

Lesson 8 | January 21, 2024

The King Is Coming

Study Text: Matthew 24:1 through 25:46

Central Truth: Jesus Christ came, and He will come again.

Key Verse: Matthew 24:3

Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (KJV)?

“Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world” (NLT)?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine Jesus’ teachings about His second coming and the end of the world.
- Students will commit or recommit to be ready for Jesus’ return at any time.
- Students will rejoice in the glorious inheritance awaiting every believer.

Introducing the Study

Say: Over the past several weeks, we have considered Jesus as newborn Messiah, Kingdom Teacher, faithful Master, evangelistic Sender, and Head of the Church. Our study of Matthew’s Gospel concludes today as we celebrate Jesus, our soon-coming King.

Opening Activity—Company Is Coming!

Ask: If you could invite your favorite actor, author, or musician to your house for dinner, whom would you choose? How would you prepare? Would you make extra effort because of their VIP status?

Say: Jesus promised He would one day return to earth in physical form. We don’t know when He will arrive, but thankfully, He told us how to get ready for His coming. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After triumphantly entering Jerusalem on Sunday and clearing the temple of money changers on Monday, Jesus spent the Tuesday before His crucifixion teaching in the temple. When the Pharisees and Sadducees questioned Him, “Jesus knew their evil motives” (Matthew 22:18, NLT). He denounced their hypocrisy in front of the crowds (23:1–36) and then left the temple for the last time with the words, “Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another” (24:2, NLT).

Jesus and His followers then went to the Mount of Olives, where the disciples asked Him to explain the meaning of His comments at the temple. “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

(verse 3, KJV). His answer is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25—also known as the Olivet Discourse.

Part 1—Christ Will Come Again

Signs and Fulfillment

Matthew 24:27–31

Say: Have you ever tried to take a picture of lightning? No matter how powerful the thunderstorm or how fast your reflexes, it's difficult to catch a bolt of lightning in a single frame. Jesus said His coming will be just as sudden and visible, and explained how to anticipate His return by observing the signs of the times. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Matthew 12, the religious teachers and Pharisees asked Jesus for “signs to prove [His] authority. But Jesus replied, ‘Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign’” (verses 38–39, NLT). Notice how differently He responded to His disciples’ request for another kind of sign—the sign of His coming (24:3). Rather than asking Jesus to prove His power, the disciples were asking for landmarks to signal His return. Jesus provided a lengthy, detailed answer. He wanted His followers—including us—to be prepared, promising “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (verse 13, NLT).

Although His arrival will be lightning fast, Jesus told the disciples there would be clear indications “the end is near” (verse 28, NLT). Just as people usually spot vultures flying high overhead before noticing the carcass they are circling, we will observe certain signs taking place before we see Jesus return to earth. There will be great disruption in the heavens (Isaiah 13:9–10; 34:4) and “great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11, NLT).

Then Jesus will fulfill His promise with one final sign: “The Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30, NLT; Daniel 7:13). This sign will be visible to everyone on earth, even those who are not looking for His appearing. It will indicate the time of human decision has passed. Those who are not prepared will mourn when Jesus returns, but there will be rejoicing when the angels “gather his chosen ones from all over the world” (Matthew 24:31, NLT). Many believe Jesus was moving backward in His prophetic comments in verse 31, speaking about the Rapture, or the gathering of true believers that will precede the Great Tribulation and Christ’s second coming in glory. It is important to note that Jesus’ aim in this passage was not to give an exact progression of events, times, or seasons. He frequently followed the pattern of Old Testament prophets, speaking of one aspect of His coming and then another, not always in order.

Discuss

? Why do you think Jesus waited to describe the signs of His return until He had left the temple and was alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives?

? Paul refers to the Second Coming as our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13, KJV). How does the promise of Jesus’ return give you hope?

Like the Days of Noah

Matthew 24:36–39

Say: Some days start out normal and end up being life-changing. Maybe you meet your future spouse, get a big promotion, or receive news of a family member’s death. For many people, the day Jesus returns will start like any other. By the time they realize what has happened, it will be too late to surrender their lives to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At this point, Jesus provided a straight answer to the disciples’ original question: “When will all this happen?” (Matthew 24:3, NLT). He responded, “No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen” (verse 36, NLT). Luke recorded Jesus’ later statement, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know” (Acts 1:7, NLT). While scholars have debated the exact meaning of Matthew 24:36 (particularly the nature of the Son’s knowledge), we can be sure of Jesus’ point: Humans do not—and *cannot*—know the exact timing of His return.

However, in God’s mercy, we can sense the nearness of Jesus’ coming—if, and only if, we observe the signs. Jesus compared the time of His return with the days of Noah, when “the LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil” (Genesis 6:5, NLT). Although wickedness is rampant in these last days, the purpose of Jesus’ comparison to the days of Noah was to illustrate the way people would continue to ignore the signs of what was coming. Despite Noah’s witness to the unbelievers around him during his ark-building project (Hebrews 11:7), life on earth continued as normal in the days leading up to the Flood. There were weddings and dinner parties “right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 24:38–39, NLT).

Resource Packet Item 1: Living in the End Times

Distribute the worksheet for students to take home. Encourage them to prayerfully reflect on Peter’s end-time instructions and think of ways they can put them into practice as they wait for Jesus’ return.

Discuss

? How is the attitude described in James 4:13–16 similar to Jesus’ depiction of life in the days of Noah?

? How can believers stay vigilant and live with an expectancy of the Second Coming while still taking care of the business of daily life?

Part 2—Be Prepared for Christ’s Coming

Reward for Readiness

Matthew 24:44–47

Say: Jesus used another illustration to show how important it is to get ready and stay ready for His return—which will happen “when least expected” (Matthew 24:44, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The limitations and uncertainty of travel in New Testament times meant it would have been impossible to give an exact return date when leaving on a long journey. Wealthy property owners would often entrust household affairs to diligent, reliable servants during their absence. In verse 45, Jesus describes such a servant as “faithful and wise” (KJV). This servant would be responsible for managing fellow servants and serving meals at the proper times. By conscientiously fulfilling these regular, everyday tasks, the servant would demonstrate his faithfulness.

Jesus promised this kind of servant would receive a reward for a job well done when the master returned. In fact, he would be put in charge of all the master owned. Jesus describes a similar reward in the Parable of the Talents toward the end of His discourse in Matthew 25: “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!” (verse 23, NLT). Although the two parables’ messages are different—constant readiness in chapter 24 versus faithful investment in chapter 25—the wise servant’s reward is comparable in each. As followers of Jesus, we are also promised a reward if we endure: “They will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, NLT).

Resource Packet Item 2: Heavenly Crowns

Distribute the information sheet. Review with the class the heavenly crowns promised in Scripture to faithful followers of Jesus.

Discuss

- ? What “household affairs” has God entrusted to you? How can you show yourself to be faithful and wise in these areas?
- ? How does the promise of eternal reward motivate you to serve Jesus faithfully here and now?

Punishment for Wickedness

Matthew 24:48–51

Say: Are you familiar with the childhood panic of hearing your parents come home before you finished the list of chores they’d given you? There’s an instant feeling of regret that comes from being caught unprepared with a job poorly done, halfway done, or barely even started. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus contrasted the faithful servant in His parable with another worker who was basically worthless—drawing a clear line between reward and punishment. The evil servant said “in his heart” (Matthew 24:48, KJV) that the master was not coming back soon, and soon his actions followed his thoughts. Peter warned against this kind of faithless thinking: “In the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, ‘What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?’” (2 Peter 3:3–4, NLT).

Instead of caring for his fellow workers, this evil servant misused his authority, “beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk” (Matthew 24:49, NLT). Not only was he taking advantage of his master’s perceived delay, but he was engaging in a lifestyle that dulled his ability to remain alert and ready. When the master returned with no warning, the servant was utterly unprepared.

Jesus said part of the servant’s punishment was being assigned a “place with the hypocrites” (verse 51, NLT). The word *hypocrite* (from the Greek word for “actor” or “stage-player”) indicates the servant had the outward appearance of being a business manager, but he was using the position for his own gain. So instead of enjoying the master’s blessings like the faithful servant, this evil servant would be judged. Jesus’ message is clear: When He returns, He expects to find us serving Him out of genuine love and faithfully carrying out His work.

Discuss

? Name some lifestyle choices that dull our readiness and lull us into complacency rather than keeping us alert for Jesus’ return.

? How do you respond when people question the promise of Jesus’ return?

Part 3—Inherit the Kingdom

The Final Judgment

Matthew 25:31–32

Say: When Jesus came to earth the first time, “he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being . . . he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8, NLT). But when Jesus comes to earth again, He will come with triumph and majesty. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After describing the faithful servant’s reward and the evil servant’s punishment, Jesus told two parables to underline the importance of preparing for His arrival. In the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13), five women were ready when the bridegroom arrived and joined in the marriage feast. The five who were unprepared were left outside the door, begging for it to be opened. In the Parable of the Three Servants (verses 14–30), another master left his servants in charge during his travels, entrusting each with a certain amount of money. Two invested wisely, one fearfully

buried his portion in the ground. All were judged accordingly. Again and again, Jesus emphasized the suddenness of His return and the eternal consequences at stake.

As His discourse came to an end, Jesus brought everything together with a picture of the final judgment. In verse 31, He shifted from telling parables for the sake of illustration to describing a literal future event: the Great White Throne Judgment (see Revelation 20:11–15). On that day, Jesus will sit on a throne fit for His divine glory. The angels escorting Him will bring before Him both believers and unbelievers. At this same event, Jesus will destroy the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:8), casting both him and the false prophet into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). Jesus will order Satan to be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years (20:1–3). Jesus will then set up His glorious kingdom to reign on the earth for those thousand years.

Jesus did not describe every detail of the Second Coming during the Olivet Discourse. His intent was not to establish an exact time line for the disciples (or us), but to explain the destiny of the human race and the standards by which we will be judged. When all humanity has been gathered at His throne, He will “separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:32, NLT). Only Jesus can see the state of each person’s heart, so only He is qualified to say who is righteous and who is wicked and then administer perfect justice.

Resource Packet Item 3: Sorting Things Out

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class in half, assigning one parable to each group. After the groups have read the parables and noted their symbolism, ask them to share their insights. Then discuss the questions as a class.

Discuss

? Why do you think Jesus used parables and metaphors to describe real end-time events?

? Does the thought of the Final Judgment fill you with joy or dread? How might your reaction indicate your readiness?

A Glorious Inheritance

Matthew 25:33–46

Say: When a parent leaves an inheritance to his or her child, it’s based on the relationship they share—not whether the child has earned it. Likewise, our glorious inheritance in heaven isn’t a payment for good deeds done; it’s a gift from Father to child. As Paul wrote, “Since we are his children, we are . . . heirs of God’s glory” (Romans 8:17, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The sheep at Jesus’ right hand will be the ones who belong to the Father apart from any good deeds they may have done. The works Jesus mentions in Matthew 25:35–36 are outward evidence of the salvation they had already received (James 2:14–17). Each action Jesus lists reflects the compassionate character of His own ministry. His faithful followers have reached out to “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40)—feeding the hungry,

giving water to the thirsty, showing hospitality to strangers, clothing the poor, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners.

The goats at His left hand have not done these things, signifying their estrangement from the Father and the curse already on them (John 3:18). They did not realize their indifference to the needs of other people was the same as neglecting Jesus himself.

Jesus clearly describes the destiny of each group. The unrighteous will receive punishment in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons” (Matthew 25:41, NLT). But the righteous will receive eternal life and “inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world” (verse 34, NLT). We have been given fair warning of what awaits us at the Final Judgment. We each must choose our eternal destiny.

Discuss

- ? Why are compassion and kindness signs of Kingdom living?
- ? How can you find ways to serve others—and thereby serve Jesus—this week?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: On one of the last days of His earthly ministry, Jesus devoted a great deal of time to answering His disciples’ questions about His return and the end of the world. Why? Because the stakes could not be higher. Those of us who are ready—eagerly anticipating His arrival at any moment—will receive an eternal reward. Those of us who doubt His promises or ignore the signs—failing to surrender our lives to Christ—will receive eternal punishment and be separated from Him forever.

Living It Out Ministry in Action

- Examine your heart and ask God to reveal whether you are ready for Jesus’ return.
- Demonstrate your love for Jesus by meeting someone’s physical needs this week.
- Make a list of friends, family members, and coworkers who are unbelievers. Regularly pray for the Holy Spirit to draw them to Jesus so they are prepared for His return.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The King’s First Coming.
Isaiah 7:13–14; 9:6–7

Tuesday:

The King’s Kingdom Foretold.
Daniel 7:9–14

Wednesday:

The King’s Second Coming.
Zechariah 14:4–9

Thursday:

The King’s Kingdom Is Now.

Luke 17:20–21; Romans 14:17

Friday:

The King's Kingdom Will Come.

Luke 22:14–20, 28–30

Saturday:

The King's Kingdom Is Forever.

Revelation 11:15–19