



THE RETURN OF THE KING



Part 1 – Of That Day & Hour No One Knows

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- When you think of the Second Coming of Christ, what do you typically think of? Are you giddy in anticipation, or fearful of the troubling times to come?
- 'No one knows the day or hour' is a well-known verse regarding the end times. How has it affected how you view prophecy, the end times, and the Second Coming?

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

As the church approaches Christmas this year, we want to take a closer look at the Second Coming of Christ. While we tend to focus on the First Coming of Christ during this time, the church would do well to remember that Jesus' death and resurrection are but the first part of a two-part story. The Messiah will return to usher in the end of history and establish an eternal kingdom in a new heaven and new earth. Jesus' time here on earth 2000 years ago is but a taste of His full glory and majesty which is to be revealed.

Matthew 24 : 36 – 44¹

³⁶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

1. Two Ditches

When discussing the Second Coming of Christ, the church tends to make one of two common mistakes.

1. They develop a foolish fascination with Christ’s return

Some Christians obsess over the finer details of the Second Coming: the nature of the return, the timing of the return, or the surrounding elements of the return. Although these questions are important (some of which are addressed in the Bible), an over emphasis on these things can lead to obsession and superstition. Think about Christians who are trying to interpret the significance of blood moons or obsessively reading a series of fictional books about the seven-year tribulation.

2. They practically ignore the impending reality of Christ’s return

On the flip side, deemphasizing the Second Coming leads to a lack of urgency for the church. At any moment Jesus could split the sky open coming forth in judgement, yet most Christians live their lives as though this reality is far off in the distance. The Second Coming should affect how we live our lives for God.

2. The Natural Question

As Christians, we are called to live watchful and ready lives in trust that Jesus is returning for His Bride, the church.

The starting point for a conversation about the Second Coming is a naturally occurring question considering the mystery surrounding this glorious event: when will it happen?

In Matthew 24, Jesus says, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows...”

Christians, based on which of the two ditches they fall into, tend to interpret Jesus’ words in one of two ways.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 24:36–44.

- A. The Bible provides so many clues and hints as to the nature of the Second Coming that we should spend enormous time and energy studying prophecy. Failing to figure out exactly when Jesus will be back means we are unfaithful.
- B. Jesus said we can't know, so why bother investigating prophecy about the Second Coming at all? We should simply have faith and preach the Gospel as the Great Commission commands.

As you might expect, there is a proper middle ground that avoids these two ditches when approaching the question of 'when.'

It is certainly true that Jesus says no one knows the day or hour. In fact, He claims not even the angels, nor the Son (aka Himself), know this appointed time: only the Father. As such, we should not seek to know more than has been revealed. There is an inherent unknowability regarding certain aspects of the end of times, particularly the specific timing of the return. John Calvin puts it like this:

"It would be... proof of excessive pride and wicked covetousness, to desire that we who creep on the earth should know more than is permitted to the *angels* in heaven."

However, this isn't permission to remain ignorant on biblical prophecy regarding the Second Coming. Jesus' statement regarding the day and hour speaks to a specific date, but not the general season. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus does say that the church, if they are paying attention, will be able to sense the general timing of His coming. Jesus provides the Parable of the Fig Tree in which He says this:

Matthew 24 : 32 - 33²

³² Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!

There are certain signs that will precede the Second Coming of Christ that Christians should be looking for. This isn't date-setting, but rather a prudent awareness that as certain things come to pass, if you should find yourself living in the generation of the Lord's return, the return is that much closer. Hebrews illuminates the purpose of knowing certain things about the end times:

Hebrews 10 : 24 - 25

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

As Christians, Jesus has commanded us to know what we *can* know about the Second Coming (which is more than you might think), but not everything. God's revelation to us regarding future events is intended to give us peace and comfort in anticipation of a

² The Holy Bible: New King James Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Matthew 24:32-33.

great trouble that is to befall the world. It is also included in the scriptures to reveal even more about the majesty of Jesus.

At the same time, God has also *concealed* great details that are only for the Father to know, and we are to leave these alone and not chase what is inherently unknowable. There is so much that is unclear, and we shouldn't be intimidated by this. The fact that the 'when' of Christ's return is hidden is meant to produce a certain kind of lifestyle in His followers.

3. Be Aware

We could say that the church is called by Christ to be aware or to be awake. Jesus invokes the time of Noah as an analog for the end times. "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." This is to say that the season of the Second Coming will be similar to the time of Noah. In doing so, Jesus conveys three things about being aware:

1. Judgement is Coming

The story of Noah is a story of judgement upon the earth. The Second Coming centers around the final judgement of Christ upon the earth. He will gather His own and punish the wicked. Not everyone will enter Heaven on the last Day. Choosing sin over God will leave you at the mercy of God's judging.

2. Life can lull us to sleep

Life can be constant and nonstop, full of activity. You can easily fall into the motions: wake up, eat, feed the kids, go to work, pick up the kids, eat, sleep. This repetition tricks us into thinking life will go on as it always has, but Jesus tells us that the Second Coming will happen abruptly and change everything. In Noah's time, people carried on in the normal flow of life right up until the flood hit. Such it will be for many when Christ returns. Life is normal until its not. Judgement is long-coming, but hits in a flash.

3. We are tempted to fall asleep

In the days of Noah, there was an ark to provide refuge from the flood. In the days of the Second Coming, the only refuge is a saving faith in Christ because of what He has done on the Cross. Jesus has given us the way to eternal life, but we have to wake up. We need to acknowledge our sin, repent, and follow Jesus. Once we've done this, we need to help prepare the world for the coming judgement by inviting the lost to seek the Savior. Hebrews tells us to do this all the more fervently as we see the Day approaching.

4. Be Ready

Christ calls us to a heightened awareness through another illustration in addition to the Parable of the Fig Tree. "But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Notice how Jesus once again claims that the church can know the general season of His return (but not the specific date: the 'hour you do not expect'). We are to be like the master watching for the thief even though we can't know exactly when the thief will appear. It's these points of ignorance regarding of the Second Coming that should push us to be ready and prepared. The fact that we can't know precisely when Christ is returning shouldn't lead to apathy, but diligence.

If you don't know when something is going to happen, but know it's a certainty, you must live your life at all times as though it *is* going to happen. Jonathan Edwards said it this way:

"Resolved: Never to do anything, which I would be afraid to do if I expected it would not be more than an hour before I would hear the last trump sound."

Being ready means, first, having a saving relationship with the King of Kings. Second, it means proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the Earth in anticipation of the Second Coming. Third, it means if find yourself living in the generation of the Lord's return, you need to be aware of why the things happening around you are happening. The world will seem as though it has fallen into complete chaos. However, by studying the scriptures and knowing what accompanies the general season of Jesus' return, the church can have assurance that God is still in control. Further, the Second Coming, especially as it approaches, should be a call to all Christians to seek the lost all the more diligently to help them prepare for what's ahead.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Am I trusting in Jesus for my salvation? As the Day of the Lord's return approaches, do I have assurance I will be saved from God's judgment?
- Am I faithfully following Jesus? If the Second Coming could be right around the corner, is it affecting the way I live my life?
- Am I being a responsible student of scripture? If God has chosen to reveal certain things about the end of times, am I aware of what He is saying? How is study of the Second Coming meant to affect our faith in Christ?