

NOTE TO TEAMS: In verse 36, the KJV omits the section about “the Son” not knowing the time of the end.

Looking Forward to Christmas

Session 6

January 5, 2025

*Looking Forward with Expectation*

**Session Passage:** Matthew 24:32-44

**Matthew 24:32-35**

**Connection to The Point.** The return of Jesus is near.

**Context.** Matthew 24–25 relates Jesus’s comments brought about when His disciples spoke of the majesty of the Jerusalem temple (see Luke 21:5). Jesus then noted that the temple would be completely destroyed. Later, while on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked two questions: when the destruction of the temple would occur and what would be the sign of Jesus’s return and the end of the age (Matt. 24:1-3).

In Matthew 24:4–25:46 Jesus answered His disciples questions, describing the signs that would surround the destruction of the temple and His return, offering parables about the disciples’ need to always be alert and expectant of His return, as well as speaking of the final judgment. One of the factors related to the interpretation of these chapters is the interpreter’s perspective on the end times, known as “eschatology.” An important dimension of eschatology is one’s view of the millennium.

**Millennialism.** This term refers to one’s view of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20:1-6. Broadly speaking, there are three main millennial views: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism. These views are related mainly to the timing of Christ’s return and the nature of His one-thousand-year reign. Below are general descriptions of each view; within these views Christians disagree on the interpretation of some of the details.

“Premillennialists” assert that Jesus will return in the end times prior to the literal millennium when Christ’s earthly rule begins. The millennium will be followed by the final judgment. “Postmillennialists” contend that Christ will not return until after the millennium. They maintain that the worldwide growth of Christianity will eventually bring about peace and harmony on earth. After that Jesus will return and institute the final judgment. “Amillennialists” say no literal thousand-year period will be associated with Jesus’s return. There will be a final cataclysmic end and then Jesus will return. They interpret the passages about a thousand-year earthly kingdom in a symbolic manner. This session will focus not on the different millennial views, but on the words of Jesus in this passage concerning His second coming.

**Learn this lesson** (v. 32). Jesus and His disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem. He earlier had told them that the city and the temple would be destroyed (23:37-38; 24:1-2; this occurred in AD 70 when the Romans decimated the city). The disciples asked Jesus when these events would occur and what would be the sign of His return. Jesus answered both their questions in

Matthew 24–25. Perhaps Jesus’s favorite way to teach was by using parables. A parable is a story from real life, though not necessarily a real event, that illustrates a moral or spiritual lesson. Jesus used parables to teach about the kingdom of God and spiritual principles. In this instance, Jesus used parables in relation to the sign of His return (24:32-35) as well as the need for His disciples to remain vigilant in expectation of His return (24:45–25:30).

**Fig tree** (v. 32). Figs have a high nutritional value and were an important part of people’s diets in first-century Israel. Fig trees grew throughout ancient Israel. They have low thick limbs and wide trunks. Jesus used fig trees as object lessons for His teachings several times (Matt. 7:15-20; 21:18-22). In this case, Jesus used a parable about fig trees to inform His disciples about the return of the Son of Man (Himself, 24:29-31; see Dan. 7:9-14).

**Its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves** (v. 32). The fig tree’s branches have rough leaves which appear in the spring along with its fruit. This is a clear sign of the changing of the seasons and that **summer is near**. The figs ripen in the summer months, at which time they are ready for picking.

**In the same way** (v. 33). As He spoke, Jesus may have pointed to fig trees on the Mount of Olives to give His disciples a concrete image to focus their attention on. He was not really telling them something about fig trees they did not already know. He was using the fig trees as an object lesson concerning His return.

**All these things** (v. 33). Just as the fig tree’s bearing fruit indicates the coming of summer, so too *all these things* which Jesus had describe will be an indication that the time is drawing near for the return of Jesus, the Son of Man (vv. 27,30). Jesus noted one of the primary indicators of the nearness of His return. “This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (v. 14).

**Recognize that he is near—at the door** (v. 33). *He* is Jesus, the “Son of Man” (vv. 27,30). *Recognize* (*ginosko*) means to understand, to grasp the meaning or significance of something. In this context, the occurrence of the various events Jesus had described should lead to His disciples understanding His return is near. However, this does not indicate the exact timing between the events described and Jesus’s return. It merely indicates that His return is near.

*Door* is often used figuratively in Scripture (Gen. 4:7; Rev. 3:20). When someone hears a knock at the door he or she knows someone is standing right outside the door. This image plainly emphasizes the closeness of the return of Christ. So when they see all the things Jesus spoke of occurring, His disciples would know that His coming was imminent.

**Truly I tell you** (v. 34). Jesus often started His statements with this phrase (*amen lego hymin*). It appears thirty-one times in Matthew’s Gospel alone. Whenever He prefaced a comment with this phrase, Jesus indicated He was about to reveal something very important and expected His listeners to pay close attention to His words.

**Generation** (v. 34). This verse is difficult to interpret. The term *generation* (*genea*) has multiple meanings. It can refer to people having common characteristics or interests. It can refer to all of those born at a particular time or all of those living at a particular time. It can refer either to a specific period of time or an indeterminate period of time. While Matthew used the term in a variety of ways, he consistently used it to refer to the span of a human generation (11:16; 12:41,42,45; 23:36). Interpreters are divided concerning the meaning of the *generation* to which Jesus was referring. Perhaps the best way to understand Jesus's words in relation to this term is that His teachings have a dual fulfillment. One generation during the time of Jesus's first disciples would experience the destruction of Jerusalem, and another in the future will see a greater series of catastrophic events in relation to Jesus's second coming.<sup>1</sup>

**Until all these things take place** (v. 34). In His teaching while on the Mount of Olives, Jesus described two different future time periods and two distinct events. One was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which occurred in AD 70 when the Romans sacked Jerusalem (Matt. 24:2; see Luke 21:20-24). The other period was His return in glory at the end of the age at an unspecified (and unknown to anyone except God the Father, Matt. 24:36) future date (see Luke 21:25-28). **Will certainly not pass away** indicates in both cases the generation Jesus was referring to would live to see the events He was foretelling.

**Heaven and earth** (v. 35). This phrase encompasses the entire created order. The *earth* is the world in which human beings live, while *heaven* includes the sun, moon, planets, and all that outer space contains.

**Will pass away** (v. 35). All of the created order is temporary. However, at the appointed time, God will intervene to create a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1; see Isa. 51:6; 1 Cor. 7:31; 2 Pet. 3:10-11).

**But my words will never pass away** (v. 35). *Never* translates two words used for a double emphasis. We might say, "No, not ever!" The words of Jesus are the absolute truth of God, and Jesus is the embodiment of that truth (John 14:6). A billion years from now, when we are safely in our eternal home, Jesus's words will still forever comfort and inspire His people. His Word is eternal and unchanging (Ps. 119:89; Isa. 40:8).

### **Matthew 24:36-39**

**Connection to The Point.** The return of Jesus will surprise most people.

**Context.** In Matthew 24:36-44 Jesus is referring to His second coming.

**That day and hour** (v. 36). *Day* and *hour* are often used in Scripture as a general way to refer to time and here should not be viewed as referencing twenty-four-hour or sixty-minute periods (Matt. 7:22; 10:19; 25:13). It is similar to the Old Testament's references to the time of final judgment as "the day of the Lord" (Isa. 13:6,9; Joel 1:15; Mal. 4:5).

**No one knows** (v. 36). Jesus emphasized that when the end will come has not been revealed. It should not be the concern of His disciples to attempt to set dates as that does not enhance one's faith and is only a hindrance to doing the tasks God has appointed for them (Acts 1:6-8).

**Neither the angels of heaven nor the Son** (v. 36). It may not be a surprise that the angels do not know when the end will come, but it is certainly shocking to learn that even the Son Himself does not know. Jesus's self-confessed ignorance of His return must be taken in the full light of the incarnation. When God the Son was on earth, He chose to forego some of His omniscience as part of becoming human.

**Except the Father alone** (v. 36). Only *the Father* has knowledge of when the end will come. That Jesus made a distinction between Himself (God the Son), and God the Father is noteworthy. It emphasizes the subordination of God the Son to God the Father (see John 14:28). Other passages in Scripture emphasize the unity of the Father and the Son (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30).

**The days of Noah** (v. 37) In order to further magnify the unpredictability of the time of His coming, Jesus compared it to *the days of Noah*. The reason for the flood was the pervasive and constant nature of evil among humanity (Gen. 6:5). Because of this, God decided to wipe out the entirety of humanity, save for Noah and his immediate family (vv. 6-8,18).

But notice, Jesus did not focus on the people's wickedness in those days before the flood. Rather, He focused on the fact that the people were going about their daily lives. They gave no thought to the possibility of God's judgment upon them.

**Eating and drinking** (v. 38). These terms represent the universal actions of all people, the routine behavior of humanity.

**Marrying and giving in marriage** (v. 38). One major tradition of most if not all cultures is marriage. The people of Noah's time were keen on giving their sons and daughters away in the time-honored tradition of matrimony, though it's unlikely they included worship of the true God in their ceremonies.

**Until the day Noah boarded the ark** (v. 38). The apostle Peter noted that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). But God's warnings through Noah of the impending cataclysm ended when He told Noah, his family, and the animals to board the ark, and God shut the door (Gen. 7:6-16).

**They didn't know** (v. 39). The people of Noah's time *didn't know* in the sense that they did not take Noah's warning of impending judgment seriously and continued on with their daily lives. They ignored Noah, doubtlessly thinking they knew better, until the day of God's judgment came and the flood **swept them all away** (see Gen. 7:17-24).

**This is the way** (v. 39). Jesus compared life in the days of Noah to life in the days prior to the coming of the Son of Man. Just as the people were going through the motions of life in the pre-flood world, so it will be before the return of Christ. The majority of the people will not be ready.

**The coming of the Son of Man** (v. 39). *Coming* refers to the *parousia*. That Greek term means “presence” (as in 2 Cor. 10:10), “arrival,” or “appearing.” It was often used for visits of high-ranking officials or heads of state. But it also denotes the return of the Son of Man (Jesus), almost always in association with His judgment of the world at the end of the age.

#### **Matthew 24:40-44**

**Connection to The Point.** The return of Jesus calls for us to be prepared.

**Two men will be in the field** (vv. 40,41). Jesus used two illustrations to emphasize the need for His disciples to be ready for His return. The first had to do with agriculture. In the agrarian society of first-century Israel many able-bodied men worked as farmers and herdsmen. The second illustration involves **two women who will be grinding grain**. Grinding grain in preparation for making bread was a daily activity of women in first-century Israel.

**One will be taken and one left** (vv. 40,41). This sentence can be interpreted in two ways. First, it may be referring to one person being taken to God’s judgment. But it could also mean that the one being taken is a believer who will be taken to be with God. In either case, when Jesus comes there will only be two categories of people: the prepared and the unprepared. Believers in Jesus will go to be with Him forever in glory, and the rest of humanity will face God’s judgment and an eternity separated from His presence.

**Therefore be alert** (v. 42). The term for *alert* (*gregoreo*) means to be watchful and/or in a constant state of readiness. It can also mean to be or remain fully alive (“awake,” 1 Thess. 5:10). Jesus expects His disciples to be diligent in doing the work that He has given them to accomplish (Matt. 25).

**Homeowner** (v. 43). Jesus now used another short parable to make His point. This one involves a case of the crime of breaking and entering. He used the illustration of a hypothetical homeowner (*oikodespotes*, “master of the house”) whom He put in an impossible position.

**Had known what time the thief was coming** (v. 43). Theft is a crime Jesus’s audience would have been familiar with and it is an example all generations since then would also be familiar with. Obviously, if a homeowner knew what time the thief was planning to break into his or her house, the theft would have been thwarted.

**He would have stayed alert** (v. 43). The term for *stayed alert* (*gregoreo*) is the same used in the previous verse for “be alert.” The diligent homeowner would have been on guard against the thief and not allowed his or her house to **be broken into** (*diorusso*, literally, “dig through” or “break through”—the majority of houses in first-century Israel were made of mud and clay and were easily breached with picks and shovels).

**Be ready** (v. 44). The term for *ready* (*hetoimos*) has an active sense of preparing and a passive sense of being in a state of preparedness. Most people are no more ready for the Lord's return than most homeowners are for someone breaking into their houses.

**At an hour you do not expect** (v. 44). The return of Jesus, **the Son of Man**, is assured. On the Old Testament background of this title see Daniel 7:9-14. All of Jesus's disciples can count on this fact. However, the specific time of His return is unknown. The term *expect* (*dokeo*) has the meaning of to suppose or presume. Despite the many attempts by some to pinpoint the time of Jesus's return, the reality is that we cannot know precisely when this event will occur. Because of this fact, it is the Lord's expectation and all believers' duty to remain in a constant state of readiness by being about the duties that He has given them.

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 612–613.