

Because No One but the Father Knows...

Matt. 24:36-51

Intro. About a year before Peggy and I were married, she attended a Jack Van Impe Crusade in Chicago. Now the Van Impe's can be pretty sensational. For more than 4 decades, Jack has passionately preached the nearness of the Lord's return. Peggy phoned me after the meeting that night. Before she said a word I could tell she was upset. She told me about Jack's message and said he seemed sure Jesus would come before we got married. I was happy she was excited about marrying me, but her worries were a little off base. First, Jesus said, **no one knows the day or the hour...**not even Jack Van Impe! Second, as she realizes now, I am no grand prize, and our marriage, though wonderful, is certainly not more glorious than Christ's return! (Having said this Peggy stands to her feet and shouts, *"Listen to this man...he's speaking the truth!"* But haven't we all had some apprehension and misgivings about the Lord's return? (the angel and the golfer)

Ever since **v.3**, Jesus has been answering the question His disciples asked Him privately... **"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"** Like my sermons, the answer Jesus gave was a bit longer than His audience anticipated. First, Jesus first described **birth pains** that would precede His coming (**vs. 4-14**). He then spoke about **the abomination of desolation** that would mark the midpoint of the seven year period known as the **Time of Jacob's Trouble** or the **Great Tribulation. (v.15)** This act of sacrilege against God and His Temple would serve as a sign to Judean inhabitants at that time. It would be a signal for them to immediately flee to the mountains. (**vs.16-28**). Then, as we found last time, **the distress** that will mark the final 3 ½ yrs. of the Tribulation would be immediately followed by cosmic signs that would precipitate the supreme sign of His appearing on the clouds of heaven. (**vs. 29-35**)

By the parable of the fig tree in **vs. 32-34**, Jesus bundled together all these conditions and signs to answer the question **"when."** He said, **"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.** Just as a fig tree beginning to leaf out signals the approach of summer, **all these things** are signs that will indicate His coming **is near...right at the door. This generation**, or the generation of faithful Jews who will witness all these things, **will certainly not pass away until all these have happened.**

The rest of **chap. 24** consists of a prohibition and three parables. Addressed primarily to the Jewish remnant or believing Jews living at the time of the Tribulation, each parable contains an important admonition. As we've been saying all along, this isn't our mail. Though the NT letters generally describe what conditions will be like at the end of the age, there are no specific signs for the rapture! The signs pertain to Israel and the Second Coming, not the rapture of the Church. Yet because this is God's Word and all Scripture is profitable, it contains lessons for every believer. Since Israel's time of trouble will be preceded by the sudden and imminent rapture or removal of the Church; and since world conditions indicate we're living on the threshold of that momentous event...we ought to give our full attention to the lessons taught in these parables. Do I hear an "Amen?"

1. A prohibition against date-setting – v. 36

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Let's do something to help us get the big picture of this passage. Let's string together the main points in these verses. I've put them on the screen so you can read them out loud with me:

- **v.36 - “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”**
- **v.42 - “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.**
- **v.44 - So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**
- **v.50 - The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.**

So what do you think Jesus is telling us in these verses? Daah! He said, **no one knows about the day or the hour / you do not know on what day your Lord will come / the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him / and the master will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. Therefore,** or because this is true, those who believe Christ’s Word must **keep watch / be ready /** and pursue a life that is both **faithful and wise.** So that’s a quick fly over of the main points in this section. The rest of what Jesus said illustrates and supports these points by parables or by parabolic comparison. The section begins with what I’ve called *a prohibition against date-setting.*

I’m sure the disciples wished Jesus would have just given them a date. I mean, if we knew the day of His return, we could mark it on our calendars. If we knew **the hour,** we could set an alarm clock. Just like believers today, the disciples were curious to know **when this will happen.** We wish we knew how much time we have. We wish we knew how concerned we should be. We wonder how to plan?

I’ve wrestled with **v.36** like some of you have. I’ve asked the question... *“Since Jesus is God and God is omniscient or all knowing, how can He not know something as important as the day and hour of His return?”* We wish some other Bible verse would settle the matter but **Mk. 13:32** echoes the factuality of **Matt. 24:26.** There Mark writes, **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** The fact that only the Father knows is further supported by what Jesus said in **Acts 1:7 - He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.**

The conclusion I’ve come to is simply this...only God the Father knows the day and the hour when Jesus will return...period...end of discussion. Now wasn’t that easy? The best solution is to take Jesus at His Word. But an explanation for the curious mind may emerge from what the Bible teaches about the humanity of Jesus and His relation to God the Father during His time on earth. By His incarnation, Jesus became the Son of Man and the Servant of God. Being fully human, He voluntarily limited the display of His divine attributes. That Jesus was fully human and like us is illustrated by **Lk. 2:40** which says, **And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.** Jesus grew both physically and intellectually. **Heb. 5:8** adds this...**Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what he suffered.** Now there’s an air of mystery about this, but Jesus **grew** (like other children) and Jesus **learned** just as we ought to. Along with the fact that Jesus is fully man, His life demonstrates complete submission to God the Father. For example, in **Jn.14:10b** Jesus said, **The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.** From His example of submission to God the Father, we’re shown how we should live in submission to His Spirit who lives in us.

So I’m perfectly OK with the fact that even Jesus, as the Son of Man, did not know the day or the hour. So what did Jesus say about date-setting? In the immortal words of Tow-Mater in the Disney movie Cars...He says, *“to not to!”* But that hasn’t stopped many would be date setters. Baptist pastor William Miller, preached that Christ would return in 1843.

Yet when 1843 came and went, he adjusted his calculations and said 1844 was “*the true year.*” With his followers dressed in white and waiting on their rooftops, this date became known as the “*Great Disappointment.*” Another date-setter was Charles Taze Russell, founder of the Jehovah’s Witness Movement. Among the earlier dates he proposed, Russell predicted Christ would return in 1874 / 1878 / 1881 / and 1910. When those dates didn’t pan out, he said 1914 was “*the definitive year.*” Despite these fails, the Jehovah’s Witnesses officially predicted Christ would return in 1918 / 1925 / 1941 / 1975 / and 1994. Their track record is absolutely perfect... they’ve been wrong every time!

More recent date setters include Dr, Jack Van Impe. After hinting at other earlier dates, Jack specifically said 1996 looked like the year. His latest prediction is that 2018 will be the year of the Second Coming which means the rapture will occur 7 yrs. earlier, around 2011. OK, maybe not!

These date-setters are joined by Edgar Whisenant who wrote the book...[88 reasons the Rapture is in 1988](#). Not surprisingly, the date was revised to 1989. Other date-setters include J.R. Church / Harold Camping / Peter Ruckman / and Stuart Cobbs. These men share at least four things in common...

#1. - each man had a following / #2 - each man made a bunch of money selling books / #3 - with respect to date setting, each man disobeyed Christ’s command to not to. / #4 Each date was wrong.

There are at least four detrimental consequences to setting dates for the Lord’s return:

1. *It Turns Believers From Faith to Sight* - Instead of living a life pleasing to God out of love for what He has done for us and because we believe His Word, date-setting leads people to trust in visible signs. In this mindset there is little living by faith and little incentive to "get right with the Lord" until the proposed date gets real close. It’s sort of like “the Apr.15 effect.” Just before the date, the Church would be as busy as H & r Block!
2. *It Turns Believers From Hope to Disappointment* - Failures on the part of date-setters causes some to become doubtful and disappointed. What they were told to expect built them up for a huge event. Consequently they become disillusioned when it fails to come to pass.
3. *It Causes God's Word to Be Mocked And Ridiculed* - Unbelievers have a field day reminding believers of the failure of their "prophecies." They mock and ridicule believers and their Bible.
4. *It Distracts Believers From What They Should Be Doing* - Instead of inventing elaborate schemes for predicting the time of the rapture, believers should spend their time doing what the Bible clearly tells us to do: pray / study doctrine / seek lost souls / and help the needy.

It’s always best to take Jesus at His Word. He prohibits date-setting. He said, **No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** Just one further word...even though Jesus prophesied certain conditions and signs that would precede His return...even those who witness those signs will not know the exact day or hour.

2. A parabolic comparison – vs. 37-42

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

vs. 37-42 isn't exactly a parable. It's more like a parabolic comparison or an illustration from the past. Here Jesus reminds his readers of Noah and the Flood of water that wiped out the entire human race with Noah and his family the only survivors. Though efforts are made to compare the days of Noah with our times and some of these comparisons are valid...the essential point of the comparison is stated in **vs. 37** and **39**. **As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man...they** (that is unbelievers who rejected the warnings of Noah) **knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.** So how was it in the days of Noah? Jesus said, **before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...**In other words, they were doing life as usual completely oblivious to the danger. It's not necessary to interpret **eating and drinking** to infer gluttony and drunkenness, although these sins may have been prevalent in that generation as they are in ours. Nor is it necessary to take **marrying and giving in marriage** to mean lawless marriage, divorce and remarriage...although that also may have been true. The point is simply this...they were clueless right up to the day when Noah and his family climbed into the ark and it started to rain. In **v.39** Jesus said, **they knew nothing about what would happen...**They knew nothing even though Noah had been preaching for 100 yrs. They ignored his warnings and were deliberately ignorant.

Comparing their ignorance to the generation alive at the time of the Tribulation, Jesus said, **Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.** Once again, people alive at this future time will be going about their work and business as usual. A popular Christian song that came out in 1969 was entitled, I wish we'd all been ready. The song is confusing because it applies these verses to the rapture. But Jesus wasn't talking about the rapture. The context of **Matt. 24, 25** is the Second Coming! Like the flood, those **taken** away are not believers. They are unbelievers **taken away** to judgment. This **taking away** was prophesied earlier in **Matt. 13:41 - The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** Once again, the section ends by stating the point of this parabolic comparison... **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."**

Even though this isn't our mail, this same call to **keep watch** or remain vigilant has application for every believer. In a rapture context, **I Thess. 5:6** says - **let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.** As citizens of heaven, we should never become so occupied with earthly pursuits and business as usual that we forget who we are and where our true home is. God gave us His Word so we might know what time it is / what He has planned for the future / and what things are most important to Him right now. The next parable logically follows.

3. A parable about being ready – vs. 43, 44

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The parable here is a bit facetious because no home-owner ever knows when a thief is coming. We never heard of a thief who sent notification or advance warning of his intentions. He plans his break under the cover of darkness at a time when he's least expected. But...**if** by some unusual means a home-owner knew a thief was coming to his house that night...he would have kept watch and would have prevented the burglary. That makes sense doesn't it? He would have made sure his wife stayed awake and alert. He would have kept their not so friendly pit bull nearby. He would have armed himself with a flashlight and perhaps a weapon. The point is...he would have been ready. He would have prepared himself for the burglar. Then comes the point... **So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**

Unlike the home-owner, we believe Jesus who says we can't know the time when Christ will return for us. This certainly doesn't mean Jesus is a thief...but He will come the way a thief comes. This being the case, we must remain in a state of readiness. As someone has wisely said, *"We should make our plans as though the Lord's coming will be delayed but live as though He could return at any moment."* Though this teaching applies primarily to those who find themselves in the Tribulation, it has meaning for all of us. Jesus asks us to stay awake, be watchful and vigilant.

4. A parable about being faithful and wise – vs. 45-51

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the parables, people are often compared to servants or sons because God is the Master and Father over us all. Slaves and sons are natural terms that reflect this relationship between God and man. The idea behind Christ's parables is that human beings have an equal opportunity to respond, believe and choose to live for God or not. Some do, and some don't. While there is only one servant in this parable, there are two options of paths this servant might choose.

The parable illustrates the fact that God entrusts responsibilities to each and every human being. In this instance, the servant was responsible to oversee his master's other servants and make sure they were fed at the proper time. His dual role involved leadership and service. He is **faithful and wise** if he follows his master's instructions and does what his master trusts him to do. He's unfaithful and stupid if he doesn't. Apparently the master isn't on site or looking over his shoulder, because **v.46** says, **It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns**. The servant's faithfulness and wisdom will be rewarded with increased or ascending responsibility. **v.47** says, **I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions**. What an honor it would be to be trusted to such a degree that the master puts him in charge of everything he owns.

A different scenario is introduced in **v.48**. This same servant chooses a different path. Rather than being faithful and wise, this servant chooses a path of wickedness. His attitude toward the responsibilities entrusted to him begins to change when he realizes his master's return is delayed. Defying his master's wishes, he mistreats the servants under him. Instead of remembering that he is nothing more than a servant, his position goes to his head. He becomes selfish and hedonistic. He carouses with drunkards. Though he may have once been faithful and wise, he now shirks his responsibilities and takes advantage of his master's goodness. He becomes unfaithful and worthless.

But a day of reckoning came for him as it will for each of us. **v. 50** says, **The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of**. Once again, Jesus said, **No one knows about that day or hour**. God the Father is the only One who knows the date of His Son's return. Yet thinking he has all the time in the world to give attention to his master's business and get his act together...this wicked servant is caught unawares and unprepared. His punishment is severe and ultimate. His place is not with the righteous, but with the hypocrites!

Commenting on this passage, William Barclay relates the following fable...

“There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, ‘I will tell them that there is no God.’ Satan responded, ‘That will not delude many, for they know there is a God.’ The second said, ‘I will tell men that there is no hell.’ And Satan answered, ‘You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin.’ The third said, ‘I will tell men that there is no hurry.’ ‘Go,’ said Satan, and you will ruin men by the thousands. The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time.”

There are at least two things none of us can be sure of. First, we can't be sure we'll survive this day much less tomorrow. **Jas. 4:14 - Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.** Though we can't be sure about tomorrow we can be sure we will stand before the Lord someday. Death isn't the end for anyone. **Heb. 9:27 - Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...** This being the case, we should seek the Lord and seek to please Him by the way we live out our days.

The second thing none of us can know is the day or hour of Christ's return. Jesus said that. It's the main point in these verses. Whether we die before Jesus comes or whether He returns at an unexpected time, the opportunity to love Him and to live by faith and obedience will have ended. So how will it be for you? Will you be found like that wise and faithful servant or will He find you playing the part of that foolish and unfaithful servant. Once again, since no one but God the Father knows the day and hour of Christ's return, Jesus urges us to make sure we are ready to meet Him everyday. **II Pet. 3:14 - So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.**

We know the responsibilities God has entrusted to each of us, but let me keep it real simple. If you belong to Jesus, He instructs us to *wait, watch and witness*. Our *waiting* isn't to be idle like a guy waiting at a bus stop or a patient waiting in a doctor's office. Our waiting is to be intentional, active and obedient. The faithful way the Thessalonian believers proclaimed the Gospel and turned from idols to serve the Lord was widely known. This how they waited for Jesus. **I Thess. 1:8-10**

Our *watching* isn't to be sky gazing or becoming all wrapped up in prophetic speculation and date-setting. Our watchfulness is to be a vigilance informed by the Word of God. It's a watchfulness that prompts us to be ready at all times. We're not to wonder *if* Jesus is coming, we're to keep watch *since* we know Jesus is coming. **Lk. 21:36 - “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”**

Finally, Christ has commissioned us to be His *witnesses*. This is where so many Christians fall down. Here's a Barna statistic I read last week. Barna says 82% of people polled said they would come to church if invited by a friend. Now I'm thinking a whole bunch of that 82% are telling the pollster what they think he wants to hear and another bunch are lying. So, what if the actual percentage is 50% or even as low as 25%? What if half or one quarter of those we invite came? That would be wonderful! But here's the accompanying statistic that should trouble us all...Barna says only 2% of church members polled ever invite a friend to church. I can't verify those statistics, but if the ratio is anything like this, it's terrible! How can we say we're ready to meet the Lord with so little concern for the lost? How can we say we're walking as Jesus walked and obeying His command to seek the lost and make disciples with hard facts like that staring us in the face? Barna didn't ask how many Christians preach on street corners or boldly witness for Christ...he simply asked, how many Christians invite an unsaved friend to church. That's form of witnessing is about as low-key as it gets.

So, give consideration to what Jesus said here. He calls us to actively wait, to attentively watch and to aggressively witness. Though we believe the time is short...the date is known only by the Father.