

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 24 (PART 6)

Matthew 24:36-41 - Concerning Timing Of Christ's return

Key point from this chapter - No one other than the Father knows the timing of Christ's return. This includes the angels, your favorite end times preacher, and even Jesus himself.

The return of Christ will be comparable to the story of Noah and the great flood (found in Genesis 6-8). If you remember that story, the entire world was ignorant and skeptical concerning God's warning of the flood. The one exception to this was Noah and his family. Although Scripture indicates that Noah did his best to warn and proclaim this news (2 Peter 2:5), humanity ignored his words and went on with life as usual.

With this in view, Jesus describes a similar atmosphere in the world before his coming.

The language of "one taken, one left" is not about the non-biblical secret rapture, but rather more likely about who is saved and who is not - considering the immediate context of the Noah story. Men will be farming, women will be grinding wheat - normal activities - but one will be judged and the other saved as Christ's return hits the world like a flood.

Support for this view is found in the verses that directly preceded this section.

Matthew 24:39 - and they did not understand until the flood came and **took** them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

The point is this: life will continue on with normal tasks and days. But some on the earth, as they go about their lives also are keenly aware that there is a great event on the horizon, when salvation and judgment will be seen by all the earth.

Bible Study Note: this is a good example of where a Bible reader's beliefs can be read-into the text rather than allowing for our beliefs to be gained *from* the text. If you already believe in a pre-tribulation secret and sudden rapture, this verse is going to be interpreted a certain way. However, if you approach the Bible asking "God, teach me what this says and what this means", you're likely to be open to letting the full context and teaching of Scripture guide your beliefs. The same is true for the next section. Let's read on.

Matthew 24:42-44 - Thief In The Night

It's always helpful to ask what the "therefore" is there for. This section is directly connected to the previous teaching of Jesus about being on the alert and not letting his return catch you by surprise. Jesus' goal is for his disciples to not be surprised like a home being broken into at night. He wants us to be like homeowners, who when word reaches us that there is a string of burglaries in the

neighborhood, take measures to ensure our home is not the next victim (see Kevin McCallister in the original Home Alone movie.).

This language of a "thief in the night" will be repeated by Jesus' followers later in the New Testament. So understanding how Jesus originally uses the phrase is really important.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 - Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come **just like a thief in the night**. 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

2 Peter 3:9-15 (NLT) - The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 **But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief**. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

11 Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, 12 looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. 13 But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. 14 And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. 15 And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved.

Revelation 3:1-3 - "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, **I will come like a thief**, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Thieves are successful when they can keep their arrivals secretive and hidden. If you are daydreaming, preoccupied, have your guard down, distracted or sleeping, thieves have a greater likelihood of robbing you - whether sneaking on to your property or snatching your purse.

So, this is not a parable to support a sudden, secret rapture. This is a parable to illustrate the importance of watching and being on the alert. Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be surprised by this coming - in other words for those disciples watching and alert, it should not be like a thief in the night. Remember, the Bible is where we get our beliefs, not where we find support for what we already believe.

That being said, I want to take a moment and expose you to some of the interpretations of this section from those who hold a "secret rapture" (aka a secret and sudden coming of Christ which

takes the church away to heaven and keeps the world in chaos for a time). I am not speaking evil against these men or their character, but I want you to be aware of how this view is communicated:

“The thief-like coming of Christ is His coming for His saints... sudden, unannounced, and unexpected.” - C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, note on 1 Thessalonians 5:2

“The Rapture will occur suddenly, secretly, and without warning, like a thief in the night, catching the world totally by surprise.” - Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm: Why Christians Will Escape All the Tribulation*, p. 69.

“Jesus said He would come like a thief in the night. That means He will come secretly, unexpectedly, & without warning to take His church out of the world.” Hal Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 54.

“The coming of Christ for His saints will be secret, instantaneous, and unexpected. It is this aspect which is described as coming as a thief in the night.” John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 51.

“This coming for the church is never described as visible to the world, but is likened to a thief who comes secretly.” John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, p. 279.

In contrast, there are many scholars who allow Jesus and the full passage to determine their comments:

“The ‘thief in the night’ passage has been regularly misunderstood. Paul’s point is not that Jesus will come secretly, but that he will come unexpectedly.” N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 132.

“The point of the comparison with a thief is that no one knows when he will come, not that he will come invisibly.” D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, p. 507

“The coming of Jesus will be as obvious and public as lightning, but it will come with the suddenness of a thief.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the NT, p. 932.

“It is a misunderstanding to suppose that ‘thief in the night’ implies a secret coming. The emphasis is on the unexpected nature of the event.” Leon Morris, *1st & 2nd Epistles to the Thessalonians*, p. 155.

“‘Like a thief in the night’ does not mean that Christ’s coming is secret, but that it is unexpected. There is nothing in the metaphor itself to suggest invisibility.” George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*, p. 92.

Matthew 24:45-51 - A Good Servant

This final parable of Matthew 24 gives us direction about how to be ready for the coming of the king. Two servants are described, one who is faithful, sensible, and obedient to what their master has commanded and the other servant is evil, selfish, skeptical, angry, and disobedient. Let’s consider some of the qualities of these two:

First, we see a servant who is called faithful. Faithfulness is doing what is right over a long period of time. On good days, bad days, in hard times or in easy times. There is a reliability to this servant.

Second, he is called sensible, which is related to practical wisdom. This servant isn't lead by his emotions or feelings but by a godly wisdom that allows them to be faithful in doing what is right. This points us to the description of this servant being obedient to the master while the master is gone and also when the master returns.

To be faithful and sensible indicates the servant isn't scrambling at the last minute to get the tasks done once he gets word of his master's camel approaching their neighborhood. No, this servant has been faithful and sensible, obedient day in and day out to the tasks that his master left him to attend to. He's not obedient only when the master is watching nor is he waiting till he gets around to it.

And what does the text tell us this servant has been tasked to do while his master is gone? He has been "put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time (v. 45)." He is more than a laborer, he is caring for others. He's feeding the children of his master and ensuring they have what they need, when they need it. He is acting like the master would, were he there, but doesn't ever confuse serving like his master with him being his master.

You want to be ready for the coming of Christ? We do well to follow this servant's example.

But in contrast, we have another servant to learn from. What's the deal with the evil servant beating his fellow slaves and eating and drinking with the drunkard? Sort of a wild turn from "my master isn't coming for a while so I don't need to work!". I think what this is describing is more than just a guy with an anger and drinking problem. This servant has, in his own mind, taken the role of master. Who would have the authority to exact punishment on other servants? The master. Who gets to eat and drink excessively because other people are doing the work for them? The master.

This describes someone who has decided that because the master is taking too long to come back, they will become their own master and base their lives and choices on what they want to do, rather than what their former master has commanded them to do. Rather than serving food to the master's household and fellow servants, he's using what his master has given him for his own selfish desire.

You and I might not go to the extreme of beating other people up, but we shouldn't let the extreme traits of this evil servant minimize the real temptation that it can be to become our own lords.

This conversation is especially important for modern disciples. It has been nearly 2000 years since Jesus' ascension and his return has not yet happened. It might be easy to ease up and not remain sober and vigilant, but this would be a terrible idea. For either Jesus will return in our lifetime or we will die and our next conscious moment will be his return.

You and I must be ready, "for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think he will (24:44)." We don't need to predict when that might be, but be prepared for it. And the way we stay alert, awake and ready is by being good servants to our returning master. He has given us his commands to follow while he is away and we ought to be faithful, sensible, obedient and proactive to serve and care for others, just like our master would.