



How was your Christmas? I hope you were able to at least speak with family members, even if you were unable to see them because of covid-related matters. If you were unable to see family this year, there is a show that you can probably relate to.

[pic of Home Alone]



Kevin McCallister was so frustrated with his family that he wished he could be alone for Christmas. Because of miscommunication, poor parenting, and a nosy neighbor kid, it was assumed that Kevin was with the rest of the family. Kevin was home alone for Christmas. But as you know from the story, he had to be prepared for someone coming to his house. He had to be prepared so that he could endure through his time alone and be prepared for those who were hoping to catch him off guard. Today's text on the return of Christ calls us to endure until His return AND calls us to be prepared for his return at any moment.

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

**37 As the days of Noah were, so
the coming of the Son of Man
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 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, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

43 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.

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



No one will be able to predict the exact timing of Jesus's return.

Point 1: No one will be able to predict the exact timing of Jesus's physical, visible return.

Explanation: The return will be evident to everyone. It will be a physical, visible return. But no one knows the exact timing, not even the Son himself. Jesus limited himself in certain ways in order to be dependent on the Father and the Spirit as fully human, but he remained God the Son. He did not empty himself of his divine power and nature. He rather limited himself in certain ways. Robert Latham points out that Christian churches in different cultures tend to emphasize either the oneness of the Triune God or emphasize the three persons of the Triune God. If you tend to emphasize the points of oneness of God and the full deity of the three persons but not the three persons in relationship, then this passage may frustrate you. This is one of those teachings that remind us of the beautiful relationship between Father and Son, as the Son was determined to depend completely upon the Father. Yes, where one person of the Trinity is working, all three are working. But it is appropriate for the Father to plan the return and appropriate for the Son to return. And the Son is willing to limit his knowledge of the exact timing of his return in glad submission to the Father. If the Son does not know, neither will any of the so-called prophets who try to tell you the exact date of Jesus's return.

Illustration: In 2011, Robert Weinland predicted that Jesus would return that year. When it didn't happen, he tried to misuse 2 Peter 3:8 to say that God was taking his time and would come the next year. And again the next year when it didn't happen. He would have liked for Jesus to return because he was convicted in 2012 of tax evasion.

Some have believed that Jesus would return in the year 2000 because it was the beginning of a new millennium according to the Gregorian calendar.

Those postulating dates are not just untrustworthy tax evaders. Some credible teachers of the Bible throughout the life of the church have attempted to predict a general timeframe of Jesus's return based on historical events in comparison to signs predicted by the NT.

Application:

Jesus is making something very clear to us: You cannot predict the exact time when Jesus will return, but you are to live in preparation for it. Jesus could return any day. The signs predicted by Jesus and the apostles that precede his return can all be considered fulfilled. But the final day is still awaiting a greater fulfillment. We must live in

a tension that on the one hand expects Jesus to return at any moment and on the other hand expects to have to endure this world as his followers, even a world that is opposed to Him.

Since the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church can rightly say that we are living in the end times. But there is still a very last day that we are awaiting. Peter proclaimed a prophecy from Joel that spoke of the great and terrible day of the Lord. The pouring forth of the Spirit showed that we were in those end times, but the great day of Christ's return when judgment is settled with all people of the earth is still to come.

When that final last day comes,

Jesus will swiftly separate people into those saved and those condemned.

Point 2: Jesus will swiftly separate people into those saved and those condemned.

Argumentation: You may not feel comfortable with that understanding about Jesus, that he will return as judge. John the Baptist quotes Isaiah to say that Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, who will have a winnowing fork in his hand to separate wheat from chaff, gathering the wheat in the barn but throwing the chaff into the fire. Jesus has baptized with the Holy Spirit and used fire at Pentecost, but there is judgment from that prophetic declaration still to come when Jesus returns. In Revelation 19, John sees Jesus as a rider on a white horse. The word that comes out of his mouth is like a sharp sword to defeat the nations, over whom he reigns with an iron scepter, and whose garments are stained with blood like one who just stepped out of winepress.

In both the OT and NT God is consistently both holy and loving, both gracious and just. He will judge people in their sin, while making a way to salvation by means of his own hand. Jesus is the only way to salvation. He has died in the place of sinners, bringing salvation to all who look to him by faith. But he is also judge of all, and will declare guilty all who already stand condemned because of their rebellion and their denial of His reign.

I mentioned a few weeks ago I've been reading Chronicles of Narnia to my children. I have a few favorite characters in those books other than Aslan. One of my favorite characters is Mr. Beaver. He mentions the name of Aslan to the children and declares him to be the king of all, a lion. The children are both desirous and fearful of this Aslan they have not yet met. Then, one of the children asks him if Aslan is safe. Mr. Beaver responds, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you."

Before we talk about the imagery of the flood, let's remember that we need to have our hearts reoriented to God and His Word. In our flesh, we will want to defend and protect our supposed autonomy above all. But the Spirit fights against that mentality within us. Like Susan in Lewis's story, we need to be reminded that God's glory is to be our great concern. We can entrust ourselves to Him.

Explanation:

Jesus warns that at his return, he will separate people quickly into two groups, those that are saved and those that are condemned. Jesus compares that future cataclysmic event to the past cataclysm of the worldwide flood in Genesis when the Lord saved Noah and his family. Just as that flood came quickly, so will the judgment of Jesus's return. Just as that first flood was worldwide, so the judgment of Jesus' return will be rendered for everyone in the world. In the time of Noah, only those who were prepared before the flood were saved. Only those who are prepared before the return of Jesus by trusting in him for salvation will be saved.

I need to admit to you that Matthew 24:38 is one of the scariest verses in all of Scripture to me. It is not scary to me because of Jesus's judgment, for I have trusted in Christ for salvation. It is scary to me for how easily we can pursue daily life without any regard for God. It is scary to me for those I know who do not believe in Christ but believe they are doing good things in this world. The people in Noah's time were eating and drinking, marrying and giving away in marriage. Those are not bad things themselves. Jesus did not say they were being gluttons and drunkards. He did not say they were having sex outside of marriage. They were doing things that are natural parts of life. But the people in Noah's time were pursuing them without any regard for God. There was one man who had regard for God, who had received God's grace. He responded by preparing for God's declared judgment by staying focused on God's means of salvation. Through his message, his wife, three sons, and their wives believed and were also saved. The rest were taken, or swept away in God's torrential judgment.

Jesus is returning one day to judge between those who have life in His name and those who do not. Today, this end time that we are in, is the day of salvation. Do you know this Jesus by faith? You need to respond to his call of salvation before you die or before he returns.

People in the U.S. dismissed the idea of being affected by the Covid-19 virus in January 2020. And then it reached our shores and spread like wildfire. Some who have interacted with the virus have been fine with no symptoms. Others have had mild symptoms. Some have faced severe illness and lack of oxygen. Others have died. Everyone, regardless if you have contracted it or not, has been affected by this virus, the one we dismissed back in January.

You may dismiss the imminency of Christ's return now, but He will return. And if you have not received his free offer of salvation beforehand, you will have no recourse for a cure afterward. And there will be no escape from his final judgment. It will not apply to just 2-3%. He will call all before his judgment seat, revealing those who were truly His people and all who rejected Him.

Will you come into salvation today? Will you believe in Christ, giving Him your life?

For those who have believed, we are to live in a certain tension.

Christian, live with both the expectation of Christ's imminent return and the expectation for endurance.

Point 3: Christians, live in both the expectation of Christ's imminent return and the expectation for endurance.

Explanation: Jesus's teaching is not intended to lead us to complacency. Rather, his impending return should lead us to action. We who are able to have life because of Jesus's first advent, are to live as God's holy people who testify to the grace of God in Christ. So, we are not to walk around on high alert at all times, looking to the eastern sky anytime we hear a loud noise. But we are also not to pursue our daily tasks without regard for His return. We are to live in a certain tension. We are to live in the tension between expecting Christ's imminent return and the expectation that we must endure suffering for faith in Christ in this world.

We formerly used a word in English that helped describe such patient expectation. The adjective "longsuffering" paints a verbal picture of this patient tension.

You may not like the word tension, but it can be a good thing. There is a proper tension between driving too fast and driving too slow. We traveled back from NOVA yesterday. We saw the effects of people not respecting the proper tension of driving. One driver in particular decided to force his way into traffic without concern for the flow of traffic. His reward was having his front bumper ripped off by an Amazon truck.

There is a proper tension in balancing a budget. You need to spend in order to live, but you must make sure to save so that you do not have to go in debt.

There is a tension that we must live within if we are to live for Christ in this world with lives of worship.

Jesus says that there are those who will go about their daily tasks as those prepared for His return and there will be those who go about their daily task who are not prepared for His return. If you are in Christ as demonstrated by your faith in Him, then you are prepared for His return. So what should you do? You should pursue what He has set for you to do daily as worship for Him. Regardless if you are a man or woman, regardless if you are young or old, regardless what particular job or responsibilities you have before God as part of our society, you are to pursue good responsibilities as part of your worship of God.

So as you are programming code for I.T., as you work on wells or roads, as you care for your home and children or attend business meetings, as you balance sheets or strike new major contracts, as you teach in person or via electronic communication, as you serve in the medical field, or as you inspect or design buildings, you are to live as one expecting Christ's return at any moment. You are to be a witness to those around you who are not yet prepared for the day that the door of salvation is closed.

You are to be like Kevin McCallister who is not caught off guard by the different voice at the door. But instead of setting traps for thieves, we are to be orienting our lives to eternity, waiting for our Lord to welcome us home with Him forever.