you been doing?
I called you to love and serve me by loving and serving one another.
I called you to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and welcome the stranger,
but you have spent the last 20 years watching TV
and playing on your phone or computer!

We can fill up our schedules with whatever we want –
but if we are not doing what Jesus told us to do,
then we are slothful!

Now it's true that the Greek word "talent" refers to a unit of money.
So it might be better to translate it "a million dollars" –
but it does apply nicely to all sorts of "talents" in the other sense!

How are you using the talents that God has given you?

How are we investing the resources that God gives us?
And sure, this applies well to the question that the elders and deacons
are discussing right now:
how should we use the million dollars that Rolf Caylor left us?!
How do we invest this for the good of Christ's kingdom in this area?

So – think about these four things:

The days of Noah.
A servant who is charged with caring for his fellow servants.
Virgins waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom.
Servants entrusted with investing the master's property.

The day of glory is coming.
The faithful steward will be blessed – as his master sets him above all that he has.
The wise virgins go in to the glorious feast.
The good and faithful servant enters the joy of his master.

In each case, Jesus says that the glory – the joy – the blessing – is deferred *for now*.
But if you are patient and if you seek first his kingdom,
then you will enter into his joy, his glory, his blessing.

Our problem is that we want the joy and the glory and the blessing *now*.
We want to *be* the master.
We want to *be* the bridegroom.
We want to *be* God.

We are very much like Milton's Satan:
"Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

Jesus is not saying that there is *no* joy now.

A faithful steward will no doubt enjoy working with his fellow servants.

The wise virgins had the pleasure of each other's company as they waited and watched.

The good and faithful servants had the *use* of the master's resources
while they waited for his return.

But in all three cases, what *mattered* to these people
was that they would be found ready when the longed-for arrival came!

In other words, are you willing to confess that Jesus is King?!

Are you willing to set aside your pretended claim to throne
and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

Or are you going to insist on perpetuating your pathetic little kingdom of one.

Oh, sure, you might be able to enforce your rule in your home.

But when your kids are grown,
they will rebel and establish their own little despotisms!

Jesus is coming to judge the world at the last day.

Are you about your master's business?