

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide
Matthew 24: 36-44 “Expect the Unexpected”

History, Culture, & Context

In this section of the Book of Matthew, Jesus is teaching His disciples that the exact day and hour of His return on earth is known only to God. Verse 36 says, “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” The term “that day” refers to the day of judgement, which we see throughout the Book of Matthew (7:22, 24:42, 44; 25:31-4) and Zechariah 14.

Jewish teachers debated if the Second Coming, or “Day of Redemption” (Ephesians 4:30 and Philippians 3:20-21; and 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) was set by God since the very beginning or if human actions will determine this. Regardless of their speculations, translations and calculations to determine when this day will be, Jesus addresses the issue here in verse 36.

In verses 37-39, Jesus mentions the days of Noah to highlight how unexpected the flood was and how the people (except Noah and his family) were caught off guard and unprepared. Jesus is again trying to shift the discussion from when He will return to what we need to do in the meantime to prepare for this event.

In verses 40-44, Christ gives more metaphors as examples for being prepared for the coming of the Son of Man. In verse 41 we read, “Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.” According to the NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, “Many Galilean homes shared a common courtyard with other families, and housewives worked together at a common millstone. The implication here is that, despite the closest of associations, one is taken (to judgement, v. 39) but the other is spared.”



Greek Icon Depicting the Second Coming.

This section concludes with “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.”

Questions to Consider

1. What is the benefit to us in *not* knowing exactly when Christ will return? What do you think is God’s purpose for this (see vv. 42-44)?
2. What must we do to prepare for the day the Lord returns?
3. How will Christ’s Second Coming differ from His first?
4. What do you think is the significance for reading this passage during Advent?