

The End Is Near

Matthew 24:36-51, John 14:2-3, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 4:7, 1 Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 2:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Exodus 22:2-3, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, Revelation 20:4, Revelation 19:14, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Zechariah 14:6, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Ephesians 4:16, Matthew 23:27

Slide 1

Several years ago, a businessman had to drive to Fort Wayne, Indiana for work.

He rented a brand-new car and enjoyed the ride so much that he blew past a tollbooth without thinking.

Since he had a toll tag on his own car, he didn't think anything about it. Then he realized that he was in a rental car and it didn't have a toll tag.

So, he began to worry. Then he thought, *"This car belongs to the rental-car company—not me. They should be responsible for any tolls, and it's probably covered in the cost of the rental anyway."*

When he drove past another toll, he thought, *"Even if I'm responsible for the tolls, there's only a few tolls between here and Indiana—maybe \$4 round trip. They wouldn't send me a bill for only \$4."*

After he returned home from his business trip, a month or two went by. Nothing happened. But then, six months later, he received a letter that read: "Notice of Toll Violation."

He was right, to a degree. The Tollway Authority didn't bother sending him a bill for a measly \$3.90 in tolls.

But when they added in a \$20 fine for every one of the 5 tollbooths he drove past, they did bother sending him a bill for \$103.90!

The fact that months had gone by, and nothing had happened, didn't mean that nothing was ever going to happen.

A lot of people have the same attitude when it comes to Jesus' Second Coming. Nothing has happened so far, so they begin to think that nothing will ever happen.

Yet, the signs of Jesus' Second Coming are casting their shadow today like never before, and I believe something is about to happen.

We've been studying what Jesus had to say about the future in answer to three questions His disciples had asked him: "*When will the calamity come?*" "*What is the sign of Your coming?*" and, "*What is the sign of the end of the age?*"

Today we'll see His description of the timing of these events. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 24, verse 36, where Jesus sets the timetable for the coming tribulation and His Second Coming.

Matthew 24:36, "*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

What? No date! I expected a date, and I'm sure His disciples did too. But Jesus makes it very clear: "*No one knows the date except His Father in heaven.*"

Jesus could know the timing of His return, because as God He is omniscient! But, in His humanity, He chose not to know.

That makes perfect sense when you understand the wedding customs in Jesus' day.

In Jesus' day, when a man wanted to marry a woman, he would go to the woman's home and negotiate a bridal price with her father.

After he paid that price, he went back to his father's house to prepare a place for them to live. That preparation usually took about a year under the watchful eye of the man's father.

Then, when the father declared that the place was ready, the man would return to his bride's home and bring her back to their new home. That's why only the father knows the time.

The man might try to rush his preparations in anticipation of bringing his bride home early, but the father wouldn't let him.

Only when the father was satisfied that their place was ready, would he allow his son to go and get his bride.

2,000 years ago, Jesus came to our home and paid the bridal price for His bride, the church. He didn't pay that price with silver or gold; he paid that price with His own shed blood on the cross.

Jesus gave His life for His bride! Then He rose again, after which He went back to His Father's house to prepare a place for her.

I'm sure Jesus wanted to come back as soon as possible for His bride, but His Father kept saying, "*No, not yet.*"

Now, it's been 2,000 years since He left, and our home must be nearly ready! Imagine, after all that time, how magnificent our new home will be.

It can't be too long until the Father says to His Son, "*Your home is now ready. Go and get your bride!*"

Slide 2

This is why we're to live in constant expectancy of Jesus' arrival. We're not to wait for signs, we're to wait for our Savior.

Life will proceed normally right up until the time Jesus returns for His bride and the earth spirals into the tribulation. Listen to how Matthew describes this event.

Matthew 24:37-39, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before 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. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."

Before Jesus comes for His church, life will go on as usual. People will follow their ordinary pursuits, unaware of anything remarkable. Then, suddenly, tribulation will come and sweep them into a flood of turmoil.

Now, for those of us who're concerned about an imminent catastrophe, a company named *Vivos* can help.

Their website says, "People are sensing that a global life-changing event is just ahead. Millions of people believe that we are living in the 'end times.' The governments of the world know something and have been bunkering up for decades. Why is nobody telling you to prepare? Obviously, to avoid a mass panic. What is your plan? Will your family be victims or survivors?"

Their solution is an airtight, fully self-contained *Vivos* shelter, designed to survive any catastrophe.

Their website advertises "Shelter complexes which comfortably accommodate large groups of people, in spacious living quarters, outfitted and stocked for a minimum of one year of autonomous survival to ride out the potential events."

Vivos shelters include complete and fully furnished living quarters, with semi-private bedrooms, deluxe bathrooms, kitchen and dining areas, spacious lounges, and meeting areas.

They have computers, exercise equipment, a library, security devices, vaults for valuables and munitions, a communications center, laundry facilities, repair shop, and more.”

Their website warns *“that half or more of the US population will be dead within a year from the anarchy following a major catastrophic event.”*

But they offer their shelters as *“the only known and practical solution for survival of all catastrophes.”* Members need to only arrive before their facility is locked down and secured from the chaos above.

How much? Prices start at just \$35,000 per person for an 80 person accommodation.

Their website even reminds you, *“It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark!”*

How nice, but totally unnecessary for those who have put their faith in Christ. He’s our shelter, and He’ll take us out of this world before the chaos begins.

Matthew 24:40-41, *“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.”*

With no warning or sign, people will disappear from their homes and normal workplaces all over the world.

Now, as we've seen in this chapter so far, there are clear signs for the end of the age; and there are clear signs for Christ's Second Coming to reign on this earth; but there are no clear signs preceding people being taken out of this world.

Life will be normal just as it was *"until the day when Noah entered the ark."*

Those taken are clearly believers in this context, because the ark took Noah and his family out before the flood overwhelmed those who were left behind.

Jesus will take believers out in the same way. Literally, He'll receive them before the tribulation overwhelms those who are left or abandoned.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever."*

It was common in Jesus' day for citizens to go out of the city to meet their king as he returned from a long trip. That's the picture Paul paints here in 1 Thessalonians 4.

As Jesus, our King, returns after a long time away, believers will go to meet Him *"in the air"* before He arrives on the earth.

Then they'll accompany Him on His return to this earth where they'll rule and reign with Him for a thousand years.

Thus, Jesus will come at any moment for His saints. Then, He'll come after the tribulation with His saints to reign.

So, don't wait for any signs. Just wait for your Savior, who could come at any moment, to take you out of this world. Wait, but don't do it idly. Instead, while you're waiting, watch for His coming.

Slide 3

Matthew 24:42-43, *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: 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."*

Thieves do not announce their arrival. They just show up at night to do their damage.

In fact, in Biblical times the law allowed a homeowner to kill a thief who broke in at night, rather than the day.

Why? Because such a thief posed a greater threat since he expected people to be home, most likely intending to do them bodily harm.

In the same way, Jesus will come for His saints unannounced, after which God's judgment will fall on this earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, *"For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."*

The believer should therefore stay awake. We must remain alert and watch for His coming, so you can protect your family from the judgment to come.

We must alert them to the threat that's coming, so they can find refuge in Christ, *"who delivers us from the wrath to come."*

Matthew 24:44, *“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”* Prepare for the any moment, unannounced return of Christ!

Robby Robins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war. After his 300th mission, he was surprised when his commanding officer gave him permission to immediately pull his crew together and fly his plane home.

They flew across the ocean to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania.

They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—*“Welcome Home Dad!”*

How did they know? No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn't expected to leave so quickly.

Robins relates, *“When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, 'Daddy!' His wife came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, and a crisp yellow dress. 'How did you know?’”* I asked.

“I didn't,” she answered. *“Once we knew the war was over, we knew you'd be home one of these days. We knew you'd try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.”*

Be ready every day for Jesus' arrival. So, we must wait for His coming, watch for His coming, and finally continue to work until He comes.

Slide 4

Matthew 24:45-47, *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.”*

Serve Jesus faithfully and wisely until He returns. Manage His affairs until His arrival. When Jesus left, He put His followers in charge of His household, i.e., His church, and He expected them to feed His church.

Now, this certainly applies to church leaders today, whom He called to *“preach the word in season and out of season.”*

But this also applies to all of Jesus’ followers, whom He has gifted to serve, so that *“when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*

You see, as we wait and watch for His coming, Jesus wants us to work to build up His church, to feed and nourish His body, to take care of His household, so that together we can reach out to a world in desperate need of a Savior.

As we approach the day of Christ’s return, this is no time to sit idly by as we wait for Him! It’s time to get to work to expand His household, so that when He comes for His church, it’s as full as it can be.

What are you doing to contribute to the ministry of Christ’s church? If nothing, then find a way to serve and get busy!

During his 1960 presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy often closed his speeches with the story of Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives.

One day in 1789, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand.

Quelling a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, *“The Day of Judgement is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”*

Don't fear the future. Refuse to operate like the wicked world around you. Instead, serve Christ faithfully until He returns.

As our world grows darker, let the light of Christ shine through you, or as we learned in VBS this year, we are to *“shine Jesus' light”* and reject the darkness.

Matthew 24:48-51, *“But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Who Matthew is describing here are church people, but they're not true believers. Jesus describes them as *“wicked hypocrites.”* They look good in church on a Sunday morning, but their hearts are far from Him.

In Matthew 23:27b, *“Jesus said of such people, ‘You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.’”*

Slide 5

Conclusion

In 1989, Adele Gaboury, an elderly lady, disappeared. Her concerned neighbors in Worcester, Massachusetts, notified the police, but a brother told them that she had gone into a nursing home.

Satisfied with that information, Gaboury's neighbors began watching her property. Michael Crowley noticed her mail, delivered through a slot in the door, piling high.

When he opened the door, hundreds of pieces of mail drifted out. He notified police, and the post office stopped deliveries.

Gaboury's next-door neighbor, Eileen Dugan, started paying her grandson \$10 twice a month to mow Gaboury's lawn.

That winter, Dugan's son noticed Gaboury's pipes had frozen, spilling water out the door. He called the utility company to shut off the water.

While her neighbors did their best to keep the outside of her home looking nice, no one guessed that Gaboury had been inside her home all that time.

When police finally investigated the house as a health hazard, they were shocked to find her body. The Washington Post reported that police believe she had died of natural causes four years previously.

The respectable, external appearance of Gaboury's house hid the reality of what was on the inside.

In the same way, people can have a respectable, external appearance, but hide a decaying corpse on the inside. They look to be spiritually alive, but inside they are spiritually dead.

Look at your own heart. Do you see a living faith within or does your respectable, external appearance hide death within?

If you see death, find life in Christ, Who died for you and rose again. Trust Him with your life and let Him begin to transform you from the inside out.

Then, instead of hell, Jesus will assign you a place with Him when He comes. Give Him your life before it's eternally too late! Don't put it off, because Jesus could come at any moment.

Wendy Zoba, talks about the time when her middle son, Ben, was very young. He had heard more than one sermon about the importance of surrendering his life to Christ.

Ben seemed well-attuned to the heart of God; he exhibited the selfless and kind tendencies that would take some—like his mother—a lifetime of sanctification to acquire.

So, it disturbed his mother and father when Ben stubbornly resisted their invitations for him to give his life to Christ.

He would offer no explanations; he would simply tell us in his preschool English that he wasn't ready.

He resisted for several months. Then, one morning as they sat around the kitchen table eating their breakfast, little Ben announced that he was ready to give his life to Christ.

He then got up from the table and went upstairs. Mom and dad looked at each other and followed him.

They expected to find Ben on his knees in prayer. They didn't. Instead, they found him folding his Star Wars pajamas into his Sesame Street suitcase.

They said, "*Ben, what are you doing?*" He answered, "*Packing.*" "*Why?*" they asked. "*To go to heaven,*" he replied.

Then they understood why their son hesitated to give his life to Christ. He thought that in so doing, he would have to leave them and literally take up residence with Christ in heaven.

Little Ben was ready to go! Are you? Trust Christ with your life and wait for His coming, watch for His coming, and work until He comes.