

MATTHEW 24:29-51

WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”¹

If all the Gospel writers, the Evangelist Matthew devotes more verses to record what the Master said concerning the days preceding His return to reign over the earth. A large portion of Matthew 24 deals with signs that are not actually about Jesus’ return,² though they refer to conditions that will prevail on the earth in the days preceding that event. A very small portion of the chapter describes the return of the Master.³ However, a large portion of the chapter⁴ and all of chapter 25 (62 verses in total) are devoted to warning us to get ready since we do not know when He will return to reign. Put another way, the Master stresses the need for readiness through the use of seven historical references and verbal pictures—four in chapter 24 and three in chapter 25. The application should be self-evident: Are you ready? Christians should live in anticipation of the Master’s return, looking for this Blessed Hope.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² MATTHEW 24:4-26, 32-35

³ MATTHEW 24:27-31

⁴ MATTHEW 24:36-51

There is a significant point of contrast between verse 33 and verse 36. In verse 33, Jesus says “You know,” referring to the fact that when certain events begin to unfold, the observant individual may know with certainty what is coming. On the other hand, in verse 36, He says “No one knows,” speaking of the precise timing of His return. “You know” arises from observing multiplication of various signs: “false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, apostasy and false prophets.” However, the timing of His return is hidden from men. Though many people—Bible teachers who imagine they have a foolproof method of calculating the timing of His return, modern Gnostics who imagine they have hidden knowledge, and outright charlatans who seek to dupe the gullible—attempt to set dates for His return, they always turn out to be wrong, and they will continue to be shown to be foolish and errant.

What we do know is: (1) the return of Christ the Lord to gather His elect and to judge the world is yet future; (2) we do not know when this will be; and (3) we must keep watch and be ready. Nothing the disciples saw, and nothing that we will ever see, is a certain sign of the Master’s return, for that day will be sudden and without warning.

TIMING OF HIS COMING — The Christian Faith is a doctrinal faith; it is defined by fixed beliefs. There is considerable room for Christians to disagree about many aspects of the Faith—how we conduct our services, the governance of the congregation, the preferences we have concerning interpretation of what is written, and so forth. However, at its core the Faith consists of foundational truths that are held inviolate by all who name the Name of Christ. The foundations of the Christian Faith may be stated as: Jesus is very God and perfect man; He presented His life as a sacrifice for sinful man and raised bodily from the grave; He ascended into heaven and He shall come again to gather His elect and judge the wicked; faith in Him, without any necessity of deeds, brings an individual into a right relationship with the Father; and the authority for this Faith is the written Word of God. These truths are held in common by all redeemed individuals. Though we may disagree on many other issues, these truths define us as Christians.

No saved individual doubts that Jesus was born of a virgin or that He gave His life as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind. No redeemed individual doubts that He was raised from the dead and that He ascended into glory where He is seated on the right hand of the Father. Though there may be church members who doubt these truths concerning the Master, it is impossible that one who denies these truths could be saved.

Similarly, no saved individual doubts that Jesus will come again to gather His saved people and to judge the wicked. We who are redeemed may disagree about the timing of His return and we may quibble about the order of events at His return, but we hold the promise of His return as foundational to the Christian Faith. To deny this “Blessed Hope” [see **TITUS 2:13**] is to deny a fundamental truth of the Christian Faith.

However, Jesus does speak of His coming as an event to be anticipated by His people. Nor should we imagine that this is the only time the Master spoke of His return. It seems evident that throughout His days in the flesh, He spoke of His coming to reign. For instance, we read, “Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers” [**MATTHEW 13:40, 41**].

Again, Jesus said, “The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” [**MATTHEW 16:27**].

As He concluded this instruction, the Master testified, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” [**MATTHEW 25:31**].

From earliest days, believers have comforted their weary hearts with the knowledge of His return. In one of his earliest letters, the Apostle Paul stated, “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:14-17].

However, there will be no warning when He returns. What is important for us to understand is that the Master did not provide a detailed timetable of events preceding His return. To be certain, the disciples did ask “What will be the sign of Your coming and the close of the age” [MATTHEW 24:3]. The Master answered that they were to be alert so that they would not be led astray. The reason this is significant is that there are within the evangelical community many who have their eschatology down precisely—they can identify every event with icy precision and thus they give definite dates of when to expect the Master’s return. However, all such efforts neglect a vital point that Jesus made when He said, “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” [MATTHEW 24:36].

But what about all the signs? Jesus spoke of false messiahs [MATTHEW 24:5], wars and disquiet throughout the nations of the world [MATTHEW 24:6, 7a], famines and earthquakes [MATTHEW 24:7b]. So, He described the situation that will prevail for believers throughout this age. He described these events as “the beginning of birth pains” [MATTHEW 24:8].

Following this warning, the Master warned of persecution targeting those who trust Him [MATTHEW 24:9]. He also warned of an increase in false prophets who would lead many astray [MATTHEW 24:11] and an increase in lawlessness that would cause the love of many to grow cold [MATTHEW 24:12]. All this builds to a crescendo until He says there will stand in the holy place—the sanctuary of the Temple—“the abomination of desolation” that was first spoken of by Daniel [MATTHEW 24:15].

Let me point out a fact that is too often overlooked: Jesus counsels watchfulness in His followers. He warns them to watch in every period of this age. He spoke of the unexpected presence that is suddenly there when He compared life at the time of His return to life in the days preceding the Noachic Flood. “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” [MATTHEW 24:38, 39].

The description of life before the heavens opened and the fountains of the deep were broken up is rather pedestrian. It was distinguished by its ordinariness. People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—in short, they doing what they had always done. The world was largely unbelieving. The people did not worship the True and Living God; they were unconcerned with His glory. To be precise, only one man was prepared and thus spared, and his family was kept from death because of his pursuit of the glory of the LORD God.

Just as the world that perished was completely secular, so it is that the world at Christ’s return will be utterly secular. Believers who long for Christ’s glory will be in a minority. There have always been detractors from the Faith, but as the age moves to a conclusion, unbelief will be in the ascendancy and the Faith will be so compromised that the Master was compelled to ask, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth” [LUKE 18:8b]?

Jesus also spoke of the suddenness with which His coming again will be accomplished. He spoke of two men toiling in a field—one is taken and one is left behind. He quickly shifted the focus to two women grinding at a mill—one is taken and one is left behind. Again, the emphasis is on the suddenness with which some will be removed. The two men working in the field would probably be co-workers; the two women grinding would likely be related—perhaps mother and daughter, or it could be two servants in the same household. Outwardly, they seem to be in the same situations, perhaps even identical in their relationship to the Master. However, at His return, one will be taken and the other left.

Jesus does not specify how these separations will be accomplished, and He most assuredly does not tell us when it will happen. The point of these verses is only that “persons most intimately associated will be separated by that unexpected coming.”⁵ That knowledge alone should encourage us to examine ourselves closely to ensure that we have not deceived ourselves. You may recall that the Master spoke of the astonishment of professed believers at the Judgement. He warned, “On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and cast out demons in Your Name, and do many mighty works in Your Name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness’” [MATTHEW 7:22, 23].

Jesus then provides a third illustration which speaks of a thief breaking into a house. “Know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” [MATTHEW 24:43]. With this graphic illustration, Jesus teaches the sudden and unpredictable coming of the Day of the Lord. It is a picture that occurs elsewhere in the New Testament, as the Apostles echo the warning of the Master.

Writing the Thessalonian Christians, Paul warns, “You yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:2, 3].

Similarly, Peter warns in his last letter, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” [2 PETER 3:10].

John records the warning of the Lord of the churches that is delivered to the church of Thyatira, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” [REVELATION 3:3].

Then, when describing the sixth of the seven bowl judgements, John records the words of the coming Judge of all the earth, “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed” [REVELATION 16:15]!

The coming of the Master will be sudden and it will be unexpected. Perhaps there is another point that should be made concerning the illustrations Jesus uses, and that is to note that the thief comes to steal what is valuable. The purchase of insurance and the care we exert demonstrates that we value our possessions—home, car, jewellery, and money. Shouldn’t we be at least as concerned for our souls? Jesus asked, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul” [MATTHEW 16:26]?

⁵ John A. Broadus, **Commentary on Matthew: American Commentary**, Vol. 1 (American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA 1886) 495

Each of these verbal pictures provided by the Master stress the need to stay alert. This accounts for the Master's warning, which is given twice in short order: "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" [MATTHEW 24:42]. "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" [MATTHEW 24:44]. The implication is that Christians can become neglectful, indifferent, inattentive, careless in the way in which they live. However, all such dereliction comes at an awful cost.

CONDITIONS AT HIS COMING — Before exploring the cost of carelessness in the Christian life, I want to examine the text to see if we can discover what conditions will mark life at the time of the Master's return. It will not take long to work through the account of Jesus' words, but the information should prove beneficial in understanding the times in which we live.

The glimpses of life in the last days afforded by Jesus are marked by what can only be described as pronounced ordinariness. In other words, the things that mark the last days have marked the course of the age. This is not to say there are not generalised changes taking place, but it is rather to caution against looking at what we believe are "signs" and concluding that we know the times. The emphasis throughout the New Testament is on looking for the Son, not looking for signs. Those who look for "signs" will be terribly disappointed in the end.

Throughout the course of the age, there have been false messiahs, wars and rumours of war, international and national conflicts, famines and earthquakes. During the Tribulation period these events will be increased, but at any time in the course of the age, these events have taken place. Moreover, when God's people have been caught in these disastrous catastrophes they have questioned whether the devastation spelled the end of the age. However, there is no particular reason to ascribe to any one of these events, or even to any number of these events, the conclusion that they serve as a sign of His coming. In fact, Peter is careful to point out that as we approximate the end of the age, the scoffers that will then prevail on the earth will ridicule any claim that the Master is coming again by arguing, "All things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" [2 PETER 3:4b].

Christians will be handed over for persecution and to be put to death throughout the course of this age. Believers will be hated by all nations because they bear the Name of the Master, just as He warned when He said, "If you find the godless world is hating you, remember it got its start hating me. If you lived on the world's terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God's terms and no longer on the world's terms, the world is going to hate you.

"When that happens, remember this: Servants don't get better treatment than their masters. If they beat on me, they will certainly beat on you. If they did what I told them, they will do what you tell them" [JOHN 15:18-20].⁶

Professed believers have fallen away and will continue to fall away. False prophets have arisen, and they will continue to multiply; and because they are greedy, "they'll whip up speeches just to get the honorariums from you" [2 PETER 2:3].⁷ Lawlessness—disregard for God's will—will be evident throughout the age; nevertheless, the Gospel will advance.

Though all these things are ongoing, they will dramatically increase at the very end of the age. In fact, Jesus cautions that ultimately "the abomination of desolation" will stand "in the holy place." This is the image of the antichrist that will be placed in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem as prophesied by Daniel [DANIEL 9:27; 11:31; 12:11] and by John [REVELATION 13:11-15].

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)

⁷ Clarence Jordan, **The Cotton Patch Gospel** (Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Macon, GA 2004)

However, this event occurs during a time of unprecedented tribulation, as the Master makes clear when He says, “There will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved” [MATTHEW 24:21, 22a]. We can conclude, then, that from our vantage in this present age, the world will continue to be characterised by a secular bent, by animosity toward those who dare live with radical abandon for the cause of Christ, and by lives consumed with the mundane, pedestrian aspects of routine.

That of which we may be certain is that Jesus is coming. Let me say that emphatically: *signs or no signs, Jesus is coming*. He said that following the Tribulation of that day, there will appear in heaven “the sign of the Son of Man” [MATTHEW 24:30]. I have no idea what “the sign of the Son of Man” might be; frankly, neither does anybody else. What should be obvious, however, is that at that time of its appearance, it will be apparent to all who witness that sign what they are seeing! Moreover, following the revelation of that sign, those then on the earth will “see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” At that time, “He will send out His angels ... [to] ... gather His elect” [MATTHEW 24:31]. This is the Second Coming of the Christ at the conclusion of the Tribulation. This particular event is described more fully in MATTHEW 25:31-46.

READINESS FOR HIS COMING — We believers have waited two millennia for the Lord’s return. The world ridicules the thought that He will come again and that His coming is imminent. Tragically, many believers, perhaps even the most, live as though He will never come. They have a hope of heaven, and they anticipate that they will be welcomed by Him at His return—but there is no evidence of expectation in their daily lives, no sense of looking forward to His return. One gets the impression that they have been so fully co-opted by this present dying world that they are insensible to His presence now among His people and oblivious to His return.

We should not be surprised at this, for the Apostle spoke of this movement toward insensibility in one of his earliest letters to the churches. Clarence Jordan, in his masterful work into the patois of the southern United States, translated Paul’s words thusly, “Brothers, you don’t have any need for me to write to you about schedules and seasons. For you yourselves know for a fact that ‘Lord’s Day’ comes like somebody breaking in at night. Just when people settle back and say, ‘It’s so peaceful and quiet,’ then all of a sudden calamity hits them like a woman having labour pains, and then it’s too late” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-3].⁸

In the text before us, the Master stresses the need for believers to be watchful, to be alert to and conscious of the proximity of His return. Thus, throughout this discourse, Jesus warns against being deceived. He warns, “See that no one leads you astray” [MATTHEW 24:4] and cautions against being duped by reports that He is present [MATTHEW 24:26]. He cautions against being led into error, a warning that has not often been heeded by professed believers.

During the brief years of my service before the Lord, I have witnessed multiple instances of professed believers wandering away into strange doctrine. Two examples stand out in my memory. In the late seventies, before our family moved to Canada, a man named John Todd generated great excitement among some of the most prominent ministries in the United States with a message that the armed forces and the government was riddled with secret satanic worshippers he identified as Illuminati. His message was that the forces of evil would attack Christians, and therefore Christians must stockpile food and water, arm themselves with assault weapons and build fortified redoubts from which they could fend off the evil hoards.

⁸ Clarence Jordan, op. cit.

I was on the faculty of the Criswell College during that time and several students asked what I thought of the message Todd presented. My response was that Scripture teaches that “God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control” [2 TIMOTHY 1:7].⁹ Therefore, any message that enjoined us to fear the possibility of evil could not be of God. Moreover, Scripture is quite clear that “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:4]. Thus, the message of this individual could not be from God.

Nevertheless, it was astounding to me to note the number and names of apparently sound ministries that endorsed this man’s message and ministry. I could only conclude that numerous pastors had failed in their responsibility to guard their flocks and to declare the full Word of the Lord or that Christians were generally gullible. There is a third possibility that has become more apparent as time has passed. That is that too many of the professed saints of God want to believe evil about others, and so they accept without question scandal and calumny and gossip about prominent individuals. While the Master urges us to be watchful, He never encourages us to engage in physical warfare with evil. Neither does He permit us to think evil of other believers.

To complete the story, it appears that John Todd was charged and convicted of criminal sexual conduct and jailed, first in Ohio¹⁰ and also in South Carolina.¹¹ Today, I can find reports that he died in 2007¹² in addition to reports that purport to present his continuing message on the Internet.¹³ The man is a mystery, though it is evident that he is a Christian counterfeit.

In 1988, a man named Edgar Whisenant wrote a pamphlet entitled “88 reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988.” I was leading a family camp in Minnesota that summer. During a break in the activities, a local pastor excitedly asked if I thought it was possible that the rapture would occur at the predicted time. I abruptly replied, “No.” The pastor was incredulous that I could be so adamant in denying that the rapture would occur between September 11 and 13 of that year. My reason didn’t faze that pastor, though it was based on Scripture. Jesus said, “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” [MATTHEW 24:36]. Accepting Scripture as inerrant and infallible, it was impossible that Edgar Whisenant or anyone else could predict with certainty when the Rapture would occur.

Whisenant sold over 4.5 million copies of his pamphlet and mailed 300,000 free of charge to ministers across America. The Rapture did not come on September 13, and Whisenant revised his prediction, suggesting that the rapture would come at 10:55 a.m. on September 15. After that time, he revised his prediction to October 3. When October 3 came and went without any evidence that he was correct, he informed Christianity Today, “The evidence is all over the place that it is going to be in a few weeks anyway.”¹⁴ Later, Whisenant admitted that he had made a slight miscalculation because of a fluke in the Gregorian calendar, and published his discovery in “The Final Shout—Rapture Report 1989.” The publication was subsequently retitled “The Final Shout—Rapture Report 1990,” and has since been retitled yearly as “The Final Shout—Rapture Report 1991,” 1992, 1993 and so on through 1997.¹⁵

⁹ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

¹⁰ Edward E. Plowman, “The Legend(s) of John Todd,” <http://www.holysmoke.org/sdhok/todd00.htm>, accessed 9 January, 2009

¹¹ <http://www.kt70.com/~jamesjpn/articles/john-todd-now.html>, accessed 9 January, 2010

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.myspace.com/johntoddtruth>, accessed 9 January, 2010

¹⁴ Pam Dewey, “Edgar Whisenant’s 88 Reasons,” Field Guide to the Wild World of Religion, <http://www.isitso.org/guide/whise.html>, accessed 9 January, 2010

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_C._Whisenant, accessed 9 January, 2010

These are a couple of the religious pretenders whose names will continue to be held in disrepute. Their number is legion. However, there are other frauds that dismiss His coming. We know with certainty “that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” [2 PETER 3:3-13].

The Master is teaching is that regardless of our situation, we must be watching, and specifically living in anticipation of His return. Do you recall John’s instruction concerning the need to live a life of anticipation? “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” [1 JOHN 3:1-3].

What does it mean to watch? Obviously, it doesn’t mean to find an excuse to be indolent. Jesus gives us an example of two servants—one commended for anticipating the return of his Master [MATTHEW 24:46, 47], and one identified as “a wicked servant” [MATTHEW 24:48-51]. Being ready for the Master’s return means doing what we are assigned to do. Obviously, this means tending to the household of Faith, providing spiritual nourishment as we are appointed to do, wisely using all that has been entrusted to us [cf. MATTHEW 25:14-30] and selflessly serving those in need [cf. MATTHEW 25:31-46].

What is said of the evil servant? His life is marked by three vices, which we should note and avoid. He was *careless*—he neglected his work, saying, “My master is staying away a long time” [MATTHEW 24:48].¹⁶ The words are eerily similar to the words Peter places in the mouth of scoffers, “Where is the promise of His coming” [2 PETER 3:4]? For unbelievers, it always seems that because Jesus has not come yet, there will be no accounting for their neglect. However, Peter says that “they deliberately overlook” the fact that God judged the antediluvian world by water, and that He will judge this present world by fire [2 PETER 3:5-7]. They also push far from their mind the knowledge of God’s patience, distorting that patience into unwillingness to hold mankind accountable or into inability to judge the wicked. Thus, Peter reminds readers that God does not work according to our schedule—what appears to be delayed to us is on time with Him. Thus, we are warned to “Take care that [we] are not carried away with the error of lawless people” so that we “lose our own stability” [2 PETER 3:17].

¹⁶ The NET Bible

The wicked servant was also characterised as *cruel*. He began to “beat his fellow servants” [MATTHEW 24:49a]. This wicked servant is acting like the Pharisees whom Jesus described in MATTHEW 23:34, who kill and crucify prophets and wise men and scribes; and those who are not killed are flogged and persecuted. The difference is that here the one doing the beating is an individual who professes to be a servant of the Lord.

Finally, the wicked servant is guilty of *carousing*, the Lord depicting him as one who “eats and drinks with drunkards” [MATTHEW 24:49b]. He is living like those who lived in the days of Noah, who were characterised as “eating and drinking,” oblivious to the gathering storm [MATTHEW 24:38, 39].

Jesus says of the faithful and wise servant, only that he is blessed. However, of the wicked servant, Jesus says, “the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [MATTHEW 24:50, 51].

Being ready for the Master’s return means that we have a vital relationship to Him as Saviour and King. Too many professed believers are Sunday worshippers without any evidence of transformed lives. Those who are redeemed are being changed into His image; they reveal the reality of His salvation through lives that seek His glory. Christians are not perfected in this desire, but they always have that desire in their hearts. For those who are born from above, church is not just a place to go on Sunday mornings—it is the Body of Christ.

The question of the message for you is, “Are you looking for the Master’s return? When He comes again, will you welcome Him? Or will you be assigned a place with the hypocrites?” Now is the time to prepare for His return. Paul urged the Christians in Corinth, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail to meet the test” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5]! Just so, I urge you to examine yourselves.

Do you look for Jesus’ return? Are you eagerly awaiting His coming again? Are you consumed with anticipation for Him to come again? Or are you consumed with the things of this dying world? While you wait, are you doing what He commanded you to do? Are you building His people? Warning the Lost? Revealing the grace of God through your life? Now is the time for Christians to get busy with matters of eternal significance.

If, somehow, you have never been born from above and into the Family of God, let this be the day of new birth for you. Jesus came the first time to present His life as a sacrifice because of sin—your sin. He gave His life, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day. Having ascended into heaven, He is seated on the right hand of the Father. Now, the Word of God calls all mankind to look to Him in faith. This is the Word of the Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. With the heart one believes and is made right with God, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That wonderful passage then cites the promise presented by the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Have you believed? Are you ready? Are you watching for His return?