

November 10, 2019

**“Preparing for Jesus’ Return”**  
Matthew 24:32-51

FCF: Desire to be prepared

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus has been “clear” on His return.  
(magnet) And He wants us to be ready.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Few of us like going into major events unprepared. For example, as president, Harry Truman’s partnership with Winston Churchill at the end of WW2 and the beginning of the Cold War was truly significant. That said, as vice president, Truman had been locked out of President Roosevelt’s inner circle. So when Roosevelt died, Truman had little foreign policy experience and was not ready to lead. And he knew it. He told a friend, *“I’m not big enough for this job.”*

We all share the desire to be ready. That’s why we study for exams, prepare for meetings, and train for competition. We want to be prepared. It’s an understandable and commendable impulse. And, as we see in our text, one that needs to be purposed for the Day of Jesus’ return.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 24:32-51](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Jesus has been clear on His return. This is the Olivet Discourse, His teaching from the Mount of Olives during “Holy Week.” It was set in motion by His prediction of the temple’s fall. That prompted understandable concern and questions from His disciples. Jesus then answers those questions and His answer spans Matthew 24-25. Jesus has been clear on His return.

But His answer can stretch our assumptions and can raise yet even more questions. We are on a “need to know basis” here. A “need to know basis” - as a few of you know - is used to describe the restriction of sensitive data. Under such restrictions, even if you have all the needed security clearance to access all kinds of other information, unless you have a specific “need to know,” unless it’s necessary for you to carry out your official duties, you don’t have access.

Here’s an example - D-Day, the Allied invasion of Europe in June 1944. Thousands of military personnel were involved in planning the invasion but just a small number knew the entire scope of the operation. The rest were told only what was needed for their specific part.

There are aspects of Jesus’ return that is on a “need to know basis.” Jesus has been clear on His return, telling us all we need to know. He has been clear. And He wants us to be ready.

Our text shows us this. And Jesus has three priorities for us. First, the certainty of these events. Second, the uncertainty of the timing. And, third, the necessity of the preparations.

**I. THE CERTAINTY OF THESE EVENTS**

First, the certainty of these events. Will this really happen? ([READ Matthew 24:32-35](#))

*A) The Things to Come*

Clearly, we learn something of the certainty of the things to come. You can’t miss this.

## 1. Near future

In the near future, “this generation” (those living at the time) would see “these things” (meaning the fall of the temple and all that would lead up to it). With that, there would be signs they could see - just as surely as a fig tree serves as something of a barometer for the coming of summer.

2. Distant future

And, as we’ve seen in recent weeks, those near future events (horrendous as they were) would serve as but previews and precursors of distant future events - the ultimate judgment to come.

*B) The Authority of Jesus’ Words*

So there is a certainty to the things to come. But also a certainty to Jesus’ words.

1. Eternal words

Did you hear the authority? The cosmos was created. And He is the creator of the cosmos.

2. Unique words

His are eternal words. And they are unique words as well. For no one had spoken like this. All the prophets of old had said, “Thus says the Lord” whereas Jesus just said it. And meant it.

So we learn of the certainty of both the events to come and of Jesus’ very words.

*Illustration:*

Speaking of the cosmos, consider the status of planets. Pluto was demoted. How does that happen? To qualify as a planet, a heavenly body must ([READ quote](#)) “orbit the sun, be large enough to assume a round shape, and clear the neighborhood around its orbit.” It’s the third of those that struck out Pluto. But who says? The International Astronomical Union. They have the credentials to demote poor old Pluto to the status of a dwarf planet. So what can you say?

*Application:*

Back to the creator of the cosmos. Lest we wonder if Jesus has the authority to speak on the unfolding of the future, of what is ultimately to come, He has made it clear He most certainly does. And we need to hear that, to let that settle in that we might heed Him - that we might heed Him not just with His assurances and promises but with His foretellings and warnings as well.

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## **II. THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIMING**

Will this happen? When will it happen? That takes us from the certainty of these events to the uncertainty of the timing. We don’t want to confuse the two ([READ Matthew 24:36-41](#)).

*A) Sudden Appearing*

His appearing will be sudden. We won’t see it coming and it will take us all by surprise.

1. Unexpected

It will be unexpected. That’s the point of the allusion to Noah’s day and the laborers on the farm.

2. All normal

Everything will be completely normal until that moment. One will be taken and the other left. And unlike some mistaken teachings, it will be good to be “left behind” and not taken away.

### B) *Hidden Schedule*

His appearing will be sudden. And it is all according to a veiled and hidden schedule.

#### 1. From us

Hidden from us. We cannot know it. And we should not try to know it. Jesus is clear on that.

#### 2. From Jesus

It is hidden from us. And hidden from Him. Now think with me. As God, Jesus is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. He possesses all those powers but chose to suppress them at most points in His ministry. Which really fits the pattern of the humiliation of the incarnation. Truly, it is a wonder to hear of Jesus professing His ignorance. This is such humility displayed here.

We learn of the uncertainty of the timing - Jesus' sure and sudden appearing but also the hidden nature of the schedule and His humility. These are some astonishing things to consider.

#### *Illustration:*

Tim Russert served for years with NBC News as the Washington bureau chief and as the moderator on *Meet the Press*. He once had a private audience with the pope ([READ quote](#)):

I'll never forget it. I was there to convince His Holiness it was in his interest to appear on the *Today* show. But my thoughts soon turned away from NBC's ratings toward the idea of salvation. As I stood there with the Vicar of Christ, I simply blurted, "Bless me, Father!" He put his arm around my shoulders and whispered, "You are the one called Timothy, the man from NBC?" I said, "Yes, yes, that's true." "They tell me you're a very important man." Taken aback, I said, "Your Holiness, there are only two of us in this room, and I am most certainly a distant second." He looked at me and said, "Right."

#### *Application:*

Now, by my mentioning this, don't get confused on the true status of the pope as a mortal man. The point is that it's good to know your place. Time and again in the New Testament, Jesus is held up as our example and model. We are commanded to follow Him as disciples. We are to serve as He served, love as He loved, be prepared to suffer as He suffered. Here we are admonished to trust the Father's plan just as we see Jesus doing. To trust and rest in His timing.

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### **III. THE NECESSITY OF THE PREPARATIONS**

Which brings us to the third point, the necessity of the preparations. Will this really happen? When will it be? And how can we be ready? Jesus answers that with two parables.

#### A) *The Master and the Thief*

The first is a story of the master of a house and a thief ([READ Matthew 24:42-44](#)).

##### 1. Can't predict it

You can't predict when the thief will come. And just so, Jesus' coming will be a surprise.

##### 2. So stay awake

It will be a surprise so we need to stay awake, keep watch, and be on alert. That's the first story.

#### B) *The Servants and the Master*

The second story is that of two servants and their master ([READ Matthew 24:45-51](#)).

1. Danger of presumption

The theme of the second parable is like the first. But the point here is the danger of presumption. From the wicked servant's perspective, the master is delayed. And so he does as he pleases.

2. So be ready

But the faithful and wise servant knows to be ready, to be prepared. What, after all, does their master expect? Not to find his servants passively waiting at the door but busy about their tasks.

So from these two parables we learn of the absolute necessity of the preparations.

*Illustration:*

Think of when a hurricane is predicted to make landfall. Weather folks are obsessed with "When will it be?" But the better question is "Are we ready?" Remember Hurricane Katrina? For decades, people knew that New Orleans was vulnerable to a direct hit from a big storm. The city and its residents had years to prepare, but when Katrina struck, no one was ready. Over a thousand died, hundreds of thousands lost their homes, and the city lost most of its population.

*Application:*

They weren't ready. Are we? What would it mean to be ready, to stay awake? It's said that Martin Luther was once asked what he would do today if he knew the Lord was returning tomorrow. Luther said he would plant a tree. Which at first sounds so casual, so disengaged. But his point seems to have been that to be prepared does not really demand the spectacular. Nor does it mean constantly living at high alert. It means faithfulness in the ordinary, trusting in the daily, contentment in your calling - all seasoned with a profound hope and expectancy.

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**CONCLUSION:**

Let's come back to the "need to know basis." We have not been left in the dark, cheated out of vital information. There is more mercy than we realize when God chooses not to tell us everything. He tells us enough. That said, there are times it may not feel like it's enough.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom recalls a time when, as a young girl, she was returning home on the train with her father after going with him to get parts for his watch-making business. Because of words she had overheard, she asked him to explain how children are conceived. Her father stood up and took out the suitcase he had brought ([READ quote](#)):

"Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?" he said. I stood up and tugged at it. It was crammed with the watches and spare parts he had purchased that morning. "It's too heavy," I said. "Yes," he said. "And it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It's the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you."

Like a wise father, God knows when certain knowledge is too heavy for us. Jesus is not being unkind or deceptive when He does not give us the full explanation. He is carrying our burdens.

Ah, my friends, we should rejoice in what we have, in what's been given - rejoice, be attentive and at peace. For Jesus has been clear on His return. And He wants us to be ready.

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