

INTRODUCTION

A zealous college student from the south was doing summer mission work in Michigan where they don't use the familiar religious terms we do in the Bible belt. He went out to share his faith in a neighborhood and saw an old man sitting on his front porch. He walked up and said, "Excuse me, sir, but are you a Christian?" The man said, "No, we're the Smiths. The Christians live two doors down the street." The kid continued, "You don't understand. I mean, are you lost?" The man said, "No, sonny, I'm not lost. I've been living right here for 25 years." Getting a little frustrated, the student pressed on, "So let me ask you, are you ready for the Judgment Day?" The man asked, "When's it going to be?" The kid said, "Well, it could be today, or it could be tomorrow." The old man replied, "Well, don't tell my wife; because she'll want to go both days!" When it comes to end times and the judgment day, a lot of people are confused.

And it doesn't help the confusion when a religious zealot like Harold Camping sets a date for the Rapture. I mentioned last week that Harold Camping's organization spent hundreds of thousands of dollars renting billboards announcing that the Rapture would occur on May 21. This past week several billboards appeared in California that were a reaction to Camping's miscalculation. The billboards say, "That was awkward." Then there's a quote from Jesus, "No one knows the day or the hour..." Mathew 24:36. I like that billboard better, because that verse is in our text for our lesson today.

In Matthew 24 Jesus answers three questions about the future that His disciples posed in Matthew 24:3. "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" Now, skip down and let's start reading in Matthew 24:36.

Matthew 24:36-44. "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

When I was in college I was a youth minister. Back in the 1970s there was a Christian movie called, "A Thief in the Night." It was about a teen named Patty who attended church but really wasn't saved. Her friend, Jenny, was a Christian and kept begging Patty to trust Christ. As you can gather from the title of the movie, the Rapture takes place and suddenly Jenny, and millions of others disappear. And poor Patty is left to deal with the horror and chaos of the tribulation. It was an effective evangelistic film, and I recall dozens of teenagers gave their hearts to Christ

because they realized they weren't ready to meet the Lord. Are you? Let's notice what Jesus had to say about His return.

I. PARABLES OF PREPARATION: THE DAYS OF NOAH & A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Jesus skillfully wove these two illustrations into His teaching about His return.

The parable about Noah is a prediction about the wickedness of people when Jesus returns. The parable about coming as a thief in the night is more about the WAY He will return. Let's learn three important lessons from these parables.

A. The date is UNKNOWN

"No one knows about that day or hour...only the Father." (Matthew 24:36) I should say it is unknown to US. Only the Father knows. And Noah didn't know the day when the flood would come, only God knew the day. The reason God told Noah to build an ark was because He was going to destroy humanity because of their wickedness. We read in Genesis 6:5-6, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain." That's an amazing statement because it reveals that our Creator has the ability to experience grief and pain.

But God wasn't being hasty or capricious. In 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is called a "preacher of righteousness." For 120 years as he built his massive boat, I imagine people came up and said, "What's that?" Noah said, "An ark." They said, "What's it for?" Noah said, "God is grieved at the wickedness of humanity, so He's going to send a flood one day, and only the people and animals on this ark will escape His judgment. Will you repent and start living right so you can ride through the flood with me?" And everyone who heard his message laughed at him.

Some people read the story of Noah and object to the idea of a God who would destroy the world with a flood. But when you know the full story you realize God is full of mercy and patience. He could have sent a fireball to instantly destroy humanity, but the Bible says that God is loving and patient and very slow to anger. The proof of this is in some of the characters from the Bible.

Who was the oldest person in the Bible? Methuselah. How old was he when he died? 969 years. Methuselah's father was Enoch, the first prophet in the Bible. He must have known God was going to send judgment, because he gave his son an unusual name: Methuselah, which means, "When he is gone, IT will come." History proves that IT was the flood God sent.

Noah was the grandson of Methuselah, and when you add up the ages of Methuselah, his son, Lamech, and the age Noah was when the flood came, you find that Methuselah died the very year the flood came. Numbers don't lie. Just add these three numbers from Genesis. Write down 187, that's how old Methuselah was when Lamech was born. Write down 182, because that's how old Lamech was when Noah was born. Then write down 600, because Noah was 600 years old the flood came. Those three numbers give us the age of Methuselah when the flood came—969—the same age he died. In other words, the reason God allowed a man to live longer than

any other human, 969 years, was so that every time someone called his name they were reminded that something big was going to happen when he died. In a sense God spent 969 years warning humanity to repent.

Jesus said in spite of the warnings, the people ignored Noah's preaching and Methuselah's name. They kept on eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage up until the DAY the flood came. Notice those four activities—those were party activities. In spite of Noah's preaching and God's warning, they partied on, Garth! Are we living in the times like the days of Noah? Look around our nation. Are people really seriously seeking God and righteousness because we may be in the last days? It seems to me more people are in party-mode than prayer-mode. I was channel surfing through my XM radio the other day and landed on Britney Spears latest hit, "Keep on Dancing 'Til the World Ends." As I listened to that song, I couldn't help but about how everyone in Noah's day danced and partied. They had no idea that their world was about to end. They ended up doing that dance from the 1960s: The swim. And Britney, girl, I hope you know Jesus because if you don't, you won't be dancing when the world ends. Welcome to a time when we're living in the days as it was in the days of Noah.

B. The return will be UNANNOUNCED

Actually, it won't be announced BEFORE it happens, but it will certainly be announced AFTER it happens. Newspapers have a certain large typeface reserved for only the most important headlines. Do you know what it's called? Second Coming type. Even journalists realize the return of Jesus will be the biggest news event in history. But there will be no prior announcement.

He will come like a thief in the night. The Bible says, "You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief." (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4)

A good thief never announces when he's coming. ("Good thief" is an oxymoron.) In fact the M.O. of a thief is to slip in and slip out without being detected. Now when some people hear that Jesus will return like a thief in the night, they are confused, because they read passages where it says Jesus will come in great majesty and every eye will see Him. Which one is it? Yes. This is all explained in my book on Revelation, but let me summarize. When Jesus comes to Rapture the church, it will be sudden and secretive, like a thief in the night. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye. But after the seven years of Tribulation, Jesus will return as the leader of a mighty army and every eye will see Him, so both of those pictures are correct.

Have you ever been a thief's victim? I grew up in South Alabama only a block from the largest natural lake in the state. In those days we didn't even lock our doors at night, and my parents never lost their car keys, because they were always in the ignition. My dad and I loved to fish. His uncle had built us a beautiful 14-foot fishing boat, painted in two-tone red and white. My dad had a trailer and a 7 hp Sea King outboard motor. We loved to fish, and I felt like we were Bassmasters—or at least Breammasters! I helped my dad build a shed to cover the boat. One morning we woke up and the boat was gone. In the middle of the night someone had backed up to the boat shed, hooked up the trailer and stolen our boat. I remember it made me sad and mad

to think someone could be so wicked. For years whenever I saw a boat I would look to see if it was OUR boat. If I had known someone was coming to steal our boat, I would have been sitting out there all night with a shotgun across my lap.

But thieves don't announce when their coming, you just have to be prepared in case they do come. That's why most of us have security systems now. And Jesus isn't going to announce when He's coming to Rapture the church: We just have to be ready!

C. The process will be SELECTIVE

"One will be taken and the other left" (Matthew 24:40). Both parables can apply to this point. A thief who slips into your house at night isn't going to take everything. He probably won't take your refrigerator or your couch; instead he may select your jewels or your cash.

Noah selected only two of all kinds of animals. God selected eight people to be on the ark. As I mentioned, I believe more could have been saved on the ark if they had simply believed Noah's preaching of righteousness. God didn't select Noah because he deserved to be saved. The Bible says God showed grace to Noah. But by believing God and obeying God's directions, Noah demonstrated his acceptance of God's grace.

God wants everyone to be saved, but only those who accept His grace are selected to be a part of His family. When Jesus comes to Rapture the church, some will be taken and others left. Two men may be working together in a field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women may be working next to each other in an office. One will be taken and the other left.

Many of you are familiar with the *Left Behind* series by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. A few years ago I was in Montgomery preaching at a conference with Tim LaHaye. On the final evening, the place was packed (not because of me). I preached first and then Tim LaHaye spoke. During the closing prayer Dr. LaHaye slipped out a back door to get back to the airport. After the prayer I was standing down front and dozens of people rushed forward with books in their hands looking for Dr. LaHaye to sign them. But he was gone and I was ... left behind. I offered to sign the books, but nobody took me up on that offer.

When Jesus comes, some will be taken and some will be left behind. That leads me to the main point of this message. Ask yourself:

II. AM I READY FOR CHRIST'S RETURN?

There is no question about whether or not Christ is going to come. The only remaining question is, "Will I be ready when Jesus returns?" And only you can answer that question. Jesus said, "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)

Let me tell you two ways to make sure you're prepared for the return of Jesus.

A. Decide today to trust Christ and invite Him into your heart!

Have you ever turned from your sins and placed your faith in Jesus? That's the only way to know for certain you'll be ready to meet Jesus. Becoming a Christian isn't hard—it's as easy as opening the door of your heart. Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) The door is the door of your heart. Jesus isn't going to barge into your life. He's a gentleman. He is knocking and tenderly calling your name. It is God's Will for you to be saved, but He won't override your will. You have a choice in the matter.

There is a story from our Native Americans that demonstrates the power of choice. In a certain tribe, a young upstart rebelled against the old chief. He challenged the chief's wisdom and authority in front of the members of the tribe. The young man said, "Old man, if you are so wise, then answer this question." He held out his fist and said, "I have a small bird hidden in my hand. Tell me, is it alive or dead?" The brave thought he had outsmarted the chief. The bird was alive, but if the chief said, "The bird is alive," then he would apply pressure and squeeze it to death in the instant before he opened his hand. If the chief said, "The bird is dead," then he would simply open his hand and let the bird fly away. The chief was trapped.

But this chief was indeed a wise man and he realized the trick. The brave challenged again, "So, wise man, is the bird dead or alive?" The chief looked into the eyes of brave and said, "Whether it lives or dies—it is as you decide." He was right.

What a lesson for us. Tell me, are you going to spend eternity in heaven or hell? Whether you live forever or die forever, it is as you decide. Will you choose to follow Jesus today?

B. Done that? Then live in a way so you can meet Him with confidence

If you're already trusted Jesus you may think you're ready. But you may not be as ready and you need to be. There's a powerful verse in 1 John 2:28 which talks about being ready for the return of Jesus. It says, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28) Do you see there are two possibilities of how a Christian may meet the Lord? We may be ashamed or we may have confidence.

Is there anything you do or say or think that if the Lord Jesus Christ came back at that moment you might be ashamed? Imagine you're in the process of uttering that profane word you sometimes say, and in that moment the Lord returns. Or imagine you're involved in some activity you know is wrong. That might cause shame, don't you think? What about some unfinished business for the Lord? God has led you to share your faith with a lost person, or He's led you to serve in some ministry, but you've been putting it off. Suddenly you're face to face with the Lord—and it's too late. "I'm sorry Lord. I'm ashamed I didn't follow through on what you led me to do."

But you can face the Lord with confidence if you understand what John wrote. He said, "Continue in Him." In other words, daily surrender your life to the Lordship of Christ. Don't fall away, don't give up. Continue to walk daily with the Lord. Keep on praying, keep on serving,

keep on feeding on His Word, keep on sharing your faith and you can meet Him with the kind of confidence John had that allowed him to say, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

CONCLUSION

Jesus will come for you in one of two ways. Either you'll meet Him in death, or He will return before your death. So you need to be prepared. Your death may happen suddenly or slowly, you don't know. But for sure, His return will be sudden and surprising.

This is a true story; you can Google it. In the spring of 1980, the blue skies above Oregon were obscured by steam rising from Mt. Saint Helens. Geologists warned an eruption was imminent and residents living near the area were ordered to evacuate. State troopers and forest rangers entered the area with loudspeakers blaring, "Danger! Evacuate the area immediately." Flashing road signs were erected that said, "Warning, Warning, Warning. Evacuate immediately." An 83-year-old man named Harry Truman (no relation to the President) operated a lodge at Spirit Lake only five miles from Mt. St. Helens. He laughed at the warnings. Officials argued with him to leave, but when he stubbornly refused, he was granted permission to stay. He said, "Nobody knows more about this mountain than old Harry—and it wouldn't dare blow up on me."

On the morning of May 18, 1980 Harry woke, and probably followed his habit of feeding his 16 cats, then fixing breakfast for himself. At 8:13 a.m. Mt. St. Helens exploded with the force of a 23-megaton nuclear bomb. The top 1,500 feet of the mountain disappeared. The sound of the eruption was heard 600 miles away. The eruption heated the air to 600 degrees. Old Harry never heard a thing because a shock wave of energy traveling faster than the speed of sound slammed outward from the volcano. It was followed by a fifty-foot tall wave of mud and dirt that flattened everything within 150 square miles. It destroyed over half a million trees. The eruption was followed by a cloud of ash that covered everything to a depth of fifty feet. They never found a trace of Harry, his cats, or his cabin. I wonder what went through old Harry's mind in that millisecond that he had gambled with his life and lost. He had heard the warnings, but he did not heed them.

All that remains from Harry's life is a testimony to his refusal to heed the warnings. Fifty feet above the remaining molecules of Harry's incinerated remains, there is a crooked path named Harry's Trail. My advice to you: Don't follow Harry's trail.

The Bible says at any moment, the Lord Jesus could return in a flash, in a twinkling of an eye. God has placed warning signs all along the road. Warning! Repent immediately. This message is just another warning. For those of us who have heeded His warning, and put our faith in Jesus, we will escape His judgment against sin. But some people like Old Harry, just laugh at the Bible and refuse to heed God's Warning.

There have been plenty of rapture jokes lately. Unbelievers have been making fun of all this talk about the rapture. They say, "You Christians have been talking about the second coming of Jesus for thousands of years." Well God even predicted that. Listen to these words from 2 Peter 3: "In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has

since the beginning of creation' ...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9)

I was a Boy Scout growing up. Who can tell me the motto of the Boy Scouts? **BE PREPARED!**
It's not just Be Prepared (period). The official motto is **BE PREPARED** (exclamation point)!
That's a great motto for the second coming of Jesus as well. Be prepared!

OUTLINE

I. PARABLES OF PREPARATION: THE DAYS OF NOAH & A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

A. The date is UNKNOWN

"No one knows about that day or hour...only the Father." *Matthew 24:36*

B. The return will be UNANNOUNCED

"You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief." *1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4*

C. The process will be SELECTIVE

"One will be taken and the other left" *Matthew 24:40*

II. AM I READY FOR CHRIST'S RETURN?

Jesus said, "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*

A. Decide today to trust Christ and invite Him into your heart!

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." *Revelation 3:20*

B. Done that? Then live in a way so you can meet Him with confidence

"And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." *1 John 2:28*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —



David O. Dykes
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David***

Dykes in Texas.” This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes