

# Be Ready

Matthew 24:36 – 25:13

Jesus has been delivering a lot of specific information and instruction. He said within one generation not one stone of the temple would be left upon another, that His disciples would encounter false Christs, hear rumors of wars, know of earthquakes and famines, and then be delivered up death (24:1-8). When they would see the abomination that causes desolation—false worship in the temple like Daniel saw—then they should leave the city (24:15-22). But now He says no one knows the exact day or hour and therefore they must watch and be ready (vv. 44, 25:13). Instead of telling believers to hightail it immediately to a serene country, He wants them to stick around and be faithful disciples in Jerusalem. Decades will pass and it will feel like nothing is happening, so He warns them to be vigilant. They must be ready to go when it's time, but not before.

## The Sudden Hour

Some interpreters think Jesus changes the subject in these verses. Since thus far everything has specifically and clearly described what will happen in 70 AD, now that Jesus says “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven” (v. 36), some conclude He must be talking about the end of the world, the second coming. But it would be odd to use the demonstrative pronoun *that* and not be referring to the time He just referenced: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (24:33). The fact that these things will happen within one generation does not indicate the day, month, year or even decade when they will occur before the end of that generation. So they must stay vigilant for up to 40 years, and He warns how easy it will be to forget. This is what happened in Noah's time when he was the wackjob building a boat while the world carried on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until it started to rain (v. 38). This is what the coming of the Son of man will be like. It's not going to be a generation of constant turmoil, but one that eventually and at last suddenly leads to the cataclysmic judgment Jesus describes. Over 30 years later, Peter imitates Jesus by reminding suffering believers of what happened before the flood: “knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water” (2 Pet. 3:4-6). Notice the flood is an example of “His coming”, not a bodily presence on the earth, but a judgment promised before that comes to pass (cf. 24:27, 30). Our temptation is to think that God will never act, that He forgets about His promises. But we're the ones that do that, not Him. A thousand years is as a day to Him when He faithfully remembers His people: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2. Pet. 3:9). Jesus already said when trouble begins, if you're on the roof, don't go inside, and if you're in the field, don't go back (24:17-18). Two will be in a field where one is left another taken, and two women grinding at a mill where one is left another taken (vv. 40-41). In Luke's account the disciples ask “Where, Lord?” Jesus answers, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Lk. 17:37). Rather than being taken to heaven in the rapture, these people are taken by Roman soldiers and executed. You can find them by looking for the gathering of carrion fowl. Jesus would come in judgment unexpectedly like a thief in the night, so Christians had to be ready (vv. 43-44; cf. Joel 2:6). This passage is not about our generation, but it applies to us. We should not run away from our post where God has called us to live and serve in His kingdom, but neither should we be ignorant of what is happening.

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## Faithful & Evil Servants

The destruction of Jerusalem and persecution of Christians that leads up to it would make many people doubt the good plans that Jesus has for this world (Matt. 28:18-20). Misunderstanding this passage still causes people to doubt today. Jesus wept because the city would be destroyed, but this did not end God's household on earth. He asks, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?" (v. 45). "Amen," Jesus says, be assured that that blessed servant will be made ruler over all his goods (vv. 46-47). Leading and loving God's people will look different in times of crisis, but the disciples would see bigger blessings on the horizon (cf. 24:13-14, 31). There's also an evil servant who will beat his fellow servants, party with drunks, and then be surprised when the master shows up, cuts in him in two, and counts him among the hypocrites (vv. 48-50). This is a sad and angry group (v. 51). Regardless of the warnings, wisdom, and counsel Jesus gives, some pastors, elders, and churches would not listen (cf. Rev. 2-3). They would not be vigilant and diligent to tell their people to be ready when the time comes to leave Jerusalem and Judea. Jesus doesn't take time here to say "And there was a true and well-meaning servant who listened to the evil one. He too will die." We know those people existed, and Lot and his wife are premier examples in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:6-9). Jesus paints broadly about servants in His house to describe shepherds who listen to Him and therefore disciple His people, and those who follow the world to destruction.

## Wise & Foolish Virgins

The parable of wise and foolish virgins connects to and further illustrates Jesus' command to watch and be ready (24:44; 25:13). This is what the kingdom of heaven is like (v. 1). They are attendants at a wedding who will light their lamps for the wedding procession. They go out to meet the bridegroom, five with oil in their lamps and five without, and when he delays they all get some sleep (vv. 3-5). They hear at midnight that he is coming and so they all "put their lamps in order" (vv. 6-7). The foolish lack oil and ask for it from the wise, but there's none to spare (v. 8). While the foolish go to buy some, the bridegroom comes and the ready virgins go with him into the wedding and the door is shut (vv. 9-10). The foolish come later and ask to be let in, but he answers, "Surely, I say to you, I do not know you" (v. 11). The Old Testament pictures God as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride (Is. 54:4-5; 62:5). In the New Testament, Jesus identifies Himself as the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15) and the Church as the bride (Eph. 5:23-32). He is also the narrow gate and will say to many who claim to do things in His name but don't really do the will of Father in heaven, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:22-23, 13-14). The Lord comes often at night as He did to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 12:30), and lead Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus away from Herod the new Pharaoh (Matt. 2:14). The church will be refined and delivered, lighting the way for coming of the bridegroom. We are saved by grace through faith alone as God's people always have been—whether before the flood, in the wilderness, or in the Promise Land. We're not saved by how well we understand the times, but God's grace equips us to be faithful in our time just as the first century believers were in theirs. We all live on the edge of eternity, about to stand before the Lord. Be ready for that, and you will be ready for tomorrow.