

TRUST GOD'S TIMING

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
JESUS IS CERTAIN TO RETURN EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHEN.

MATTHEW 24:32-41

³² “Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.

³³ In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that he is near—at the door.

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³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.

MEMORY VERSE

³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

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³⁶ Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone.

³⁷ As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.

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

³⁹ They didn't know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be.

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

⁴¹ Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left.”

KEYWORDS

All these things (v. 33)—These words refer to the distress that will precede Jesus' return, not the second coming itself.

He is near (v. 33)—This phrase means Christ is prepared to return at any moment, not that He must return immediately after these events unfold.

This generation (v. 34)—Usually refers to a contemporary period and the major events occurring during the lifespan of a person.

The days of Noah (v. 37)—Refers to the state of humanity before the time of Noah and the flood (Gen. 6). People were ignorant of the coming judgment.

HOW CAN WE TRUST GOD AS WE WAIT FOR CHRIST'S RETURN?

On our anniversary my husband and I went to San Diego, California. When we departed from Boston it was morning and when we arrived in San Diego six hours later, it was still morning! We still had our whole day left; however, we were exhausted realizing our bodies had not adjusted to the time difference. Our sense of timing was completely off. We desired to enjoy California, but our bodies were not prepared.

Maybe that is how you feel about Christ's return. You are excited in some ways, but in other ways you are not adjusted. There are



many phenomenons in our world, and it seems that Jesus should be back at any moment. Yet, Jesus has not come. Our timing is off.

History is full of many misfires about Jesus' return. Some of these misfires are created by heretical teachers hoping to gain a following. On other occasions, a misfire occurs because well-meaning believers get caught up in their zeal about end times and misread events. What did Jesus have to say about the timing of His return? Let's look at today's session.

Trust the Signs // Matthew 24:32-33

Having described how the turbulent end of the age will look, Jesus closed this section of His discourse with three practical teachings built around three illustrations: a fig tree, Noah and the flood, and a thief in the night. Jesus began with a parable about a fig tree as a transition from describing what the end will be like in response to the disciples' initial question we discussed in the first session: "Tell us, when will these things happen?" (Matt. 24:3).

WHAT DOES JESUS' WILLINGNESS TO SHARE THE SIGNS OF HIS RETURN SAY ABOUT HIM?

Why a fig tree? Fig trees were common in Israel. The fig tree puts out its leaves and green fruit in the late spring, reminding everyone "that summer is near" (v. 32). Christ was assuring believers that although they cannot know the specific time He will return, they can know the general time by watching the signs. The point of the fig tree is that we can get a general idea that Jesus' return is soon. "When you see all these things, recognize that he is near, at the

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door" (v. 33). When Christ gets ready to return, the best news is that Jesus Himself will be near.

Trust God's Word // Matthew 24:34-35

Have any of you seen the meme where a video game player moves from sitting upright and leans forward? It denotes that, now the game just got real. In this case, that's verse 34. When Jesus started with the phrase, "Truly I tell you," He wanted them to pay close attention. He said, "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place."

Skeptics have alleged that Christ made a mistake. They assume the generation to whom Jesus was talking passed away before all the events of verses 4-31 occurred. Some assume that, since Jesus said in verse 36 that even He did not know the time of His coming, then maybe He was offering His best guess. They erroneously claim that Jesus misfired with His "guess" about the timing of His return. This spurious reasoning misses both Christ's point and the authority of Scripture. If Jesus were wrong about His second coming, then He easily could be wrong about all His other teachings.

WHEN HAVE YOU FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO TRUST GOD'S WORD?

However, Jesus gave a strong statement of His self-understanding and the reliability of His teaching. Christ underscored His own faithfulness when He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (v. 35). Christ had emphasized this truth earlier in His Sermon on the Mount: "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished" (5:18). Jesus' words are also reminiscent of Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever."

It is impossible to alter or negate what God has said in His Word. We would do well to remember that Jesus' words are firmer than earth's bedrock and as sound as the foundations of heaven (Matt. 7:24-27). Nothing is more certain than Christ's words. Whatever is touched by sin will pass away, but no sin or imperfection is to be found in the Word of God. "The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in an earthen



DIGGING DEEPER LET THE BIBLE SPEAK

As we consider what Jesus said about the fig tree, we should remember to let the parable stand on its own. Some people believe the fig tree represented the nation of Israel. Their reasoning was from an Old Testament prophecy. Both Jeremiah and Hosea compared Israel to a fig tree (Jer. 24:3-10; Hosea 9:10); therefore, it could be assumed that Jesus was positioning the rebirth of the nation of Israel. However, it is important that we learn to let the text speak for itself. Jesus made no specific reference contextually to the nation of Israel. As you continue to grow and consider the signs, it is important to contextualize Scripture without assumptions. When you look at the story in its proper context, the lesson is quite clear.

What other Scripture verses are often misinterpreted or given an unclear meaning?

furnace, purified seven times” (Ps. 12:6). It will remain pure and perfect because “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). God’s Word will endure even after “heaven and earth ... pass away” (v. 35).



Trust and Be Ready //

Matthew 24:36-41

Verse 36, Jesus’ teaching about the time of His return, might be the most well-known verse in the Olivet Discourse. This verse serves as a strong reminder to deter us from setting specific dates for the second coming of Christ. Unfortunately, this word from Jesus goes against all the curious leanings of humanity. We are inclined to want to know when something will come to pass. The larger the event, the more interested we become in its occurrence.

Everything Jesus has just said up to this point of His discourse surely caused His disciples to want to try to put all the pieces together. When Christ said “no one knows” (v. 36) the day or the hour, it is a reminder that there are some things that we just do not need to know. If we knew every detail of God’s plan, we very likely would go off of our “spiritual game.”

Those missing details were meant to keep us alert and better prepared.

Jesus illustrated the attitude of unbelievers during the end of the age by using one of the most familiar stories from the Old Testament: Noah. “The days of Noah” (v. 37) were one of the darkest periods in human history. The people’s “wickedness” however, would be short-lived (Gen. 6:5-7). God’s judgment came in force, but it did not come without warning. The people in Noah’s day had many years to observe Noah building the ark. They also had plenty of time to hear Noah’s testimony concerning the coming judgment (2 Pet. 2:5). But the people did not recognize the warning until it was too late. “They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away” (v. 39).

HOW CAN OUR ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS EXPRESS TRUST IN GOD’S TIMING?

Because no one paid any attention, they were caught unprepared. “They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage” (v. 38); in other words, they went about their daily routine without any regard for the judgment headed their way. Judgments are most terrible for those who are unsuspecting.

People will have the same mindset when Christ returns. We should never become so immersed in this present time and our present lives that we forget about eternity. We can easily allow our focus on worldly matters to distract us from spiritual matters. That is exactly what happened to the people in Noah’s day, and Jesus’ words warn us not to follow their example. Those who heed Jesus’ warnings and watch for the signs will be saved, but those who ignore the warnings will find sudden judgment before they realize what is happening.

Jesus illustrated His point by describing some people who “will be taken” (v. 41) while others will be left. Some apply this to a rapture of the

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church—a “secret snatching” of all believers which will precede a time of great tribulation. Others view this as the sudden judgment that will come upon unbelievers at the return of Christ. They maintain that unbelievers will be taken and removed, just as the unrighteous were taken and swept away in the flood. This passage makes one thing clear: the end times will mean a clear separation between believers and unbelievers. A “revealing” aspect will be connected to the Lord’s return. When Christ comes back, He will suddenly disclose people’s hearts and reveal who they really are.

The moment Christ comes for His people, some people will be committed believers and others will be unbelievers. These people can have the closest of relationships, but they will be eternally separated from each other if one has a relationship with Christ and the other doesn’t. One will face judgment and condemnation, and the other will rest securely in the glory and presence of Christ. Until that unknown moment arrives, let’s do all we can to see that others will join us in Christ’s presence forever.

DID YOU KNOW?

Grindin’! In Verse 41 Jesus tells the disciples that, “Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one left.” Jesus is painting a picture of two women grinding corn using millstones. This work was mentioned in Judges 16 and Lamentations 5. For male captives in prison grinding millstones was degrading work so the male disciples may have interpreted this as suffering especially in light of Jesus’ constant Old Testament references. It is also very possible that as Jesus spoke of the fig tree, he was observing two women working and brought them into the conversation. Women grinding corn was regular work in this region. That’s it! Stay on your grind, for it is in the grinding that Jesus will come back. Jesus did not ask the community to change what they did daily. Normal day-to-day work is where and when the second coming of Jesus will happen. Keep grindin’, Jesus sees you!

How can you ensure your everyday work will be pleasing to Christ when He returns?

LIVE IT

What will we do as believers when we learn to trust God’s timing in Christ’s return?

Jesus made the difficult conversation about the end simple by explaining it with a parable and history. As you continue to grow in your faith and walk with Christ, the opportunity you have is to share Christ with others through a story and history. Trusting in Jesus and taking Jesus at His word is not always easy. But Jesus made it easy! We show trust in God’s timing in Christ’s return when we can do the following:

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- **Trust God’s timing.** Ask God to help you trust His timing and let go of your anxiety. Read Psalm 46:10. Then spend some time being still and focusing on the truth that God is God.
- **Make Bible study a priority.** If Bible study isn’t already a part of your daily routine, schedule a time and place to study. Spend at least ten minutes each morning studying the Word.
- **Share God.** Share the faithfulness of God with another believer. Then together share with another believer. Continue sharing until you have a group. Now share with someone who doesn’t know God.

DAILY READINGS

1. NO ONE KNOWS // MATTHEW 24:36

Throughout my life I have heard predictions on when the world was going to come to an end. From Nostradamus, Haley's Comet, to the year 1999, much has been said about what will happen and when. Self-proclaimed psychics, profits, and astrologers have all weighed in and given predictions regarding the end of the age. Regardless of their accuracy on other accounts, with this matter, prophecies have failed and will continue to fail. Matthew 24:36 clearly tells us that no one knows the "day or hour." No, not even the angels have the inside scoop. Only God Himself is privy to this information.

Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—except the Father alone.

2. I DIDN'T SEE THAT COMING // MATTHEW 24:42

Sometimes in life we are blind-sided by events that can be both negative or positive. The betrayal of a friend or relative. The car that seemed to come out of nowhere forcing you to slam on the brakes. A raise or marriage proposal. In the face of these unexpected occurrences we often say, "I didn't see that coming." Just think of the horror that will be felt by those realizing that Christ returned for the elect and they were left behind. While there is yet time, believe, confess, and receive Christ and secure your place in the household of faith. Being fully prepared is the best position to be in.

"Therefore, be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming."

3. JUST BE READY // MATTHEW 24:44

Remembering my children growing up brings back fond memories. Those were the days of working a full day, rushing to pick the kids up from daycare, and then going home to fix some sort of balanced meal for their growing bodies. When they began playing sports or were involved in school activities,

things became more hectic. I had to almost have superpowers to get where we needed to be on time. "Just be ready," I'd often say in a rushed voice. Scripture instructs us to do the same regarding Christ's return. We don't know when Jesus will come; just be ready when He gets here.

"This is why you are also to be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

4. STAY ALERT! // GALATIANS 6:9

Vehicles made today come with remarkable safety features. One such feature is the driver alert system. It detects when the alertness of a driver has diminished. The car then signals the driver with a flashing symbol, beeping sound, or something similar to get their attention. Becoming fatigued on the road can be detrimental. Sometimes we have to stop and rest or have another driver take over in order to get to our desired destination. Similarly, as we drive along the road of life, we mustn't get weary. Stay alert, vigilant, and let Jesus take the wheel in order for you to get to your divine destination.

"Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up."

5. IN THE MEANTIME // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

We know that the Lord will return. We just don't know when. Scripture tells us what to look for and what to prepare for. We are warned about the destruction, deceivers, and false prophets. We are instructed to be ready and to stay alert. But between now and then is the "meantime." The meantime is our opportunity to strengthen our relationship with God and fulfill the purpose He has for us on earth. And, according to the apostle Paul, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). The meantime allows us to preach and teach the gospel so others may be reconciled to God through Christ.

We are Christ's ambassadors. He wants to use us for the glory of God, in the meantime.