

TRINITY LECTURE 2 - Bible Study

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[0:00] prepared for every good work. So we pray tonight that your word in our lives will be effective, working in us through your spirit, that we may indeed be ready to meet Jesus when he returns.

For we ask this in his name. Amen. Probably most of you at one stage or another, probably many years ago, but maybe recently, have played musical chairs. When the music stops, everybody runs to the nearest chair and sits down.

And of course, the thrust of the game is there's always one or more less chairs than people. And so people get eliminated from the game. Remember the nerves when you played that game.

The music's going and you're going around in the circle, but you've got an eye on the chair and you suddenly think the music's stopping. So you're, you're very tense. And then you quickly want to move to the next chair. You're, you're on, on tenterhooks all the time, ready for the music to stop so that you can make a dive for the chair and send other people flying across the floor and so on.

You knew the music would stop, but not when. Well, Jesus' second coming is not a game. Firstly, nor is it a competition. No one wins. It's not the first in wins. But like in that game, we are to be constantly ready, always ready at every minute and second for the possibility of Jesus' return.

[1:38] We know he will come, but not when. Like in the game, we know the music will stop, but not when. Now, over the last two nights, we've been looking at the earlier part of this chapter, Matthew 24.

We've seen that the whole chapter comes out of or derives from the questions that the disciples ask of Jesus as they've left Jerusalem and gone up onto the Mount of Olives. Jesus has provocatively said, see all these stones of this great Jerusalem temple, one of the greatest buildings of the ancient world. Truly, I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another. All will be thrown down.

And the two questions that the disciples then ask after presumably pondering while they walk onto the Mount of Olives, tell us when this will be. And then secondly, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And we've seen over the last two nights that Jesus has given various signs of or rather of events that will occur in the lead up both to the destruction of the temple and of his return. Things like wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, the spread of the gospel, opposition, persecution, false messiahs and false prophets and so on. But he's made it very clear that these events, these signs, indeed the overthrow of the Jerusalem temple itself does not in any way give us the answer to when. Because Jesus' issue in this chapter is not knowing a time or a date or a season, however precise or vague, the issue is, will we be ready? And that issue comes even stronger to the fore in tonight's passage, the last part of chapter 24. Jesus says in verse 32, from the fig tree, learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also when you see all these things, you know that he is near at the very gates. Now most trees in Palestine are evergreen, not all though, and a fig tree is one of the few that is not. And so as summer approaches, the twigs, the branches become more tender as the sap begins to run freely through it. And gradually you see the little sprouts ready for leaves to come to show that summer is on the way. Now that's the simple lesson that verse 32 is saying. Just like as you observe for us, perhaps these days and weeks, we might say we can see little bits of pink blossom on trees along some streets.

We know that spring is on the way. That's what Jesus is saying. You know that summer is near. And so that's the analogy for the things that he's been describing thus far in the chapter.

When you see these things happen, you know that Jesus is near. It's a sign of the end. That is, what he's saying is that everything is in readiness. All the things that he's spoken about already to this point are already occurring or have already occurred. That is, they're signs that were fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem and they're signs that in many respects are fulfilled in virtually every generation. That is, everything that needs to be done has been done before Jesus returns. He's near. Nothing more needs to happen. And from the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, which occurred 70 AD, 40 years or so after Jesus spoke these words, nothing more in a sense needs to happen before Jesus returns. He then says in verse 34, one of the problem verses of this chapter, truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

[5 : 50] And there are many who think Jesus has got it wrong because he hasn't yet returned and that generation has passed away. But if we're careful about what verse 34 refers to, we see that he hasn't got it wrong. He's not referring to his return within the generation in which he spoke. He's referring to the other events that lead up to his return. That is within that generation to which he addresses the wars, the rumors of wars, the famines, the earthquakes, the false messiahs, the false prophets, the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, as Paul says in Romans 10, and the destruction of Jerusalem all occur within a generation, within 40 years, which is the biblical length of a generation in many respects. They have already occurred within the generation to which he addresses. He's not talking about his actual return, but the events leading up to it. So that's that problem verse in 34 that so many think means that Jesus was expecting that he would come back within 40 years. Not quite so.

And he wants to make very clear that what he's saying here is very important. Verse 35 underscores that.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. My words of the previous verse and the previous verses in general. Jesus is in fact lifting his own words onto the level of God's words that never pass away, as some verses in the Old Testament make clear. And he's underscoring the certainty of what he says. It's not just some perhaps imagining of the future. He's saying with certainty, these things will happen. The Jerusalem temple will be overthrown all within a generation. All that then needs to be done before the end when he returns will be ready. You can be certain about that. But as he goes on to make clear in verse 36, certainty does not tell us a time or a day. About that day and hour, no one knows.

Neither the angels of heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. The lack of Jesus' knowledge does not in any way compromise his divinity. The Father knows this time. And there are some clever scholars who try to say, or some people in history who try to say, well, we may not know the day and the hour, but God has told me the month and the year.

Well, that's a casuistry that should be just torn up and thrown in the rubbish bin straight away. About the day, the hour, the season, we don't know anything really about Jesus' return, except that everything that needs to happen before it has already been fulfilled. It could happen at any time, time, is what Jesus is saying here. And he doesn't even know the time.

[8 : 59] And how blasphemous it is when human beings of later generations claim that somehow they know the time, the hour, the day, the month. And in every century of church history, there are people who claim such knowledge, beyond which even Jesus had.

Such people should be ignored, indeed rebuked, for such blasphemous behavior. Jesus goes on to draw an analogy with the times of Noah, in verse 37 onwards.

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days, before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

In one sense, there's nothing wrong per se with eating, drinking and getting married and so on, those activities. But about the people in general of Noah's day, they're totally absorbed in daily life, in living for the here and now.

They've got no understanding of God. God's going to punish them in the flood for their unrighteousness and so on. They have no expectation of the flood to come until it came.

[10 : 18] And so Jesus is likening that act of judgment in Genesis chapter 6 onwards, with his return as an act of judgment against this world. And just as in the flood, judgment in general, but some were saved, so will be the case when he returns on that final day.

There is, in a sense, a division. In the flood, it was a division between those on the ark and those not on the ark. So on the final day will there be a division through humanity of those who trust in and know the Lord Jesus Christ and those who do not, who are absorbed in daily life, have no concern for God and no expectation of the return of Jesus.

And it's a division in humanity that will go down between families, between friends, between colleagues and neighbours. It will go down every bond, in effect, that you can imagine on earth.

See how he describes this in verse 40 and 41. Two will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left. Jesus is not arguing here that there will always, in every case, if there's two people, one will go one way and one the other, but he's giving general examples.

Two women, in verse 41, will be grinding mill together, an activity that required two women to sit opposite each other, turning millstones. One will be taken and one will be left, he says in verse 41.

[11:45] It's unclear here whether the ones who are taken are taken to heaven or the ones who, and the ones left will be judged, or the other way around.

Those who are taken are taken to judgment and the ones left are saved. That's not the issue of what Jesus is saying. And it is a statement here that is far too weak to even give credence or foundation for a view of a rapture.

You know, those scary sort of left-behind type novels where all of a sudden cars lose their drivers as they're plummeting down motorways and freeways because of this rapture and some are taken. That is, the ones who are taken here may not even be taken to salvation.

It may be judgment. We shouldn't read too much into this verse. And especially if you remember back to last night when we saw back in verse 27, for example, as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

That is, this is not a verse, this one taken, one left, that lends itself to a secret rapture that somehow all of a sudden Christians disappear from the earth.

[12:56] You can't sustain that from this chapter at all. When Jesus return, as we saw last night, it will be public and evident and everybody will know, including those who have no faith.

They will know that this is Jesus who has returned. Now, Jesus is not wishing to strike uncertainty or fear into his followers and disciples here.

He's rather teaching a practical lesson. Verse 42 gives the imperative of this lesson, the command, keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Keep awake. Be ready. Be alert. Of course, he's not speaking literally that we should never go to bed and close our eyes.

But spiritually speaking, he's saying, keep awake all the time, anticipating at any time the return of Jesus.

[14:02] Just as in musical chairs, that constant state of readiness or vigilance. And what follows through the rest of this chapter and indeed into chapter 25 are four parables that deal with issues of readiness.

The first couple, the first parable, verses 43 and 4, deal with the unexpected nature of Jesus' return. And we might say that the next parable, the last that we'll deal with tonight at the end of this chapter, deals with someone for whom Jesus' return is sooner than expected and into chapter 5 it's someone for whom Jesus' return is later than expected and then the fourth parable deals with the general issue of what is readiness and good stewardship at the same time.

Well, in my lifetime I've been burgled a number of times and not once have I had advance notice of that.

Not once has there been a note left under my doormat saying tomorrow night I'd be grateful if you're not going to be home because I'm going to come and burgle your house. That's never happened in my life and it would be an odd thief that does that.

It's the sort of thing you might read in the odd spot in the age occasionally if a thief ever did that. I've never noticed that. That is, we never know when a thief is coming. The whole point of that is that they come unannounced, unexpectedly.

[15:32] We can never in a sense anticipate when a thief will come. Now Jesus is not a thief. The analogy or the parable is not in any way trying to suggest that Jesus is like a thief in moral character.

The simple point of the analogy is the unexpected arrival of a thief and of Jesus' return when he comes. So verses 43 and 4 say but understand this if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. We don't know when. We don't know the time.

And so often as we know in history people have tried to come up with dates and times. Tried to find codes and clues to come up with a date. Well may we ask why doesn't God give us a date so that I can make sure I'm ready?

Wouldn't we be better prepared? As I said two nights ago students would hate it if I told them they had an exam but I'm not going to tell you the date of the exam.

[16:51] I'll just walk into the class and tell you today's the day. They'd object. I'm probably not allowed to do it. Anyway. But we know from students examples that when they do know the date of the exam what does it mean?

That they laze around for 11 months of the year and the two nights before the exam they don't get any sleep at all. Do they actually learn better? Are they really well prepared?

It's the same with Christmas shopping. So many people go and do their Christmas shopping on the last few days before Christmas. Inevitably I do and I keep thinking what a stupid thing this is.

The shops are busy. Why don't I go when they're not busy like in June or something like that? See God knows what we're like and if he gave us a date he'd know that we'd idle away in godlessness our lives with perhaps a last frantic flurry in the few minutes before Jesus returns.

But you see that's not what God wants from our life. He wants us to be ready at the point of Jesus' return but just as much he wants us to be ready living godly lives throughout all our life up to the final day.

[18:05] And if he gave us a date I'd be sure that we'd be very slack even slacker than we are as Christians because we think I've got plenty of time to wait. Well the final paragraph of this chapter the final paragraph of this chapter too is verses 45 to 51.

Here we find a contrast between two people as Jesus continues to teach what it means to be ready. Who then is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has put in charge of his household to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?

Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. again the sense is of an unexpected return of the master and the blessedness will come when that slave is just doing his work as he ought as instructed by his master when the master returns.

Not you see the point being he's working right at the point when the master returns not just that but that he's actually just doing his work as he ought to and therefore he's found doing his work when the master returns.

He's blessed or even rewarded we might say. Truly I tell you he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. Now though the analogy in one sense applies to leadership of a slave who's put over other slaves the analogy is actually more general than that.

[19:41] It's about Christians exercising their gifts, their calls to ministry, to service, their godly character etc. etc. in their daily lives whatever their daily lives involve.

It's to be about the Lord's work to honour the Lord in all that we do all through our lives so that whenever he returns that is how he'll find us. Serving him with the gifts that God has given us etc.

Now the contrast is with the person who's not ready. The wicked slave says in verse 48 to himself, my master is delayed. That is, this is a person for whom the return of Jesus comes sooner than expected.

And he begins to beat his fellow slaves. He eats, he drinks with drunkards. This is someone who thinks he can get away with it because his master isn't coming back for some time.

He's like the school kids in the classroom when the teacher goes out of the room and they start throwing things at each other and kicking each other and pulling their hair and they think they're safe because the teacher's not there. Some get sprung when he comes back or she comes back.

[20 : 53] They're like teenagers when the parents go out for the night or go away on holidays and things like that. He's a person who's living selfishly, indulgently, unlovingly, the opposite of godly living.

That is, this is somebody for whom his life is separate from any expectation of Jesus' return. That's the issue you see about being ready. Not just that we happen to fluke it that at the very point of Jesus' return we're ready, but that our lives are consistently ready, demonstrated by godly service in whatever way God has called us to live.

The opposite of this wicked slave here in verses 48 and 49. Too many Christians, and perhaps even more and more in these modern times, live as if Christ is not returning.

They think they've got plenty of time to get their affairs right at the end of their life. They've got a weak view of godliness and a weak view of repentance, a weak view of Jesus' return and judgment as well.

And more and more it seems to me that as the modern church ignores the doctrine of Jesus' return and ignores doctrines of judgment, retirement, then we will be less and less prepared and ready for the return of Jesus.

[22 : 17] Too many Christians spend more time preparing for retirement than they do for the Jesus' return. Jesus is warning us here very severely as we'll see in these last verses, don't be caught out.

Jesus is coming at any time. We do not and will not and cannot know the precise time but that doesn't matter. We know that everything that is needed to be done already has been done before Jesus' return.

We can't say this has got to happen or that's got to happen therefore Jesus isn't coming for some time yet not at all. This parable is warning us that very thing. And we don't want to fool ourselves that just because 2,000 years nearly have passed since Jesus spoke these words that somehow we think another 1,000 or 2,000 or more years will pass.

That's living in a fool's paradise. For if Christ returns and we are not ready there are no second chances. There is no final time then to repent.

See what verses 50 and 51 say. The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. Will he give him a second chance?

[23 : 34] He will cut him in pieces. And put him with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Cut off from God forever.

A description of hell that is a place we want to avoid at all costs. As I say, Jesus' return does not figure largely in Christian thinking these days, apart from trying to calculate or devise a date.

And most of us really live almost oblivious to its possibility and imminence. We must recapture the biblical gospel if we are to live with an expectation of Jesus' return.

To the extent that we go down a liberal theology track denying judgment, we will not be ready for his return. To the extent that we go down a prosperity gospel track, so that we think that all of God's blessings for us are somehow concertinaed into this life, we will never be expecting Jesus' return.

But the Bible pulls no punches. Jesus is coming on a final day at any time, and he's coming to judge, to separate, to divide humanity as happened at the time of Noah's flood.

[25 : 00] And if we are not ready, the consequences are dire. Don't be fooled by denial of judgment.

Don't be fooled by a doctrine of universalism that all will go to heaven anyway. Don't be fooled by a gospel that looks for blessings only in this life.

heed Jesus' words and his warnings. It's not about times and dates. It's about ongoing, godly service, loving work and labor for the Lord every day of our life, in whatever avenue of life he's called us to serve him in.

Jesus said he's coming back and he tells no lies. He said he will judge and he tells no lies. He will gather his own people but he will cast out the rest.

He tells no lies. And though heaven and earth may pass away, his words do not. Get ready, stay ready, for he is coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

[26:22] Come, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.