

# No-One Knows

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn again with me to Matthew chapter 24 and verse 36. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When our cat was young, its curiosity nearly killed it. It was fascinated by the fire in the living room. All it wanted to do was climb over the coals and get up that chimney.

Not only did it get very sooty in the process, but it really was a rather dangerous thing to do, especially in wintertime when we tended to put the fire on. It's well said that curiosity killed the cat. But then it's not only cats which are curious. Human beings, we're a most curious race. And our curiosity itself, a very good thing and an instinct given to us by God himself, can sometimes get us into trouble.

[ 1 : 22 ] It can make us climb over coals and send us up sooty chimneys. Now one such area in which our curiosity can get us into trouble is when it comes to trying to place an exact date upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After all, the consistent teaching of the Bible is that Jesus is coming again. Not this time in the weakness of a helpless child, but in the glory of his Father's majesty.

But in Matthew 24 verse 36, Jesus himself says, No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.

And when Jesus says no one, his only exception is his Father in heaven. The angels don't know. He as mediator does not know.

Far less do or can we know. Of course, that doesn't stop us as curious human beings from trying to draw up calendars, predicting the exact time of his appearing.

[ 2 : 36 ] Over the centuries, Christians have predicted he'll come on such and such a date, only for him to elude them. The truth is, as we saw last week, all the conditions for his coming, having already been fulfilled, we simply do not know when he is coming again.

He could come at any time. An over-curious speculation on our part can get us into trouble. When in Matthew 24, 36 through 51, Jesus has no intention of answering that question, When am I coming again?

Rather, he's answering the question, In the light of my coming again, How should you live? How should you live? In this crucial passage of Scripture, we learn two things.

First of all, we don't know when Jesus is coming again, verses 36 through 41. But secondly, we know what we must do, verses 42 to 51. Our curiosity, rather than being trained toward the pointless and fruitless task of trying to predict the exact time of his appearing, should be focused on asking how, in the light of his imminent coming, we should live today.

First of all, we do not know when, verses 36 through 41. We do not know when. Jesus begins his discussion in this passage by saying, No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

[ 4 : 18 ] No one. Do you hear that? No one. Stop trying to draw up a calendar. Stop trying to use world events to predict the exact time of Jesus appearing. Stop trying to make out that the stars on the flag of the European Union represent the crown of Antichrist.

Stop trying to use the internal politics of the nation of Israel as a calculator. No one knows when Christ will come again. Be satisfied with the knowledge that first, he is coming again.

Second, we can't know when he's coming again. And third, he could come at any time. He is not dependent upon the political or social condition of nations.

He's working to his own time scale, entirely motivated by his own patience in giving this world time to repent and turn to him.

Let me say that again. We are to be satisfied with the knowledge, first, he is coming again. Second, we can't know when he's going to come. And third, he could come at any time.

[ 5 : 24 ] I suspect that overthinking this subject isn't something which we, in our tradition, are guilty of.

In fact, I suspect that we don't think much about his second coming at all. It just doesn't register in the list of things which are important to us, in the list of the here and now of mundane life.

And I know I'm at risk of contradicting myself here, but it may well be a more dangerous thing to live as though Jesus was not returning than to be over curious about the time of his return.

But let me say it again. He is coming again and he could come at any time. In verses 36 through 41, Jesus uses the image of the people in Noah's day.

One of the key phrases in this passage is, they did not know. It is repeated five times in verse 36, 39, 42, 43, and 50.

[ 6 : 33 ] They did not know. That's the point. They did not know. And we do not know when he shall come again. But one thing is for sure as we read in verse 44, he shall come at an hour we do not expect him.

So picture the scene. Noah, who is in other places called a preacher of righteousness, warns the people of his land that God is about to send a flood.

And they laugh at him. And they carry on as normal. They can't hear the sound of rain on their windows and none of the rivers have burst their banks. There is on the surface of things no physical indication of impending judgment.

So they just carry on as normal, doing what normal people do. And they're eating and they're drinking and they're marrying and they're being given in marriage because that's what normal people do. If they had believed Noah, things would have been very different for them, but they didn't.

So plus a change. Perhaps they laughed when Noah and the other seven people went into the ark and shut the door. What a ridiculous thing to do. You see, they did not know because there was no physical evidence of the truth of what Noah was saying.

[ 7 : 49 ] Then the flood came and it was too late for them to repent. They didn't know and then it was too late. If there had been climatologists studying the atmosphere from a satellite, they would still not have been able to predict the impending judgment.

There was absolutely no way, that's Jesus' point, of predicting from the physical world what was about to happen. All the people had to go on was the word of Noah.

A word they rejected. And thus says Jesus, it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man. There will be absolutely no physical indicators of his reappearance.

Scientists will not detect any climatic or seismic change in the days preceding his coming. it will happen at a time and an hour when we do not because we cannot know.

Everyone will just be getting on with normal life, eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage or whatever happens these days when all of a sudden the majestic Christ shall appear in the sky at the head of a host of angels and the trumpet of God shall sound.

[ 9 : 11 ] verses 40 and 41 have been used to justify what belief in what some people call the rapture namely that before the second coming of Christ he shall take his people out of the world they shall disappear.

Films have been made on the subject and people have panicked that if the rapture should happen while they're on a transatlantic flight and the pilots are taken the plane will crash. And whilst not wishing to minimise these pre-millennial Christians sincerely held beliefs I'd respectfully suggest that verses 40 to 41 and their talk of one being taken away and the other left is Jesus reinforcement of the principle that we simply do not know when he shall return.

One might expect that if we knew when such a cataclysmic event was going to take place we wouldn't bother going out into the fields to look after our livestock. We wouldn't bother grinding with a handmill.

We'd have better things to do like watching for his coming. Perhaps we'd set up viewing platforms on the top of tall buildings and we'd charge people to come into our parousia parties.

There'll be nothing like this at all. His return will be so sudden and we simply do not know when it shall be. We don't know the millennium.

[10:41] We don't know the century. We don't know the decade. We don't know the year. We don't know the month. We don't know the week. We don't know the day. We don't know the hour. We don't know the minute. We don't know the second.

All the conditions have already been met so he could come at any time. Let's translate this into our lives. People are going to be doing the ironing and Jesus will come.

people will be watching strictly or the x factor and Jesus will come they'll be at their office desks and Jesus will come in no way am I trivializing this at all I'm just telling you the way it is he will come when we least expect him from an early Christian age I had always known this intellectually but I remember the first time it hit me hard just before I got married I was walking down a dark street in the south of London where we lived and I suddenly realized that when Christ comes again the dark sky above me with all of its stars will be torn apart and I will see the majestic glory of the exalted Christ at the head of a million angels with my own two eyes what a sight and this could happen at any time yes even before this service is finished the roof of the sanctuary would be no barrier to us beholding the effulgent glory of the son of man as he appears in the sky he could come at any time this afternoon I want you to reflect on that truth that before this day is out the Lord may have returned that the sea and the sky as we have known them will be no more that the light of heaven's glory shall shine in all this earth's darkness and Jesus himself will appear again I figure that such a reality doesn't really reckon in our mindsets lest I propose our priorities would be very different from what they are now let what happened to me on that dark south London street happen to you let the parousia the second coming the glorious appearing of Christ overwhelm your mind and your senses your heart and your imagination we do not know when second we know what we must do verses 42 through 51 we know what we must do remember the three things we know Jesus is coming again we can't know when he's coming again he could come at any time the hour is coming when the exalted Christ shall split the sky and he'll appear in glory curiosity killed the cat so we shouldn't try to use the politics of nations as the determining factor as to a calendar date for his return but if that's true what of his return possible difference does it make to us in our day-to-day lives as Christians to know that Jesus is coming again that we can't know when he's coming again but that he could come at any time surely this truth must have an impact upon us one way or another well between verses 42 and 51 Jesus uses two pictures to illustrate what our response should be to the knowledge of his coming that first he's coming again that second we can't know when he's coming again and third he'd come at any time the two responses are in verses 42 and 43 be awake and second in verses 44 through 51 be ready be awake be ready be awake first of all the first picture in verses 42 and 43 the first picture in the first picture in the first place the illustration is self-explanatory a householder had his house broken into by a thief the problem you see is that he did not think he was going to be broken into in the first place

he hadn't put the right security measures in place to ensure that the thief if he did come he would not get in he said to himself it's never going to happen to me so he was quite happy to leave his house insecure and go to bed but in the middle of the night while he was fast asleep the thief came he acted this man as though it wouldn't happen to him but it did well again perhaps we can change the picture slightly perhaps this owner knew there was a thief in the neighborhood he knew that the thief was targeting his house but he did not know the precise time at which the thief would strike so he stayed as long he stayed awake for as long as he possibly could one o'clock two o'clock three o'clock in the morning but finally overcome with weightiness he fell asleep and it's while he was asleep the thief robbed his house he couldn't stay awake any longer to use our time skills he'd been awake all day but at four of the morning when he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer he fell asleep and the thief struck the householder did not know at what time the thief would come and so he fell asleep he did not stay awake and Jesus says therefore keep watch you do not know on what day your Lord will come we know he's coming again we know that all the conditions for his coming again have already been met we know that we cannot know the time of Jesus' return it could be any time and by that I mean at a time we do not expect him to return

Jesus says to us you do not know on what day your Lord will come and if that's so then we have to be awake we must keep watch because he could come at any any time we must not be lazy or fall asleep pretending as though Jesus will never come again though we do not know when to expect him when he comes he must find us expecting him anyway as I said earlier I suspect that most of

us do not live in the expectation of Christ's imminent return that we're asleep to the reality of his parousia we're not watching for him anymore if we were do not suppose we'd have far more urgency in our evangelism far more purity in our holiness far more sacrifice in our love for one another the word Jesus uses which the NIV translates well as keep watch is the same from that same word as that from which we get the Christian name Gregory

[18:08] Gregory is the one who watches we know that music style called Gregorian chanting some of us might even find it kind of fascinating in Matthew 24 Jesus is calling us to Gregorian expectation Gregorian expectation we do not know when he's coming again that's all the more reason to be more watchful as we wait for him second picture and with this we're finished be ready from verses 44 to 51 be ready here's a household steward he is called upon to faithfully fulfill his duty while his master is away on a long journey he's got the run of his master's house and he's got to faithfully provide for his master's whole household that's what he has to do so Jesus runs past us two scenarios the first is how the master returns and finds his servant running his house well in that case the servant shall approve himself trustworthy and the master shall put him in charge of all his possessions the second is the master returns and finds utter chaos his junior servants have all been beaten the senior servant who he entrusted with running his house is eating drinking with drunkards and is flat out under the table in that case the master of the house will cast that senior servant out of the household and into the darkness given the three things we're sure of namely

Jesus is coming again second we don't know when Jesus is coming again and third he could come at any time which of these two scenarios do we want to face for ourselves it's a little bit like what life was like for me when I was a student in Aberdeen I stayed in my own flat and when my parents phoned me to tell me they were coming to visit me I made sure that the flat was hoovered the bed sheets were washed and that the overflowing ashtrays were hidden before they came thankfully they only came unannounced once I still know of some mature men in the congregation who hide certain things when it comes time for their parents to come and stay I know who you are I used to hide things when I was a student because I didn't want my parents to know everything about the way

I lived my life I thought they'd be disappointed by me so when I knew they were coming I put on a bit of an act and I played the good boy I even went to classes I've heard many people who were brought up in the church but are now living a shall we say dangerous life saying you know I've got time for God I'll get serious about God in my old age what they're basically saying is they think they have time to sort themselves out before they meet God face to face just like I had I thought I had time to sort my flat out before my parents arrived to visit me so they think they've got time to sort their lives out before they meet with God do you think in the second scenario if the wicked servant had known what time his master's servant his master was going to return he would have sorted everything out so that when the master came back he'd find everything as it should be do you think do you think he knew when his master would return that's the way it is with us you know some people think they've got time to sort stuff out before the end on the other hand some weird and wacky cults have proposed the return of Christ on a particular date and on the run up to that date cult members have sold all their property and they've given up their jobs and they've joined together to await the climactic second coming of Christ on some great mountain only to be deeply disappointed disenfranchised and suicidal when their leaders prophecies prove to be false Jesus teaching here is that like the good servant who runs his master's house well we should always be ready for Christ to return and what does that look like what does it look like to always be ready for Christ to return what does that look like it means to get on with life as normal faithfully living for Christ today as though it were our last day it means to faithfully love our wives wife wife and families it means it means to be honest and diligent in the workplace it means to be a kind and law abiding citizen it means to be committed about and contributing to the church it means living with Christ every day playing our a game every day we should need no special effort to tidy up our lives because the truth is we don't know when Christ shall come again when Christ returns will he find us faithfully discharging the responsibilities and duties he's placed in our way depending upon his grace living in accordance with his word will he find us hard at work in our studies university will he find us forgiving others even as he has forgiven us will he find us loving our wife and loving our world in other words will he find us living a normal

Christian life because that's what it means to be ready for his return the alternative is unthinkable that he should return and find us denying him living in hatred be lazy listen leave the curiosity to the

cat stop trying to figure out when Jesus is coming again concentrate instead on these three truths he's coming again we cannot know when he's coming again he could come at any time if we want to be curious about anything let's be far more diligent about living a normal Christian life here and now trusting in Jesus for salvation living for Jesus in grace waiting for Jesus in hope let's be awake let's be ready let's pray we thank you Lord for the teaching of your word we thank you for how much this teaching must have meant to these first century

[ 25 : 31 ] Christian Jews who were the recipients of Matthew's letter they were living horrible lives of poverty and persecution for them to know that their Lord was watching and their Lord knew and their Lord was coming what a comfort it must have been father give us a South London experience every one of us that we'd recognize that this world isn't all that is in fact a time is coming it may come before the end of this service when we shall see the face of our Saviour not bloodied and scarred by the cross but shining like the sun in all its brilliance help us to trust in him then for salvation to live for him in grace and to hope for him in patience in Christ's name we pray Amen