

³⁶ “No one knows when that day and hour will be, not the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man returns. ³⁸ In fact, in the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark. ³⁹ And they did not realize what was coming until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man returns.

⁴⁰ “At that time two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² So be alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ You also need to be ready for this reason: The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.

Can't Wait

In some ways I can't wait till I'm older (I know I've been saying and thinking that since grade school) The reason I can't wait is because I want to be able to tell long stories about what life was like before the internet, (just like some of you do with electricity or indoor plumbing.) There was even a time before cell phones. Some of you know it as B.C. There was a time before a constant need to be connected and informed. That meant, “You'll have to wait for information. You'll have to visit the library and look in a card file and then search for the book. You didn't get thousands of phone calls or text messages asking for constant updates as to location and arrival.” Even the internet was slow then. Instead of a constant connection we rode around the neighborhood, went to the park, looked for a pile of bikes and that is where we went. We weren't afraid of missing out because we didn't know what we were missing out on, so we did our thing.

If there was something big, we'd make plans to go together. It would be announced well in advance. It was planned and we were ready for it and that's the way Jesus wants us to look forward to his second coming. He doesn't give us a time or a date but he wants us eager and excited just as your children are waiting for Christmas to arrive. But often Christians are just as terrified of Judgment Day as those without hope. But, those who are in Christ have nothing to fear. Jesus could come at any moment, and you won't miss out on anything. Jesus only calls us to *“be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* Are you ready? I can't wait.

At first glance this doesn't sound Christmasy, and no, we haven't jumped back to the End Times readings. The way the church year ends is the same way it begins: the coming of Christ. The seasons of Advent and Christmas deal with real issues of preparation, repentance, and death. Jesus begins at the end of chapter 23, making it clear that Jerusalem's time is up, the end is coming. He weeps over Jerusalem, and at the beginning of chapter 24 we hear of the coming destruction that begins with the last days.

It will be horrific. Jesus compares it to a global catastrophe, a kidnaper, and a thief in the night. All three of these horrible events rolled up into one. Jesus' disciples were terrified and asked him, "*When will these things happen? In order to prepare for an event you have to know when it will happen.* So they asked for a sign. How will we know when this will all take place? Jesus gives them a number of signs, "deception, war, rumors of war, false Christs. Jesus gives them very specific instructions that led Christians to flee Jerusalem before Titus came and leveled it in 70AD. But Jesus doesn't tell them when it will take place. "*No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" (Matthew 24:36).

This is how you are to live your life of faith, be ready for the Son of Man to return at any time. Be ready because it will be just like in Noah's time. "*In the days of 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. This is how it will be at the coming of the Son of man.*" (Matthew 24:38, 39). Jesus sets aside the fact that God destroyed creation because of how wicked they had become. Jesus instead focuses on the ordinary events of life. They weren't doing anything horrible or wrong when the Lord sent the flood. They were carrying on, life as normal. They were making long term plans and commitments, working in fields, or grinding grain. Jesus emphasizes the suddenness with which judgment came. They were not ready for the judgment of God in a worldwide flood.

And it's not as if God hadn't warned them repeatedly. In an era BC. He called to them again and again and again. He said, "*My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years*" (Genesis 6:3). And then the Lord came to Noah and said build an ark. He gave them 120 years, time for Noah to gather food, materials, and preach to a people who wouldn't listen. He gave them the sound of saws, hammers, and the smell of wood. They had it all and yet they continued without a care, because they weren't ready, the door was shut and they were taken away by the water.

That was their time of grace but what about our time of grace?

Just as the people of Noah's time lived in seemingly certain security, living for themselves, caught up with life or buried in their work, just as it was then when they did not care to listen to the hammer, saw, and Noah, so it is even today. It's still the same. Many aren't interested in God's Word or work because they don't believe anything will ever happen. We too can be caught up in this world and become lazy and self-serving (especially this time of year when so much is calling for our attention). I remember asking God, "Please don't come before I get married. Please don't come before I graduate..." I couldn't wait for them. Then there were the times when I'd pray, "God please come before this test." But we can all fall into the trap of not being ready. We too can fall into the mindset of thinking, "Jesus isn't going to come in my lifetime. I can do whatever I want." But God's message to us is "*you must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*" He expects us to be faithful workers while he is away and to be caught unprepared will have disastrous consequences. That's why he doesn't tell us when. So are you ready?

How does one get ready? Or even what does it mean to be ready? The context of these three illustrations Jesus follows them up with the wise and foolish servant (a servant who cares little for those around him), the parable of the ten virgins, (those who fail to have a living faith at the end), the parable of the talents (a parable about using the material gifts in our life of faith), and finally the final judgment (when Jesus will separate the true believers from the hypocrites.) So what does Jesus mean by *“Stay awake... keep watch...and you must be ready”*? Jesus wants us a living and active faith that is fed and feeds others with God’s Word. Jesus expects us to be in his word and take it seriously, to repent and believe his promises.

Jesus wants us to be ready not because he has so much work for us to do. He wants us ready for our own sake, so that when times are uncertain we will not fall from faith. That’s why he calls to us repeatedly, through pastors, teachers, friends, family – church members. He wants us ready because he will come and bring swift judgment on this world. .

Jesus continues *“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.”* He wants us ready because there will be no second chance. This passage is often used as a proof text for the rapture. One will be taken the other left. The language is the same as in the days of Noah. Noah was left. Being left behind in this context is a good thing. Noah's family was "left behind," safe and sound on board the ark. There is no second chance, just as in the days of Noah. You don’t want to miss out and you do not know on what day the Lord will come. *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.”* You aren’t the owner, you don’t know when the thief will come but you can lock the doors, you can prepare for the thief.

Jesus’ disciples needed to hear these words. They needed to hear that life wouldn’t be so easy, but often difficult, they needed to know that God had everything in his control and that life would happen exactly as he had planned even when they couldn’t see how. In just a few short days they would find judgment fall swiftly on Jesus. He’d be handed over to the Romans and put to death. He died on the cross for all the times we didn’t care to get ready, didn’t heed his warnings, or take him seriously. Jesus suffered for our every sin and then he rose to verify the debt has been paid. You’re ready. There isn’t anything left to do but remain in this.

If they do this when the tree is green what will they do when it is dry? That’s the question Jesus asked last week. When the tree is dry Rome would have their way with Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be destroyed and the temple pushed off its mount. They would flee for the hills, hide, and although it must have felt like the end of the world, God was still waiting, it’s not the end. Later on they would be tried, tested, and put to death, but still that was not the end.

Jesus knew these things would happen; he spoke about them ahead of time. And when it happens there will be no avoiding it. Two women will be grinding meal together; one is taken one is left.

Don't worry that you won't notice when he comes. The very stars will fall from heaven. You can't miss it. And don't worry about all the rumors and all the other things that are going on, this is just life. It doesn't mean anything. He will come. You won't need to be told. You won't be taken because you will be left behind with those on the ark. Baptismal fonts are often eight sided – reflecting not only being brought into the 8th day of creation, but also because eight were saved in the ark. And we are connected to Jesus, He is the door. He is the way, the truth, the life and he won't lie to us. He's prepared us.

He's told us, "Don't listen to those who claim to be the Messiah. Don't follow after those who predict the end of the world whoever they are." Nobody knows...He's given us his word and he will not lie to us. Jesus wants us to remember what he has done for us so we can stand ready. He wants us to know that although we don't know the time, we do know the outcome. He will take us to be with him forever. The Lord is coming to claim his church, his bride, to take her to be with him. You are ready. You can look forward to that day like your kids look forward to Christmas. Because of Jesus, the baby who was born to Mary and laid in a manger brings the peace to all nations that Isaiah spoke about. When he comes again he won't say, "Ooo, nice try... you were almost ready." Rather, "Well done good and faithful."

So when the world starts falling apart and when we see the signs of the end, find comfort, because we're that much closer to Christmas. Every day you get older that's one less day that stands between you and eternity. And one day older closer to telling those whipper snappers what life was like BC. Look forward to it. Eagerly wait for it. Pray for it, "Your kingdom come." Amen.