

AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

Matthew 24:37-41

37 “For just as the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.

38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

40 Then there will be two in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left.

41 Two women will be grinding grain at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.”

(Matthew 24:37–41, 2022 LSB)

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Matthew 24, Jesus has been talking about His Second Coming and the end of the age, answering His disciples’ questions: *When will these things be? What are the signs of Your coming? What are the signs of the end of the age?*

Jesus answers two other unasked questions as well. First, *How should Christians live in light of Christ’s return and the end of the age?* And second, *What exactly will happen at the end of the age?*

Beginning in Matthew 24:37, and continuing to Matthew 25:30, Jesus tells us how we are to live. In the briefest possible terms, we are to live in readiness for His return. He makes His point in our passage this morning, comparing the end of the age to the days of Noah. Then He taught four parables that emphasized different aspects of remaining ready.

THE DAYS OF NOAH

Matthew 24:37-41

The days of Noah are described in Genesis 6; let’s turn back there for a few minutes.

Genesis 6:5 summaries the state of the world:

5 Then Yahweh saw that **the evil of man** was great on the earth, and that **every** intent of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**.

(Genesis 6:5, 2022 LSB)

Man was not supposed to spread evil on the earth, but rather subdue it and rule it as God's agent (Genesis 1:26-27). Instead he multiplied evil in the world, to the point that the earth itself was corrupted:

11 Now the earth was corrupt before God,
and **the earth was filled with violence.**

12 And God saw the earth,
and behold, it was **corrupt**;
for all flesh had **corrupted** their way upon the earth.

13 Then God said to Noah,
“The end of all flesh has come before Me;
for **the earth is filled with violence** because of them ...”

(Genesis 6:11–13, 2022 LSB)

God saw that the evil of man and the corruption of the earth had reached a peak, and decided it was time for cleansing. In Genesis 6:7 Yahweh says He is going to blot out man, animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky. In Genesis 6:13 He says He is going to destroy all flesh on the earth. In Genesis 6:17 He says that He is bringing a flood of water on the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life.

But in all of that corrupt world, one man found favor with God: Noah (Genesis 6:8). How did Noah find favor with God? Well, how does *anyone* find favor with God? What does the Bible say?

6 And **without faith** it is impossible to please [God],
for he who draws near to God must **believe**
that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6, 2022 LSB)

Hebrews 11:6 was true from the moment God created Adam. We are told that Noah's grandson Abraham, born ten generations later but within Noah's lifetime, believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Noah was justified in the very same way. He believed that Yahweh is God, and that He rewards those who seek Him and worship Him, and that faith was counted as righteousness.

Second Peter 2:5 says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. I don't think Noah began preaching when God told him about the flood; I think Noah had been a preacher of righteousness

his entire life. His preaching was surely intensified when Yahweh told him that the world was going to be destroyed by a flood. He had a reputation for proclaiming the righteousness of God, even while the world around him fell into chaos and wickedness.

In Second Peter 2:7-8 Abraham's nephew, Lot, is called righteous, and we are told that the wickedness of Sodom was a torment to his soul. I think that Noah's soul was equally tormented by the wickedness around him. He couldn't remain silent. Instead he urged those around him to remember Yahweh, Creator of all things, and to repent of their wickedness and turn to Him before it was too late.

But they paid not attention. For them, it was life as usual.

LIFE AS USUAL

Matthew 24:38

38 “For as in those days before the flood
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
until the day that Noah entered the ark...”
(**Matthew 24:38, 2022 LSB**)

Now, Jesus is not saying eating and drinking are not sinful. Neither is getting married or giving your children to be married. But it is a sin to forget your Creator. That's why Solomon warned,

1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth,
before the evil days happen and the years draw near
in which you will say, “I have no delight in them”
(**Ecclesiastes 12:1, 2022 LSB**)

As I said earlier, nothing has changed since. People still live in willful ignorance of their Creator. Romans 1:21-23 says.

21 even though **they knew God,**
they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks,
but they became **futile** in their **thoughts,**
and their **foolish heart** was **darkened.**
22 Professing to be **wise,** they became **fools,** [and what do fools do?]
23 and exchanged **the glory** of the **incorruptible God**

for **an image in the likeness** of corruptible man
and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.
(Romans 1:21–23, 2022 LSB)

That was Paul's world. It is our world today. It was the world in which Noah lived. And it is the world that God destroyed.

So, when Jesus says, "For just as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be," what does He mean?

- He means days of great evil on the earth.
- He means that every thought of the human heart is only evil continually.
- He means that the earth itself is corrupted by man's sin; this is because man was given authority by God to subdue and rule the earth, and the earth reflects the character of its rulers.
- He means that even though cataclysmic judgment is coming upon mankind, and He has warned the world through preachers of righteousness, men and women remain apathetic and unconcerned.
- And, finally, He means that the wicked will remain unconcerned until it is too late.

TOO LATE

Matthew 24:38-39

Jesus said in Matthew 24:39, "They did not understand until the flood came and took them all away."

What was it that they did not understand? The preaching of Noah that God was going to destroy the world, and them with it, because of their sin. Noah preached righteousness for hundreds of years, and no doubt intensified his preaching while building the ark, but they ignored him. They didn't understand what he was talking about; it didn't make sense. What do you mean, all life will be destroyed by a flood?

And then the unthinkable happened, and they did understand.

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life,
in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month,
on this day all the fountains of the great deep split open,
and the floodgates of the sky were opened.

**12 Then the rain came upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.
(Genesis 7:11–12, 2022 LSB)**

The flood didn't begin with a few raindrops and then build in intensity. It began explosively, violently, suddenly. In Matthew 24:38 Jesus uses the word *cataclysmos* – a cataclysm, a sudden, convulsive event, an explosively violent upheaval that sweeps everything away.

First the surface of the earth collapsed as **all the fountains of the great deep** split open. Massive earthquakes took place. The tectonic plates that form the earth's crust were shattered into sixteen massive, continent-sized pieces, and those pieces were themselves broken into smaller pieces. People would have been thrown to the ground, houses fell into rubble, and trees shook. Massive columns of water began shooting upward from deep in the earth.

And **the floodgates of the sky** were opened. All the water in the atmosphere condensed and began to fall as rain, not a light drizzle, but a pounding, drenching rainstorm. It would have been like standing at the bottom of Niagara Falls. Those still standing after the deep was broken up were quickly knocked over by the force of the water rushing over the earth.

And then they understood, but it was too late. Hebrews 12:7 says that Esau eventually realized the foolishness of his actions, and tearfully sought a place for repentance. But it was too late for Esau. It was too late for those of Noah's day.

But Jesus isn't really talking about Noah's day, is He? He was only using the time of Noah as an illustration of the end of time: "So will the coming of the Son of Man be." When the Second Coming happens, it will be too late to repent and believe the Gospel. That's why Hebrews thunders over and over again, "Today is the day – if you hear His voice, repent of your sins! Believe the Gospel!" This is because Christ's return will end all possibility of repentance. It will be too late.

Whether it is too late for someone we know is impossible for us to say. That's one of the secret things that only God knows (Deuteronomy 29:29). Our job is to urge people to repent and believe the Gospel, and to preach that righteous message until their confession of faith and sanctification in Christ are evident.

But we do know that there are those in this world, and perhaps many, who are like the sons of Eli. They will not repent because God has determined to put them to death (First Samuel 2:25). So we urge repentance and faith in Christ, but shouldn't be surprised when sinners resist. If anything, we should be surprised that a sinner like us would repent and believe the Gospel.

Jesus has been comparing His Second Coming and the end of the age to the time of Noah. There are many similarities, but some differences, too. One of those differences is in how the righteous are rescued. God commanded Noah to build an ark, but Jesus Christ is *our* ark. God saved just eight people from the great flood, but He has saved countless millions through Jesus since the resurrection of Christ.

But just as in Noah's day, before the destruction comes, the righteous must be removed. Jesus describes this in Matthew 24:40-41.

LEFT BEHIND

Matthew 24:40-41

40 “Then there will be two in the field;
one will be taken, and one will be left.
41 Two women will be grinding grain at the mill;
one will be taken and one will be left.” (**Matthew 24:40–41, 2022 LSB**)

The context tells us what's taking place. Matthew 24:31 says,

31 “And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (**Matthew 24:31, 2022 LSB**)

This is the picture of that gathering. Just as Noah and his family were “gathered” into the ark, and Yahweh closed the door behind them, so when the Lord returns He will send His angels to gather His elect. Those who are left behind will face His eternal judgment.

We see that the elect are not sitting on hillsides, singing camp songs and looking at the sky, waiting for the Lord's return. They are busy with their daily lives and occupations. The main difference is not in their actions but their attitudes.

- The elect repent of their sins and trust in Christ; the wicked celebrate their sins and trust in their own imaginations.
- The elect understand that they were created to glorify God; the wicked believe that they exist for their own pleasure.
- The elect slowly come to resemble Jesus Christ more and more as the Spirit of God sanctifies and transforms them; the wicked remain as they are.
- The elect are not perfect or sinless, but they are repentant and humble before their God; the wicked savor their sins and excuse them as choice, preference, or rights.

- The elect know that one day this world will come to an end and judgment will happen, and trust that Jesus' death on the cross has delivered them fully and finally from God's judgment; the wicked believe that all things will continue as they always have, and are either amused or insulted at the very suggestion that they will face judgment one day.
- The hope of the elect is that they will be gathered to Jesus Christ, either when they die here on earth or when the Lord returns for them; the hope of the wicked is either that God doesn't care about sin, or that there is no God at all, and so there is no judgment to come.

BRINGING IT HOME

At times I have caused people tremendous discomfort and wounded feelings by wondering out loud if they really know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some of them have been deeply offended. Others have been offended on their part. I was even asked in a church Q&A time years ago why I seemed to constantly be trying to get people saved. That question makes no sense to me. Why would I constantly pursue the salvation of those I love?

Can you imagine what judgment day would be like for someone who thought they were a Christian, and only learned after they died that they had not trusted in Christ at all, but in their own goodness, in their religious devotion, or their church? Can you imagine what it would be like for their pastor to stand there and see them condemned, knowing that he never raised those uncomfortable, disturbing questions?

The Bible doesn't discourage self-examination; it commands it!

5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!

Or do you not recognize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5, 2022 LSB)

Neither does the Bible say that we should never look at someone else and fear for their salvation. To the contrary, it says,

1 Therefore, let us FEAR, lest,

while a promise remains of entering His rest,

any one of you may seem [or give the appearance, or give an indication] to have fallen short of it.

(Hebrews 4:1, 2022 LSB)

How should we respond when someone who claims to be a Christian is living in sin and rebellion, is apathetic toward the Scripture, or is in love with the world? We should be afraid that they are not actually Christians, and urge them to examine themselves and pursue Christ with all their hearts.

Finally, the Bible doesn't say that it will all work out in the end for those who were confident in their own salvation apart from any transformation in their lives. Jesus Himself says,

**21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”
(Matthew 7:21, 2022 LSB)**

I really only fear a couple of things. I fear getting the Scripture wrong when I preach. And I fear the possibility that anyone that I preach to will find themselves under the judgment of God in the last day.

So here's the response I long for you to give this morning.

If you don't know Jesus Christ, then humble yourself before Him, turn away from your sins, and trust Him entirely. Give up your attempts to make yourself right or change your life. You have always failed to change yourself; you will continue to fail. Jesus made completely atonement on His cross. If you will repent of your sins and trust in Him, you will find Him to be the perfect Savior, the perfect ark to lift you away from the coming cataclysm.

If you do know Christ as Savior, then please be humble and honest about the state of your own soul. Don't think you must compete with anyone else as a Christian. Instead be willing to examine yourself for signs of being born again: consistent faith, growing righteousness, and an attitude of repentance. And seek to love other believers enough to pray for their sanctification and encourage them as they grow in Christ. Rejoice in their growth and maturity; be merciful toward their failings as long as they remain humble and teachable; urge them to grasp all the more tightly to Jesus Christ as time goes by.

Let's pray!