

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Expecting the Unexpected” (from the Advent sermon series)

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44 (The Necessity of Watchfulness)

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- 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.”
- 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.”

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- The season of Advent was instituted as a part of the liturgical calendar of the church in the 5th century. Advent is to Christmas, what Lent is to Easter. It is a time of penitence, spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord and a time to contemplate and anticipate the numerous ways God seeks to enter our existence.
- One of the primary focuses of Advent is on what is known as “the second coming.”
- From *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*: “Our lives are defined by opportunities, even the ones that we miss.” In the text today Jesus is giving a warning about missed opportunities. For Advent, we can become so busy making a living that we forget to make a life.
- Today’s text in Matthew seems to start at the ending...it is known as “the little apocalypse.” Jesus is taking the lid off of the future and makes clear that there will be an end, however, we are not to know when this “deadline” will be. We seem to need deadlines because we tend to procrastinate and put off what needs to be done.
- Preparation is key: Spiritual preparation is the key to being alert to the coming of God.
- It is interesting how much of life is spent getting ready for life...it takes about 22 minutes to get married but a year to plan for the wedding!
- “Winging it”: if it’s not worthy of preparation then it’s not worthy of presentation! You cannot “wing” your way through life or Advent. Through faith and discipleship, it takes courage, vigilance, discipline, practice, perseverance.
 - How do you get ready for an unknown deadline such as the second coming?
- In today’s text, Jesus gives the example of Noah. While the whole world was preoccupied with living as usual, Noah was building an ark. When the storm came, it was too late to start preparing.
- Jesus then gives an example of a burglar that comes in the night.
- The three parables that follow this text help to support His message. Five bridesmaids don’t have enough oil for their lamps, so when the bridegroom comes unexpectedly, they miss out! When the shepherd comes, he divides the goats from the sheep. The basis of the division is when you clothe a needy stranger or needy person, you do so for Christ. Missed opportunities define life and eternal life equally! Not everything has a next time.
- The hope is that life is not defined by what we missed, but by what you gained as you get ready for His coming! It is time to live on *ready*!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- 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)?
- What must we do to prepare for the day the Lord returns?
- How will Christ's Second Coming differ from His first?
- What do you think is the significance for reading this passage during Advent?
- Considering the text in Matthew, how do we get ready for an "indefinite deadline"? How do we avoid being spiritually "lethargic" or "inattentive" in our faith? (See Romans 13:11-14)



NOTES

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