

## Matthew 24:36-44

<sup>36</sup> “No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup>Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns. <sup>38</sup>In fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. <sup>39</sup>And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man returns. <sup>40</sup> “At that time two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>42</sup>So be alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But understand this: If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup>You also need to be ready for this reason: The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.”

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## Keep Watch

### I.

The buildup was incredible. Looking back, you can feel it almost as if it were yesterday. It was palpable, the anticipation you felt in the days leading up to the family vacation. Before the journey could begin, preparations had to be made—many of them. Either you had to go to the post office to put a stop in for the mail or someone had to be contacted to bring in your mail. Perhaps even more difficult were the arrangements to have someone care for the houseplants, the garden, and the pets. The car was checked to see that everything was in order mechanically. Clothing was chosen and washed.

At long last most of the arrangements had been made. The bags were packed. The car was loaded. Now...all you had to do was wait. Dad had to get home from work before the trip could really begin.

You stood in the front yard looking for his car. There's one! Nope. It didn't turn down our street. Time seems to drag as you wait. There! That must be the one! No...it just passed by the house. False alarm. Finally the right car appears, comes down the street, and turns into the driveway. Dad gets out. Vacation can begin! You are euphoric.

Even though you weren't exactly sure *when* Dad was coming home, there was no question in your mind that it would be soon. You wanted to be ready. This was a day and time you had been anticipating for days—even weeks.

### II.

At the beginning of this chapter Jesus' disciples had asked: “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3, EHV). Today's Gospel reading is a part of Jesus' answer to their question. He wanted his disciples to be ready for that very special day—the day of his second coming. Jesus wants you and me, his disciples of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, to be ready for his second coming, too. On that day we will be going on a very special trip—a trip to our eternal home of heaven. Keep watch, Jesus tells us.

Maybe when you were watching for your father before vacation you were looking in the direction from which he *usually* came, but that day he drove around the block and came from the other direction. All of a sudden, he was just there—right behind you.

Jesus told the disciples *his* return would be unexpected, too, even though we know he is

coming, and even though we are watching diligently, just as he told us to. “No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36, EHV). Jesus was pretty clear—no one knows. Despite his assertion, some have gone to great lengths to try to determine exactly when his return will be.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus spoke about the signs of the end. He said: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup>Because many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will deceive many people. <sup>6</sup>You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because all these things must happen; but that is not yet the end. <sup>7</sup>Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup>But all these things are only the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:4-8, EHV).

Those seeking to ascertain the specific day of his return have taken other places in Scripture as a prescription of world events that must occur before Jesus’ return will happen. “No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36, EHV). Even Jesus himself in his state of humiliation said that *he* didn’t know the time. How is it that any one else is so arrogant as to think we can figure it out?

“Understand this: If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” (Matthew 24:43, EHV). Ignorance is bliss. The kind of homeowner Jesus spoke about went about his life blissfully unaware of the disaster that was about to come on him. Perhaps it wasn’t such bliss after all, since in the end he lost all he had. Had he known the time the break-in would occur, he might have taken steps to prevent it.

Ignorance is no excuse. Especially ignorance about the return of Christ.

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns. <sup>38</sup>In fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. <sup>39</sup>And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away” (Matthew 24:37-39, EHV). The people of Noah’s day went far beyond ignorance and blissful lack of awareness—they took it to contempt.

During the years he spent building the ark, Noah repeatedly warned the people of the coming judgment of God. They couldn’t be bothered with his warnings. They were too busy with their lives—too busy having fun. The secular was far too important to give up just because some madman was warning about the coming judgment of God. Everything seemed to be going on just the way it always had. Why should they bother changing their ways? Instead—they mocked the messenger. Building a rudderless ship in the middle of dry land didn’t seem to give much evidence of sanity, so they just discounted everything Noah told them.

Does ignorance *still* lead to contempt? Pastors preach. The world ratchets up political correctness and jumps all over pastors and their people who preach or believe what God’s Word has to say about sin.

Sometimes pastors and people get caught up in the secular and cave in. They soften the message in ignorance, but eventually they become contemptuous of what the Lord says. All kinds of personal decisions and feelings become more important than God’s Word or God’s will for the Christian’s life. Materialism, sports, entertainment, and recreation take first place over God.

The consequences for the ignorant and the contemptuous of any and every generation are grim. The loss is total. The homeowner is cleaned out. The people of Noah’s day probably didn’t even see him leave for the ark. The rain might not even have bothered them all that much at first—not until

the water started swirling around their ankles, and then their waists, and then their necks.

Those of today who show contempt for the Lord will also experience a total loss.

### III.

If you have ever tried to warn someone about sin, they probably pull out *this* Bible passage: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged” (Luke 6:37, EHV). But Christians are to evaluate behavior and call out bad behavior—just not with a hypocritical attitude. In fact, just a few verses after saying “Do not judge,” Jesus goes on: “In fact, each tree is known by its own fruit... <sup>45</sup>The good person brings what is good out of the good stored in his heart, and the evil person brings what is evil out of the evil within” (Luke 6:44-45, EHV). We are to recognize the deeds of unbelief and warn people about them.

The reason for warning others is to spare them from the consequences of being unprepared. The people of Noah’s day reveled in their disregard for God. When the floods came, the consequences were not only lethal, but eternal. The unprepared homeowner was stripped of everything he had because of his lack of preparedness.

Do *you* tend to ignore God’s threat of judgment while occupying yourself with the worries and cares of day-to-day living? The concern of the moment is what kind of Christmas tree to get and how to decorate it. It’s time to take advantage of Cyber Monday and get all the gift buying out of the way. What can you get that the recipient doesn’t already have? Can you out-do last year’s gift?

With all kinds of trivial things holding our attention, we are diverted from our preparation for Christ’s return. When we don’t watch out for temptation, it is far too easy to fall into the traps the evil one sets for us every day. His temptations start out subtle, but eventually suck you in to a trap that pulls you away from Jesus and into worldliness.

### IV.

Keep watch by remembering what you are *really* doing in the season of Advent—preparing your heart for Christ. When Jesus spoke the words of our text he was preparing his disciples for the time when he would leave them. The words of preparation continue for another whole chapter after today’s Gospel. At the end of everything he had to say to them, Jesus said: “You know that after two days it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2, EHV).

Keep watch. One of the things that helps us keep watch is remembering Jesus’ first Advent. There is the stable of Bethlehem. We picture in our mind’s eye the manger where he lay. We listen to Christmas music—real Christmas music—which reminds us of the angels singing praises in the night sky. And all of this helps us also to think about the mission Jesus came to accomplish.

He came in mercy for all the times we failed to be watchful. He came because of our materialism. He came because he knew the world seduces us and would lead us away from him. He came to buy us back.

We look back on his birth and his life and his death and we remember. Each week in the worship service we are fed with his Word and Sacraments. They help us to be prepared— not just for that one hour on Sunday, but *each* day as we pray, praise and give thanks; each day as we live in preparedness out of thanks that Jesus has given us the victory.

Thank God as you wait for the return of Jesus. When he returns you will not be unprepared, but run out to meet him. Like children waiting for the dad to start vacation, we will rejoice to know he is there to usher us into our eternal home of heaven. Amen.