

It is no secret... (I have told you this before)... that I watch a lot of television news. (Too much... if you were to ask certain family members of mine...) ... But I am captivated by current events.

One of the reasons that I end up watching longer than I sometimes plan... is due to their teasers... just before they go to commercial break. *“The FBI warns that foreign hackers have breached millions of home computers... details after we return from these messages from our sponsors...”* ... *“...OK... the morning shower and shave can wait. I’ve got to know what those promised details are. I can’t turn the morning news off yet...”*

Today... as I introduce our passage of study... I am (rather shamelessly) going to try to arouse your curiosity... as a means of staying tuned. ... I would like for you to look with me at a very familiar verse that shows itself to us... later on... in our passage. I will begin with it... and although most of you know this verse... I am going to ask a question... that perhaps you have never thought of... or if you did... perhaps you did not dare try to answer.

Discussing His Own return to earth... Jesus says this to His disciples...

### **Matthew 24:36**

It’s “unsettling” that Jesus (God, the Son)... Who is so intimate with the Father throughout the Gospels... doesn’t know something His Father does. Or more to the theological point... how is it that the second person of the Trinity... doesn’t have full knowledge of something? Doesn’t Jesus know everything? If He is God... isn’t He supposed to be omniscient (all-knowing)?

Details to follow... stay tuned.

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Over the course of the past several weeks... we have been in Matthew chapter 24... which concerns itself with the return of Christ. In today's section of Matthew's Olivet Discourse... (as it is sometimes called)... it's helpful to remember the context of Jesus' words. ... Jesus is in the middle of a conversation with His disciples... just days before He would be crucified for the sins of men and women throughout history. ...And before He died and rose from the grave... He prepared His disciples for His departure... promising them that He would return. ... How His disciples... (both then and now)... live in light of this reality... is the subject Jesus picks up on... in today's passage. There is an attitude we must have... and behavior we must be doing.

What we are studying are grand and glorious truths... to bank our futures on. But what do they mean for our lives now... at this moment? ... How does the reality of Christ's return affect the way we should think and feel right now? ... The answer to these questions will be part of our passage today... and it runs all the way through the end of Matthew 25. ... Jesus tells parables and stories to help us understand how we should live in light of His coming. The second coming... we learn... is an intensely practical doctrine. It's a sobering one, too.

### **Matthew 24:27-31**

Aspects of these verses... bring out what we can and should know about the awesomeness of Christ's return. ...In fact... every phrase of Matthew 24:27-31 is brimming with Jesus' power and glory.

- He will appear with a heavenly light show. It will make the most incredible fireworks display look amateurish. It will make Halley's Comet look like two Boy Scouts rubbing sticks together to get a spark.
- Look at the phrases of verse 30... "*all the tribes*" and "*the clouds of heaven*" and "*with power and great glory.*" For everyone to see Jesus coming from Heaven — appearing (or arriving) as the everlasting ruler of this earthly dominion. ... This is another awesome image.
- In Verse 31... Note Jesus' absolute authority — "*And he will send out his angels ... and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*" What power! ... He has the whole world in his hands... *and* he has the whole heavens in his hands too... "*from one end of heaven to the other.*"

The second personal coming of Christ will be as different as possible from the first. He came the first time as "*a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering*" (as Isaiah 53:3 said)... He was born in the manger of Bethlehem... (in lowliness and humiliation.) ... He took the very nature of a servant... and was despised and not esteemed. ... He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men... condemned by an unjust judgment... mocked... flogged... crowned with thorns and at last crucified between two thieves.

But... He will come the second time as the King of all the earth... with royal and celestial majesty. ... The princes and great men of this world will themselves stand before His throne to receive an eternal sentence. ... Before Him every mouth shall be silenced... and every knee bow... and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

It seems that the entire earth will be enveloped in physical darkness when the elements of the heavens that have produced light for the earth for thousands of years will be dimmed and, perhaps, extinguished. Life-giving light will no longer radiate from the sun and the moon. Even the secondary sources of light, the stars far beyond the realm of our galaxy, will also fade. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 that Jesus will return in flaming fire. So... perhaps the reason everyone will see Him... is that He will burst upon the scene as the **only** light in the universe.

Can you imagine how menacing this will be? The whole universe will look like it is coming unglued at the seams. ... Then... when Jesus actually appears... He will not be greeted with great accolades of triumph. ... Instead... the people will cry out in agony... terrified of the visage of righteousness and glory that descends from heaven.

At that one crucial moment... they will realize the true depth of their depravity before a holy God... and they will know with certainty that their moment of judgment is at hand. ... All of their "goodness"... all of their hard work expended on "good worldly causes"... all of their self-acclaimed "righteousness" - will vanish in a moment... obliterated in... and by... the brightness of Christ's holiness... ... crushed by His power and glory.

The nations of the earth will **mourn** (as verse 30 says)... because unbelievers will suddenly realize they have chosen the wrong side. ... Everything they have scoffed about - will be happening... and it will be too late for them.

Too late... the truth will dawn on all the devil's hardened followers. They will admit to each other: "*The Bible, which we have despised, was right all the time. The prophecies were not allegories, but literal actualities. The One whose peerless name we have customarily used as a curse word is the eternal, uncreated Son of the living God. Here He is, coming back as He said, not as a carpenter but as a conqueror, not with His glory veiled, but with that glory dimming the brightness of the noonday sun.*"

### **Matthew 24:31**

This is not the first time Matthew wrote about this in His gospel... because this is not the first time Jesus spoke of it. Jesus informed his disciples in Matthew thirteen that weeds would grow among the "good seed" of the redeemed. Jesus advised his disciples to let the weeds continue to grow along with the wheat to ensure that the wheat would not be destroyed along with the weeds. Nevertheless, when harvest time comes, Jesus himself will separate the weeds from the wheat, guaranteeing the security of his chosen ones.

### **Matthew 13:41-43 (ESV)**

*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

John, also wrote of this in Revelation 14...

### **Revelation 14:14-16 (ESV)**

*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and*

*reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

Jesus had already warned His disciples of imposters who would come claiming to be the Messiah. While these false christs would perform many spectacular miracles... they would never be able to duplicate the power of this glorious event. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can shake the heavens to their very foundations. Only the Lord of all creation will appear in the clouds and ascend the throne reserved for God's Anointed.

Because of the sweeping magnitude of this event... we can now understand why Jesus warned His followers about those who would say that Messiah had already come. This will not be some secret event... but an event plainly visible and profoundly frightening to everyone... especially the unbelievers.

### **Matthew 24:32-34**

Sitting on the Mount of Olives... there were numerous fig trees in the vicinity that they could look at as Jesus spoke to them. ... During the winter... the fig tree loses its leaves and the branches become cold and brittle. ... When spring arrives... the branches become more pliant and buds develop into leaves. ... When one sees these developments on the fig tree... one can safely conclude that summer is coming. ... Similarly... the matters of which Jesus had been speaking... are reliable indicators that His coming back is near

But what is not so clear to the modern-day interpreter... is what Jesus meant by what He said in verse 34. Look at it again with me...

## Matthew 24:34

This verse is what has made so many theologians declare that the events we have been studying happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... and the heavens shaking is figurative... for a major world-history event. They point to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. as that event. And certainly it is a major world-history event. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth from that time... until Israel was allowed to become a state again in 1948.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples... in the early 30's of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. He told His listeners that "all these things" He has been speaking about will happen before THIS generation passes. The destruction of the Temple occurred in that generation... less than 40 years after Jesus spoke.

For those of us who believe Jesus has been speaking about a future time... when Jesus will return... it looks like we might have a problem... because of verse 34 here.

Details to follow... stay tuned.

(No... this time... I'm kidding.)

The word translated "generation" comes from a Greek word γενεα. I did a little word study on this word... and I found out that γενεα had... as it's primary meaning... during the time of Christ... "*those who are descended from a common ancestor.*" (According to the most recognized authority of New Testament Greek, "A Greek Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, by Walter Bauer)... the primary meaning of this word is "*a race of people.*" ... Now Bauer goes on to explain that it's

meaning later expanded, to include all those living at a given time... or... simply... "generation." Unfortunately "generation" is how this Greek word is translated most often when a new version of the Bible comes out. And it has led to a lot of unnecessary confusion. ... *"Those who are descended from a common ancestor..."* or *"A race of people"* is the primary meaning of this word... and this meaning definitely fits the context of our passage.

With the primary meaning in mind... we can see that Jesus was providing assurance to His disciples - an assurance based on His solemn promise that the Jewish people would not disappear from the scene of history... *"until all these things take place."*

In verse 34 here... Jesus promised His disciples that the Jewish people would survive the destruction of Jerusalem... the demolition of the temple... the dismantling of the Jewish sacrificial system... and the end of the Judean nation. (That is what His men were concerned about. It prompted this whole discussion... we know as the Olivet Discourse.) ... Not only would they survive that prophesied period of time... but they would survive as a people... until that time when the Son of Man returned in power and glory to render justice... and rescue those who belong to Him.

Notice also the word *"not"* in 24:34. It is a translation of the Greek *ou mē*, a very strong term that can be literally rendered "Absolutely not - by no means what-so-ever." ... I can still hear Dr. Leonard Hillstrom (one of my Greek professors in seminary) shouting *"Don't you even **dare** to think it is possible!"* as he told us there is no stronger way to say "no" in Koine Greek... than *Ou Me*. So the Lord was saying, *"This race (the Jewish people) shall **by no means** be destroyed, through all these events."*

Haman was not able to destroy them, neither was Pharaoh, nor did Hitler succeed in his attempts. And no dictator in our day will be able to exterminate these people -- God will... (and has)... seen to that.

**Matthew 24:35**

Jesus confirmed the reliability of these prophecies with this dramatic statement.

(You know)... In our human mindset... the physical world is the only existence that we know. ... We rely on the stability of physical matter and routine... expecting one day to follow the next. ... However... Jesus told His disciples that the world as they knew it... would someday disappear. This material world... which embodies the tangible things in our physical existence... will certainly come to an end.

Unlike our temporary physical world... however... Jesus' words are eternal. His entire ministry... from his first message in the synagogue... was rooted in authority.

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So... now we have come to verse 36. Did you stay tuned?

**Matthew 24:36**

How is it that the second person of the Trinity doesn't know something? Doesn't Jesus know everything?

To answer... I am going to quote Christian author... Daniel Doriani.

Remember that Jesus chose to limit His divine powers when He became man (Phil. 2:6-8). God is omnipresent... omnipotent... and omniscient. Jesus possessed these powers... but chose not to exercise them at most points in His ministry.

Jesus is omnipresent... yet he traveled from place to place by foot (typically) or by boat or donkey (occasionally). ... When Jesus wanted to go to Jerusalem... he *walked*. He didn't stand in Capernaum and tell the disciples "*Since I am omnipresent, I am already in Jerusalem, so I'll stay here and see you there when you arrive!*" ...When He walked... He laid aside His omnipresence.

Jesus is omnipotent... yet unless He ate food He became hungry. Without sleep... He became tired. ... Eventually He slept—hard (so that a rough storm could not waken Him... Matt. 8:23-25). He did not draw on His omnipotence to fill his empty stomach or to refresh His weary body.

Jesus is omniscient... yet He laid aside His knowledge too. Jesus asked genuine questions in the Gospels. In Mark 5:30-32, Jesus asked "*Who touched me?*" and "*looked around*" to see who it might be. In Mark 9:16... He asked the disciples, "*What are you arguing about ...?*" In John 5:6... He asked a man how long he had been sick. On other occasions... He asked visitors, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" (Matt. 20:32; cf. 20:21).

Indeed... if Jesus had constantly exercised His divine attributes... He would not have led a genuine human life. ... If He endured no human limitations... His incarnation was a charade. ... If the crucifixion caused Jesus no pain... how could He suffer for us? ... If no bodily desires touched

Him... how can we say He was “ in every respect ... tempted” as we are (Heb. 4:15)?

So Jesus truly did not know when He would return. He did not need to know – AND NEITHER DO WE!

It is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return. If we knew the precise date... we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ.

Worse yet... we might plan to keep sinning and then turn to God right at the end. Heaven is not our only goal; we have work to do here. And we must keep on doing it until death or until we see the unmistakable return of our Savior. This is the point that Jesus makes through the rest of our passage.

We must be prepared because our lives and our eternities are at stake. As strange as it may sound... this text prepares you for your future - **ten billion years** from now. What could be more important than that?

### **Matthew 24:37-39**

Here the emphasis is on the fact that the people did not know *the day* when judgment would strike. Noah and his family in the ark are a picture of God's miraculous preservation of Israel during the awful time of the Tribulation.

What kept the people from listening to Noah's message and obeying? The common interests of life—eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage. They lost the *best* by living for the *good*. It is a dangerous thing to get so absorbed in the pursuits of life that we forget Jesus is coming.

In Noah's day... and at the time of Christ's return... everyone will continue his or her daily routines... finding security and contentment in the mundane

bustle of human existence. ... Even though Noah's shipbuilding was plainly visible... and provided an ominous symbol of a very dubious future... people generally chose to ignore the "foolishness" that Noah exhibited. Most of the people who are alive at the return of Christ will ignore all the warnings of prophecy... the many evangelists... and the events of the tribulation.

### **Matthew 24:40-42**

I can hear someone saying to me, "*Well, Pastor, these verses have painted you into a corner. You said the church and the Rapture are not in the Olivet Discourse... but here they are! Two shall be in the field; one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.*"

But I will answer: "*Why do you lift this out of context and apply these verses to the rapture... when believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air...?*" ... In these verses... Jesus is not talking about the Rapture. After all... what is... and has been our context...? ("*As the days of Noah were.*" ... And who was taken away in the days of Noah? ... **Unbelievers**. They were judged. They perished in the Flood.) The context of judgement began back in verse 31... when Jesus spoke of the angels gathering up people... like a harvest.) ... This is not referring to the Rapture. ... This pictures the removing from the earth by judgment those who are not going to enter the millennial Kingdom.

The point Jesus is making is that believers need to be watchful – not at all like those who got swept away in Noah's day. You and I are waiting and need to be watchful for that part of the Lord's return... known as the

Rapture. ... But those in the future... who become believers and live through the Tribulation will need to be watchful for this second part of His return – when He comes to judge. Either way... we all must be watchful.

### **Matthew 24:43-44**

The idea is this: if you knew a thief was coming tonight... you would *do* something about it. You would perhaps secure the entrance ways... set up a trap... call the authorities... or grab him before he grabs your stuff. You would not passively let your house be broken into. You would be prepared and watchful.

So let me now ask... Are you keeping watch for Christ...? ... What does this look like... practically...? (I am tempted to say here “Stay tuned”... But I won't.) ... No... Jesus gives us the answer through the remainder of the chapter and all the way through the next (chapter 25.) So... let's just begin with His answer... and then pick it up again next week.

### **Matthew 24:45-51**

Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of His people and doing His work here on earth... both within the church and outside it. This is the best way to prepare for Christ's return.

The contrasting descriptions of the faithful slave and the wicked slave should lead you to ask, "**Am I faithfully following Christ?**" There are some details in these stories that we don't need to press too far... but we should be compelled to ask who the "faithful" slave is.

One slave faithfully honors his master until he comes... he is working at his/her assigned tasks when the Master comes. He/she is not sitting on their hands. ... But the other virtually forgets that his master is coming back. This latter, "wicked" slave dishonors his master and is thus surprised by His return.

What caused this servant's downfall? *Something went wrong in his heart:* He ceased to expect his Lord to return. ... He lived like the world and mistreated his fellow servants. ... (LISTEN) Whenever God's servants cannot work together... it is more than likely because somebody has forgotten that the Lord will return. ... .. Looking for His appearing... and loving His appearing... should motivate us to be faithful and loving and daily trying to discover the good works He has embedded into our day. (Eph. 2:10.)

How about you? How would you live differently today if you knew Jesus was coming back tonight? Will you be found walking in obedience to Him when He returns, or will you be found wandering in disobedience? Will you be found loving your neighbor or ignoring your neighbor? Will you be found passionately devoted to your spouse or practically negligent of your spouse? Will you be found hating sin or holding on to sin? Are you involved in actions, thoughts, and attitudes that would not make sense if it were the last hour of your life?

We don't know *when* Jesus will return... but we know for certain *that* he will. ... And that should keep us busy building up and longing for the kingdom.

Martin Luther said that “*Christians should live as if Jesus had died this morning, risen this afternoon, and was coming this evening.*” And it was Jonathan Edwards who his famous resolutions that he read over every day. I won’t read them all... just two:

#7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life. ...

#19. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump.

I will conclude now... with the main idea of our passage this morning. It is this:

Although Christ's delay may be long, His return in judgment will be sudden and irreversible, so we must be prepared by trusting Him now with a persevering faith that bears fruit.