

Session 6

January 5, 2025

LOOKING FORWARD WITH EXPECTATION

Matthew 24:32-44

The good news of the gospel is “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). But the good news gets even better! Not only did Christ do those things, but He is coming back! The Second Coming of Christ is as certain as the first coming. For the saved, the appearance of Christ will be a great and marvelous transition into eternal glorification. For those who are lost, it will be a horrific and terrible transition into eternal damnation. But in every case, the appearance of Christ should be no surprise...for the Lord Himself prophesied His return. In the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus gave specific truths to His disciples regarding the End Times. Three admonitions about His return are given in this week’s passage.

Be watchful (vv. 32-35). It was the disciples’ own awe and wonder at the beauty of the holy city that prompted Jesus’ End Times discourse. In the final days of Jesus’ life, it had been their habit to visit the temple early in the day, then retreat to the shade of the olive trees outside the city as the day warmed. As they departed from the temple, the Bible tells us the disciples paused and pointed out to Jesus the splendor of the magnificent city. Taking it from there, and no doubt with sadness (see Matt 23:37ff), Jesus prophesied the fate of God’s holy city, His chosen people, and their unfortunate religion. Like everyone since, the disciples wanted to know exactly when these events would happen. While that question was never answered explicitly, Jesus told them to “watch for the signs.” First, His appearance was *signaled*. Here, as so often in His teaching, Jesus again turned to nature to help illustrate His point. No doubt the fig trees scattered among the olive trees caught His eye. As the sprouting of the fig leaves was an indicator that summer was arriving (v. 32), so the coming to pass of the events described in the previous verses indicated that Christ’s appearance was quite near... “even at the door!” (v. 32). Second, His appearance was *certain*. How certain? Jesus stated that His return was as rock-solid as the very word of God (v. 35). For reflection: *There is much debate surrounding the meaning of “this generation” in verse 34. Remember: Bible prophecy is often given in “now” and “then” terms. Smaller, closer events foretell the much bigger events to be fulfilled in the future. The smaller, closer event in this case was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. But much of this discourse looked beyond that event to the future events of the Great Tribulation that will signal His return.*

Be warned (vv. 36-41). Two specific truths are given in these verses. First, the exact day and hour of Christ’s return remain a mystery. Daniel 9 gave a general timetable (that Jesus referenced back in vv.15-16), but as to the exact time, only the Father knows (although I feel certain Christ knows now!). Second, while the signs will be abundant and the general timeframe helps, the appearance of Christ will catch most people by surprise. Jesus offered both an historical example and more present examples to illustrate His point. The example of Noah is particularly appropriate. For over a hundred years, people saw Noah building the ark. All of this time, he was proclaiming God’s coming judgement (see 2 Pet 2:5). Yet, the people soon ignored him and went about their lives...until the rain started falling! And by then, it was too late (v. 38). The “one-taken-and-one-left” examples (vv. 40-41) illustrate the suddenness of both Christ’s appearance

and their separation for judgement. For reflection: *Does the fact that Jesus did not know the time of His Second Coming trouble you? Does it in some way contradict His omniscience? How do you explain it?*

Be prepared (vv. 42-44). The Lord's third admonition was also an encouragement. We don't know when He will return...but we *do* know that it doesn't really matter as long as we are ready for it! The example of the homeowner being robbed is not meant to imply that Christ's coming is a bad thing. Rather, it indicates the need to be meticulous in our preparation and vigilant in our expectation. How disappointing it would be for our Lord to return and find us derelict in our duties! For reflection: *If a true believer can never lose his or her salvation, then why would the Lord warn us to be ready for His return? What difference would it make?*