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The Certain, Unexpected Return of Christ; Matt 24:36-51
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Introduction – I came to faith in Christ as a 15 year old freshman on Dec 27, 1987. Shortly after I became a true believer and follower of Christ, a new buzz rumbled through the evangelical world, as is often the case from time to time.

Edgar Whisenant, a NASA engineer, claimed that having studied the Bible he could predict with unquestionable certainty that the rapture would occur in 1988, sometime between Sept 11th and 13th. He published a book entitled 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988. 300,000 free copies were sent to ministers across America. Another 4.5 million were sold in stores. As the date drew closer, TBN offered programming to provide special instructions on how to prepare for the rapture.

Whisenant was quoted as saying, “Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong” and “I would stake my life on Rosh Hashana 88.” When the date arrived it was reported that people sat in lawn chairs in their front yards waiting on the rapture. And of course, Sept 11-13, 1988 came and went without the rapture. Whisenant would go on to correct his figures and predict the rapture in 1989, 1993, and 1994, each time with decreasing attention and book sales. I don’t know if he ever admitted to being wrong and misleading thousands of people. Talk about false prophets.

I remember when I first encountered this teaching as a young believer who had just been saved. My first thought was, “Good night, I barely made it!” My second thought was, “Wait a minute. Doesn’t the Bible say somewhere that no man knows the day or the hour?” I’m so thankful I had a pastor at that time who had his feet grounded in the Scripture rather than his head full of the latest trend or buzz!

But what about this teaching in v36 that no one knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come. Not even the angels, who are close to the Father. Not even the Son, in His humanity, only the Father. Now Jesus has just said that His coming is absolutely certain in v35. Heaven and earth will pass away, but what He has just said about His coming is an absolute certainty. So on the one hand, we can be absolutely sure the Son will come just like He said, but on the other hand,

we won't know the specific date. It's going to happen; we just don't know when. Even though Jesus has given us detailed signs and events that will unfold, we still will not be able to predict with precise accuracy the timing of His coming.

I would illustrate this way. Think of when a woman is pregnant and is planning a natural birth. We know she is going to give birth. The signs are certain and the birth is inevitable. We can even figure a due date. But the due date is never set in stone. The baby may arrive early, it may arrive late, or it may arrive on the due date. We know the baby is coming, we see the signs, but we never know exactly when the baby is coming until the baby comes. That's much the same with the coming of Christ.

- I. The Culture will be a Signal (vv36-41)
 - a. In v37 Jesus says the culture will be a signal that His coming is near. "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Now what does Jesus mean by that? Are we expecting a lot of rain before Jesus comes? No, He explains what He means in v38.
 - b. It's not the weather; it's the culture. God destroyed the earth with the great flood in Genesis 6 to stop the fast progression and effects of sin. He literally cleansed the world and began again because sin had advanced and corrupted so rapidly. Jesus describes the culture of Noah's day in two ways.
 - i. They were eating and drinking. Now, at first glance that doesn't sound like a sin issue does it? I mean those two things are basic necessities of life. Paul says in 1 Cor 10:31 – whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
 1. I think that verse helps us understand this verse. Eating and drinking in and of themselves are not wrong, sinful things unless you forget the Giver and allow the gifts to be your end. In other words, the phrase eating and drinking signifies a life of pursuing nothing except what pleases you. If your life is void of God, you have to fill it with something and pleasures are usually the first distraction from God we gravitate towards. In other words, as Neil Postman wrote in his prophetic little book in 1985, they were amusing themselves to death. Just pause a minute and ask this question, how large a role

does entertainment play in our present culture and in our lives and even in the church? We literally thirst for the next entertainment and demand to be entertained.

- ii. The second thing Jesus says is that they were marrying and giving in marriage. In other words, their loss of the sacredness of marriage was an example of how they had lost a moral compass. Their lives were not governed by what was right; they were governed by their feelings and desires. Does that sound familiar? Did you know that last month in Spartanburg county a pop up divorce court was held at the auditorium and in one day over 100 marriages were dissolved? The clerk of court said this allows people to move on with their lives. Somehow we got to the place where ending marriage as quickly and conveniently as possible is the solution rather than saving it. But that's nothing new is it? That's just like it was in Noah's day.
 - c. So in v39 Jesus says the culture was devolving rapidly right up until Noah entered the ark and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.
 - i. Now Noah and his sons were building the ark for 75 years and 2 Peter says he was a preacher of righteousness and was warning the people. So what does it mean that they were unaware? It doesn't mean they were not told and informed that judgment was coming. It means they didn't believe it. So when it came, as God said it would, they were swept away.
 - d. The culture of pleasure-seeking, loss of morals, and unbelief will signal that His coming is soon.
- II. The Church will be Ready (vv42-44)
- a. V40 Jesus describes what it will be like to be alive at His coming. Read. I believe the man taken and the woman taken illustrate the gathering of the elect spoken of in v31. Just like Noah and his family were removed from the earth and placed in the ark before judgment fell, so will believers be removed from the earth and gathered to Christ before the final judgment falls. To be left is to be left in your sin.

- b. Therefore, Jesus says, be ready. It's coming for sure. But you won't know precisely when. So be ready. He is coming for His own. Make sure you belong to Him.
 - c. Is your heart right with God? Have your sins been forgiven in Christ? Are you living your life for the Lord? Is your mind filled with the things of God or the things of the flesh? Are you making daily preparations to meet the Lord?
 - d. Listen, that's not only wise counsel for the coming of the Lord. That's wise counsel for life period. We're not promised tomorrow. Are we ready to meet the Lord?
 - e. In v43 Jesus gives the illustration of the master of the house. If he had known when the thief would break in, he would have been ready. The point is, he didn't know when so he should have been ready the whole time.
 - f. Therefore, v44, be ready church. The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. What does that mean? We look around at our culture today and it sure looks a lot like Noah's day. But the truth is that the world has always been filled with sin and has always resembled to some degree Noah's day. So you'll leave here today after hearing this sermon and most of you will reason, "Yeah, that sounds reasonable but I don't think He's coming today." "I've got too much to do. I haven't retired yet. We've got that trip planned. I still need to go to college." We think we'll live until we're 100 but the vast majority of us won't. We won't wake up tomorrow expecting Jesus to come, but one of these tomorrows He will.
 - g. The church must be ready. If we lived every day like Jesus was coming that evening, we'd turn this world upside down for Jesus Christ!
- III. Will You be Among the Ready? (vv45-51)
- a. Jesus illustrates how some will be ready for His coming and some will not by the story in vv45-51 contrasting the wise and faithful servant and the wicked servant, the believer and the unbeliever.
 - b. You see when the master arrives, He'll find the believer busy about His master's work. But the unbeliever doesn't believe the master is coming. So he lives any way he chooses to live and to his dismay the master arrives when he least expects him.

- c. The faithful servant is rewarded and the wicked servant is punished. The believer is taken to heaven and the unbeliever is sentenced to hell, the place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That phrase weeping and gnashing of teeth signifies excruciating pain and raging anger. You see, the believer's sins were paid in full by Christ, but the unbeliever must pay for his own sin.

Conclusion – if someone is aware they only have a few days to live, they are often told, make sure your house is in order. You see that's the point of the end time passages in the Bible. The point is not to predict dates but to prepare hearts. The point is not to know when He's coming but to be ready when He does.