

Jesus Will Reign

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*So you also must
be ready, because
the Son of Man
will come at an
hour when you do
not expect him.*

MATTHEW 24:44

Questions arise with the first word of this passage: “Immediately”!

Most of the rest of the content in verses 29–31 has almost always been understood to describe Christ’s return, depicted poetically in the language of Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 as involving cosmic upheaval. (Some have instead taken it as a sort of invisible coming of Jesus in judgment through Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70—though the idea of gathering the elect from one corner of the world to another doesn’t fit that interpretation.)

When will Christ come back? This message on the Mount of Olives was provoked by Jesus’ disciples asking him when he would come back (Matt. 24:3). He itemized a long list of what must happen first (vv. 4–26) and now says, in essence, “Watch for these things to know when my coming is near,” just as a fig tree in leaf portends the arrival of summer.



Examples of all “these things” occurred by A.D. 70, so the church in every generation since has believed it might see his return. Jesus is not saying he will return in the disciples’ lifetime, merely that all the preparatory events will have occurred. “These things” in verse 34 have to be the same as “these things” in verse 33—which show that Christ’s return “is near” but not yet here. So they can’t include his actual return—just the signs that prepared for his return. When he returns, he will no longer be merely “near, right at the door,” but he will have arrived!

We can’t know the precise timing of all this, so we must always be prepared. Those who aren’t will be caught off guard by the suddenness and surprise of the final events. If we remain alert at all times, we don’t have to worry about a midnight burglar. Of course, Jesus isn’t coming back to steal anything from us; it is the idea of *unexpectedness* he’s highlighting in this comparison.

But what about “immediately after the distress of those days”? Perhaps the distress here is the distress that characterizes the entire period between Christ’s two comings. After all, 2 Timothy 3:12 promises persecution to all the godly (even amid the many joyous moments in the Christian life).

However we interpret it, here is testimony to Jesus as the Mighty God who will put all things right in his perfect timing. Today, many Christians have recovered the biblical call for justice in this life, and rightly so—we should do all we can to help others. But war, sickness, natural disaster, injury and disability, poverty, and broken relationships all require us to ultimately trust God for *complete* restitution and restoration in eternity.

Contemplate

Matthew 24:29–44.

What questions does this passage raise for you? What feelings does it stir up? Pray, reflecting on how it points your focus toward Jesus’ might and power.