

Alert

JESUS IS COMING BACK.

Matthew 24:36-51

36 “Now concerning that **day and hour** **A** no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except **the Father alone**. **B** 37 As the **days of Noah** **C** were, so the coming of the **Son of Man** **D** will be. 38 For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. 39 They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. 40 Then two men will be in the field; **one will be taken** **E** and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore **be alert**, **F** since you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this: If the **homeowner** **G** had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. 44 This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. 45 Who then is a **faithful and wise servant**, **H** whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes. 47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is **delayed**,’ **I** 49 and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 that servant’s master will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” **J**

Exploring Key Words

- A** The timing of Jesus’s return is unknown. This makes any speculation on our part an exercise in futility.
- B** The unknown timing reveals Jesus’s voluntary limitation of His divine attributes during His incarnation (see Phil 2:6-8).
- C** The timing of Jesus’s second coming is like the arrival of the flood (Gen. 6–7). In Noah’s day, people were going about their business, ignoring the warnings of God’s judgment (Matt. 24:38-39).
- D** Jesus’s favorite way of referring to Himself. Taken from Daniel 7, the term reflects both His full humanity and His full deity.
- E** Jesus’s return will reveal a distinction between people. The illustrations of the men in the field and the women grinding grain (vv. 40-41) means some will experience Christ’s glory, while others will face His judgment.
- F** The best way to be prepared for Jesus’s return is not to speculate about its timing but to live with consistent faithfulness (see 1 Thess. 5:6).
- G** “Master of the house” (ESV). The threat of a robbery would keep the owner of a house alert. Likewise, the assurance of Jesus’s return should keep His people alert and active.
- H** The first servant provides a picture of what faithfulness to God looks like as we wait for Jesus’s return. He was found faithfully “doing his job” (v. 46).
- I** The “wicked servant” used the master’s delay as an excuse to sin. Likewise, many use Jesus’s delay to deny His return, though it really demonstrates grace on His part (2 Pet. 3:9).
- J** Pictures the remorse and anguish of eternity separated from God in hell.



An Unknown Hour (Matt. 24:36-41)

- Earlier in Matthew 24, Jesus's disciples approached Him with questions about signs of His return and the end of the age. He responded with some general signs in verses 4-35.
- However, Jesus explained that no one knows the specific day and hour. Since Jesus voluntarily limited His divine attributes during the Incarnation, even He could not say at that time when He would return.
- Jesus further illustrated this truth by describing two men in a field, where one man will be taken and one left. He also described two women grinding grain. One would be taken and one left.

Be Alert (Matt. 24:42-44)

- Jesus instructed His disciples to remain alert since the day and hour of His return is unknown.
- To illustrate this point, He told a parable about a homeowner who was about to be robbed. If he knew when the intruder would strike, the homeowner would remain alert and prevent the robbery.
- Since His disciples know Jesus is returning, but don't know when, they need to be vigilant and prepared at all times.

Be Faithful (Matt. 24:45-51)

- Jesus shared a second parable that further emphasized the importance of remaining faithful while we await His return.
- In the story, two servants were entrusted with a master's household. One was faithful to continue his tasks. The other refused to prepare for the master's return, assuming he had plenty of time.
- The second man represents those who suddenly realize there is no time left to repent when Christ returns. They will be judged and experience deep remorse.

Summary Statements

Jesus is coming back.

- We can be certain that Jesus will one day return.
- Believers should be ready for Christ's return.
- Believers are to remain faithful while we await Christ's return, stewarding well the resources God has given us.

Memory Verse

Matthew 24:44

Key Doctrine

Last Things

According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Revelation 1:7.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://www.explorethebible.com).

ENGAGE

What is it about the end of the world that most fascinates or frightens you? (PSG, p. 97)

- Many are curious—and perhaps fearful—about the end of the world. Everyone from survivalists to the general skeptic finds the prospect of the end of the world fascinating.
- We read books and watch movies that portray the final days of the planet. Doomsday theories abound. People want to know the when, how, who, and what regarding the end of the age. In that, we are not too far removed from Jesus’s disciples in Matthew’s Gospel.

Bonus: What are some popular books and movies that center on the end of the world?

EXPLORE

AN UNKNOWN HOUR (MATT. 24:36-41)

Bonus: What are some common things people try to predict (such as, the weather)? How accurate are those predictions?

- Matthew 24 begins with Jesus’s disciples marveling over the temple, but Jesus told them that it would be destroyed. His disciples asked when this would happen and what signs would signal His return and the end of the age.
- The disciples’ question implied another question: *When?* The answer was, “no one knows.” Jesus voluntarily limited His divine attributes while on earth. So, this information was reserved for “the Father alone” during that season.
- Philippians 2:6-8 speaks of Jesus limiting Himself of divine attributes during His time on earth. Here, Jesus spoke of limitations on His omniscience. Also, since no one knows the time of Christ’s return, any attempt to speculate and calculate it is a waste of time and energy.
- Jesus used two illustrations to emphasize the sudden and unexpected nature of His return. First, He said it would be like Noah’s flood, when people went about their daily lives unconcerned about the warnings of judgment. Second, He compared it to men in a field and women grinding grain. In each case, one is taken and one is left. One will experience salvation, while the other will experience judgment.

How do the two illustrations given help us better understand the nature of Jesus’s return? (PSG, p. 100)

BE ALERT (MATT. 24:42-44)

If Jesus said it is not possible to know the time of His coming, why do people keep trying to predict the date of His return? (PSG, p. 102)

- Since no one knows when Jesus is coming, His followers should remain “alert.” The verb used here is in the present tense and calls for continual vigilance.

- Jesus used another illustration for the suddenness of His return—the homeowner and a thief. The threat of a robbery would keep any homeowner on the alert and ready for action. The reality of Jesus’s return should be enough to help believers remain vigilant and serving faithfully.
- Verse 44 summarizes the warning to “be ready.” The day is unknown (vv. 42-43). Therefore, constant vigilance and alertness is essential.

What does it mean to be ready for Jesus’s return? (PSG, p. 102)

BE FAITHFUL (MATT. 24:45-51)

Bonus: How do you occupy yourself while waiting? What does that say about you?

- Jesus told a parable that contrasted two possible responses to His return. This parable featured two servants, one who was faithful and one who was wicked.
- The first servant remained faithful during the master’s absence. This servant (symbolizing true believers) was found “doing his job” and was blessed. As Christians, we should not be waiting idly for Christ’s return. We should be engaged in the commission He has given us.
- The second servant reasoned that the master’s delay gave him liberty to live as he pleased. His behavior denied the master’s eventual return. The master judged the wicked slave (symbolizing unbelievers), sending him to a place marked by “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—that is, the agonies of hell and eternal separation from God.

How are you preparing yourself for Jesus’s return? (PSG, p. 104)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss how people—even believers—tend to fall into the trap of the wicked servant.

What are ways that your group can assist each other in staying alert? (PSG, p. 105)

Challenge individuals to think about ways they can focus on faithfulness during a typical day.

How can you enhance those activities in your daily schedule? Are there other actions you can take to stay alert? (PSG, p. 105)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week’s study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 104)

Use cross references to learn more about a word or phrase.

In Matthew 24:51, Jesus used the expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Examine these other passages where Jesus used the phrase: Matthew 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30; and Luke 13:28. Observe the context and setting of these passages. Write a summary of what the expression refers to and why it should be a warning to all.

Ask: ***What are some things you know about hell?*** Allow adults to suggest truths from Scripture. Emphasize that Jesus taught that hell is a real place of real suffering for all of eternity. (Use “Dig Deeper” below to supplement the discussion.) Direct adults to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 104 of the PSG. After a few minutes, discuss the meaning of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Affirm again the suffering that will come with eternal separation from God.

OBJECT LESSON: PHONE NOTIFICATIONS

Invite adults to take out their phones and consider any unaddressed notifications they might see. Ask: ***How much attention do you pay to the notifications on your phone? How quickly do you respond to them?*** Point out that we might choose to ignore a notification—we know it has come and that more will follow.

Explain that the same is true of Jesus’s return. Note that we don’t know when He will come back, but we can be sure that it’s going to happen. Ask: ***From what Jesus said in these verses, how should we prepare for His return?*** Allow adults to suggest responses. Point out that Jesus used words like “ready” and “alert” to describe the active waiting of His people as they look for Him to come back.

Challenge adults to examine their lives and to see if they are waiting actively for Jesus or waiting idly for Him. Encourage them to spend time in prayer this week, asking God to help them be faithful and active as they await His return.

THE REALITY OF HELL

Three words refer to hell in the New Testament: Gehenna (Matt. 5:22,29-30; 10:28; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; Jas. 3:6), Hades (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Rev. 1:18; 20:13-14), and Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4). “Gehenna” refers to the valley on the southwestern side of Jerusalem that was once a site for child sacrifice. Some scholars see “Hades” as a temporary place for those who have died physically and are awaiting the final resurrection. It is also marked by suffering (Luke 16:23), but it eventually will give way to Gehenna as the final place of judgment (Rev. 20:13-14; Matt. 25:41). “Tartarus” appears only once in Scripture and refers to a place where sinful angels were kept for judgment.

Jesus’s teaching made two things clear about hell. First, hell is real. Matthew 10:28 emphasizes that hell is not figurative or metaphorical. It is a real place with physical consequences for both body and soul.

Second, hell is eternal. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus contrasted eternal life with eternal punishment. In Mark 9:48, Jesus echoed Isaiah 66:24, describing hell

as a place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Revelation 14:11 adds, “the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever.”

In light of the sobering reality of hell, there are three things we must remember:

1. Sin is serious. In every reference to hell, Jesus warns us of the seriousness of sin.

2. Judgment is real. Like the wicked servant in Matthew 24:48-51, we must not assume God’s patience means there will be no accountability.

3. Salvation is found in Christ alone. Jesus never tried to scare anyone into better behavior. Rather, He consistently called listeners to repent and believe (Matt. 10:32-36). New life now and eternal life to come is found only in Jesus.

We are called to confess our sins to Him and accept His death as the payment for our sin. If we reject His offer, we will spend eternity in hell.