

# LOOKING FORWARD WITH EXPECTATION

Leader pages on pp. 124-127

**THE POINT:**  
JESUS WILL RETURN TO BRING US INTO HIS KINGDOM.

## MATTHEW 24:32-44

<sup>32</sup> “Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.

<sup>33</sup> In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that he is near—at the door.

<sup>34</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.

MEMORY VERSE

<sup>35</sup> **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

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<sup>36</sup> “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone.

<sup>37</sup> As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.

<sup>38</sup> For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

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<sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.

<sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left.

<sup>42</sup> Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

<sup>43</sup> But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into.

<sup>44</sup> This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

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KEYWORDS

**Heaven and earth (v. 35)**—This phrase encompasses the entire created order.

**Neither. . . the Son (v. 36)**—Jesus's self-confessed ignorance of His return must be taken in the full light of the incarnation. When God the Son was on earth, He chose to forego some of His omniscience as part of becoming human.

**One taken. . . one left (vv. 40,41)**—When Jesus comes there will only be two categories of people: the prepared and the unprepared.

**Be ready (v. 44)**—The term for ready (*hetoimos*) has an active sense of preparing and a passive sense of being in a state of preparedness.

# WHY SHOULD WE LOOK FORWARD TO JESUS'S SECOND COMING?

What do dolphins, geese, and penguins have in common? It's true, they are so different. One flies, another lives in oceans, and still another on ice. But each of these animals have a unique and incredible gift. They each sleep with one eye open. Part of their brains shut down while the other remains alert. Each of them needs to stay awake, at least partially. The dolphin must surface for air, geese must sleep while migrating, and penguins must remain vigilant to avoid predators. We've all heard the phrase "sleep with one eye open." These animals actually do it! As followers of Christ, we could learn a lot from them. Spiritually, we must continually, obediently live out our faith in our



everyday existence while also expectantly keeping one eye open to the coming of Christ.

## Jesus's Second Coming is Certain // Matthew 24:32-25

We don't remember the details of every day twenty-four years ago, but most of us remember that day. It was a beautiful Tuesday morning in the Big Apple. The dog days of summer had ended and there wasn't a cloud in the sky as people scurried to work. The sky in New York had never seemed bluer. Fans were excited about the pennant race and the opening of the NFL season. Little did they know that in minutes the world would be turned upside down as New York's twin towers fell. Just over 100 years earlier, an enormous ship began its maiden voyage to that same city until the unsinkable Titanic careened into an iceberg and the seemingly impossible happened.

The temple in Jerusalem was perhaps the most awe-spiring sight in the world in that era. Enormous blocks of stone ornamented with gold. The stones were quarried with precision. Construction began around 20 BC and was still in progress when Jesus was there with His followers. We can only imagine the surprise of the disciples when Jesus said to them, "Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). It seemed, too, impossible. In 70 AD, Jesus's prophecy became the world's reality.

His disciples wanted to know when this would happen and when He'd return, but Jesus answered with words that brought more questions. He spoke of a time of tribulation, a phenomenon of darkness, false Christs, angels, and a trumpet's blast. And then, Jesus finally got around to addressing times. Instead of exact timing He offered them an analogy that they understood. The fig tree has a cycle, budding in the spring as sap rises from its trunk. It's all a sign that summer is near, and the fruit would be ripe.

## THE POINT: JESUS WILL RETURN TO BRING US INTO HIS KINGDOM.

As we celebrate another year, we are reminded of a new era when Jesus will make short work of all the wrongs. He will return a second time, not as a suffering servant but a ruling King. We all long for that day, and today we see ancient visions become reality.

### WHAT SIGNS DO YOU SEE THAT JESUS'S RETURN IS NEAR?

But He left us with the promise and the signs. He invites us to work, watch, and wait for the day. We live in the reality of the redemption story when Jesus's prophecy will flourish like the opening of a rose. Dead dreams will rise from the ashes of our brokenness and pain. We are called to expectantly look forward and not backwards. He is inviting us to live with one eye on the challenges we face on this dying planet and another eye on the budding blossoms of a new reality. Believers can view life as the great saga of grace that it truly is. We ought to celebrate today because we are one step closer to the coming of the Bridegroom amidst the perils of the present.

## Jesus's Second Coming is Surprising //

### Matthew 24:36-39

But when will these things happen? Who knows the day of the Lord? Only God, and He won't tell. God didn't give us this mystery for us to debate the timelines, dissect the metaphors, and figure out the precise meaning of the mark of the beast. He gave us this mystery to encourage and activate us to accomplish His mission. We get to be a part of this ever-expanding vision of redemption and mission mobilization. There's no greater work and we don't know how much time any of us get.

### HOW SHOULD THE WARNING IN THESE VERSES CHANGE THE WAY WE LIVE?

A quick Google search of the phrase, "distractions in life," yields 104 million hits in .39 seconds. The top distractions on the list are media, emails, watching videos, the internet, listening to podcasts, music, negative thoughts, playing with children, text messages, comparison, drinking, and noise. In the midst of the 2020 global pandemic, Lifeway reported a 62% increase in Bible sales. This resulted in more Bibles in people's homes. Unfortunately, by that fall, streaming subscriptions soared and viewing hours increased. Lifeway reported that binge watching took away, and at times replaced, Bible reading.<sup>10</sup> We are surrounded by distractions.

All of us to a certain extent must deal with distraction. Jesus knew that even normal everyday life can cause us to take our eyes off the bigger picture. We can be so focused on our lives here on the earth that we can lose sight of His imminent return.



## DIGGING DEEPER SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The fig tree, which can grow 20-30 feet high, yields edible fruit and is mentioned in Scripture about 60 times. It first appears in Genesis 3:7. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." It was a main food grown in Egypt and the Holy Land. Abigail sent 200 fig cakes as a present to David (1 Sam 25:18). Prophets including Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Micah, and Zechariah threatened the destruction of fig crops because of man's wickedness. In the New Testament, Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree (Mark 11:13).

In this week's passage, Jesus's disciples want to know when the end will come. Jesus lists things that will happen and tells them to learn from the seasonal growth of the fig tree. While no one knows the day or the hour, we will be surrounded by signs that the end is near and we should be ready.

### What signs do you see that the end is near?



Jesus compared the Lord's coming to the days of Noah, as people went about their daily lives and never looked up to see the foreboding clouds on the horizon.

Noah had been preparing for years and all neighbors just went around falling in love, making money, celebrating, and planning. Then the floodgates opened and everything else meant nothing. Perhaps over the years of no preparation, the neighbors saw him as some sort of carnival sideshow. They likely mocked him, but Noah continued to prepare. Jesus's words remind us that those who do not give credibility to the Bible will often mock or ridicule Christians for believing Jesus will return. But just as Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection, we can be assured that His word is true. Our responsibility is to continue to live godly lives and prepare.

The mindset of the follower of Christ in this time of waiting should be the same as Paul's: "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

## No Save-the-Date //

Matthew 24:40-44

The church has survived through persecution, world wars, disease, struggle, apostasy, and a thousand other man-made obstacles and tribulations. In each generation, giants of the faith have persevered, trusting God, trusting in His Word, and waiting with patience and expectancy for the coming of Christ.

Others have focused so much on prophecy, charts, theories, and timelines about the second coming, that it consumes all their time and energy with little left to give to a broken world. Faults lie in both mindsets. We must yearn for His coming while also serving where God has placed us.

Jesus urged His followers, and reminds us, that life goes on, but we must keep an eye on eternity. I'm reminded of this when I think of the one social media account that shows up on my feed almost every day. It's always the same message—short and sobering: "You will die someday." That's it. That's all this person ever tweets. It's a reminder to me that this life on earth will end either when I die or when the Lord comes. When one of those two things happen, there is little importance to the details of my finances, car repairs, or my team's playoff chances. So, we must be diligent to stay alert, to watch and pray. Live with a sense of holy expectancy. The Lord's coming should also stir our hearts to do everything we can to evangelize and communicate the gospel to a lost world. There's never been a greater need or opportunity to share the gospel.

### IF YOU KNEW JESUS WOULD RETURN TOMORROW, WHAT WOULD YOU DO TODAY?

We see in this passage a warning of judgment, unpredictability, and preoccupation with worldly concerns, but it ends with a powerful admonition: Be ready. For the believer, the greatest preparation that we could ever do would be to live godly lives, and let the world know the power of the gospel. We need to make it our first intention to let the world know that Jesus saves. Billy Graham preached it like this: "The second coming of Christ will be so revolutionary that it will change every aspect of life on this planet. Christ will reign in righteousness.

## THE POINT: JESUS WILL RETURN TO BRING US INTO HIS KINGDOM.

Disease will be arrested, death modified, war abolished, and nature changed. Mankind will live as it was originally intended."<sup>11</sup>

In Acts we read the account of Jesus's ascension. He gave His disciples the challenge to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. This must have been daunting for an era when travel was so arduous. We are still laboring to realize that goal. Luke tells us that He was taken up from their sight. We can certainly imagine the scene as the believers were staring up into the sky in dumbfounded wonder, as if they were watching the event at Cape Canaveral. Then two men in white stood beside them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The question from these apparent angelic messengers must have been a little disconcerting. The subtext seems to be: "Shows over guys, it's time to get to work because He's coming back." Just as John said, at the conclusion of Revelation, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"

### WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN STAY ALERT AND PREPARED FOR JESUS'S RETURN?

### DID YOU KNOW?

A common response to gospel conversations can be, "I will think about it later" or "I will go to Jesus when I get myself together." It can be challenging to create a sense of urgency without using scare tactics. The Parable of The Ten Virgins in Matthew 25, can be used to demonstrate the importance of being ready for Christ's return. The foolish virgins took lamps but did not bring oil. The wise virgins brought both their lamps and oil. They all fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom. When the bridegroom came in the middle of the night, only the wise virgins that were ready made it into the banquet. The others were shut out. The story directly states the importance of being ready. If you are struggling to create a sense of urgency while witnessing, consider using this parable to share a simple truth. Be wise and be ready for Christ's return.

**Biblical Truth:** Christ will return one day. We must all be ready!

**Did you know that parables can be helpful illustrations when engaging in evangelism?**

## LIVE IT

### Are you living as if Christ will return at any time or do you take the Second Coming for granted?

The second coming has inspired scores of movies and books, but nothing will come close to what happens when Jesus returns and the world is made right again. The bible tells us, "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone (Matt. 24:36).

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- **Read:** Set aside time this week to read all of Matthew 24 and make notes about Jesus's return.
- **Meditate:** Read John 14:1-3 and meditate on these comforting words that remind us we don't need to be troubled by Jesus's absence but encouraged that He is coming again.
- **Share:** Get together with some friends and talk about what you discovered from your readings from Matthew 24 and John 14:1-3. Spend some time praying together for friends who need salvation.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. PURPOSEFUL PROPHECY // MATTHEW 24:32-33

Jesus told His disciples what would happen in the future. He gave them a prophetic message about the end of time. He told them that the days that mark this time will be difficult. There will be rebellion, lawlessness, and other extreme and sinful conditions. It will be the culmination of sin on the earth. We should not neglect the prophecy of Jesus. Because it is about His second coming, we think we only need to wait. But there is still work to be done. There are still needs to be met. There are still souls to be saved. The purpose of prophecy is to let us know what is to come so that we will not be afraid and lose hope.

**As long as there is day, we must work until Jesus comes.**

## 2. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER // 1 THESSALONIANS 4:18

The difficult days of the end times can be daunting. But we know that God is with us. God said through Isaiah, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand." So, we should feel comforted, knowing we have an almighty God on our side. But there may be times when we or our loved ones are overwhelmed by threatening and harmful conditions. Therefore, Paul tells us we should give encouragement to one another. Specifically, Paul wanted us to comfort one another with the knowledge that even through death we will be okay. As He rose from death, so shall we.

**We should encourage one another with the news of Jesus's resurrection.**

## 3. REMAIN EXPECTANT // 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17

What is something you have waited and hoped for? Many children wait and hope for Christmas. Most teenagers wait and hope for college. And some adults wait and hope to buy that first home. If the wait is too long, we may become complacent or give up waiting all together. But there is one thing, we must not give up on. Jesus has promised to return, and if

we're not careful, the delay in Jesus's return will lead us to complacency. But we must remain expectant. An expectant heart is a heart of faith. Jesus really is coming back again. Therefore, we should live in the expectation that He could return not tomorrow but today. Jesus is coming soon.

**We should live each day expecting Christ to return. He is our hope for eternity.**

## 4. DON'T LOSE HOPE // TITUS 2:11-13

Every Christmas, we celebrate the first coming of Jesus Christ. He came to earth as a baby and grew to redeem humankind from sin. Christians benefited from Jesus's first coming when we trusted Him as our Lord and Savior. Non-believers still have an opportunity to say yes to the gospel of Christ and become His followers. Those who do will spend eternity in heaven with Him. Paul reminded Titus that Jesus's first coming not only brought salvation but it instructed us how to live "sensible, righteous, and godly" lives in this present age. It is our "blessed hope"—the expectation of Jesus's second return—that compels us to do so. Live a godly life until He comes.

**Therefore, do not lose hope in the appearance of our "blessed hope."**

## 5. LOVE LETTER // MATTHEW 10:29-30

The Bible is God's "love" letter to His children. In His Word, He tells of His deep and abiding love for us. Speaking about sparrows, Jesus said, "Not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent." Jesus continued that we "are worth more than many sparrows." Jesus lets us know that because God loves and values us so much, we never need to fear personal threats and trials. He is there to catch us when we fall. God did not use only words in His love letter; He demonstrated His love. When He saw that we were in the path of a moving train, He pushed us out of the way and died for us. That's a metaphor for what He did on the cross.

**Our lives should respond to God with love and complete obedience.**



## A Lifestyle of Worship

BY KIMBERLY J. RAYBON

Webster's dictionary defines worship as "honoring or showing reverence for a divine being or supernatural power." The Hebrew definition of the word worship as found in Job 1:20 means to bow down or fall down flat. The Greek definition of this word as found in John 4:23-24 means "to kiss" or "to blow kisses at" in a token of reverence. These definitions combined, depict an honorable show of love and respect towards God. Worship requires action. It is not simply lip service or meant to be a fleeting weekly event during a certain segment of time of church service. God means for worship to be our lifestyle: an ongoing acknowledgement of His Sovereignty and our desperate need for Him (Ps. 63:1-3).

God's whole intent and purpose for creating mankind was to love mankind, to establish a family and fellowship with His beloved creation for eternity. 1 John 4:19 says, "we love because he first loved us." Because of God's great love for us, God FIRST gave us His nature through making us in His image and His likeness, (Gen 1:26), and then placing us in Eden, a place of delight, to gift mankind with not only pleasure but also purpose. Man's purpose in the garden of Eden was to keep and follow the charge of God as given in to "be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28)," to work in the garden and watch over it. God created us to steward the earth as we enjoyed His presence. As stewards, God gave mankind commandments to live by, not to control us, but to free us to fully enjoy all that He had created.

As we worship God through our obedience, blessing always ensues. For example, though Abraham had waited all his life for his promised son Isaac, when God commanded him to offer his son up as a living sacrifice, he did not falter. He did as God instructed, but in the end, God provided a ram in the bush instead (Gen. 22:13). The provision of the ram was not the only blessing that came out of Abraham's obedience. The countless number of believers and the spread of God's message of love to all who came afterwards is the extension of that initial blessing. Abraham's willingness was a foreshadow of what God did for us through sacrificing His only begotten Son for our sins. Through Jesus's obedience to sacrifice His own life for our sins, the Son is not solely blessed to now sit in heavenly places, but we along with Him (Eph. 2:6).

Worship is known by many as a certain genre of music, a particular segment of a church service, or simply synonymous with the words we say to God, however sincerely obeying God's commandments is what defines true worship. This is so because one must put God's desire before their own and do what pleases God versus what is convenient and comfortable. True worship is centering our lives around what pleases God as depicted in His Word. God means for our lives to be a constant and continuous flow and show of worship through obeying what He commanded us to do. from the beginning: to be fruitful and multiply and to tend to the garden. Having been expelled from the Garden of Eden, the garden that we are to tend today, as modern-day Christians, is the garden of our hearts. We are to break up the fallow ground of our hearts (Hos. 10:12) so that God can penetrate the stubbornness of the human will that is prone to stray away from God. However, this is difficult to do when our lives are not yielded to Him. A lifestyle of worship helps us to do as Romans 12:1 admonishes the Christian to present one's body as a living sacrifice, holy (consecrated) and pleasing (acceptable) to God which is our true worship (reasonable service). The strength to present one's body as a living sacrifice is an act of the will. This is why the next verse, Romans 12:2, warns us to not "be conformed to this age," to not to copy the

behavior and customs of this world, "but be transformed by the renewing of our minds." As we intentionally renew our minds with the Word of God, our wills yield more and more to God's will, exposing us to the abundance of His Kingdom (3 John 1:2). God, therefore, wants us to live a life of worship not only for His sake but for our own.

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