

Alert
May 10, 2026
Allen Power

Matthew 24:36-51

Why do people obsess about what they don't know instead of acting on what they do know?

The second coming of Christ is a subject where people obsess about what we don't know instead of simply doing what we know to do and leaving the mysteries to God. During the days before Jesus' crucifixion, His disciples asked Him "When will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?" (Mt. 24:3) As they sat on the Mount of Olives, Jesus' reply was more about examples and warnings than details.

The point: We can respond to this complex subject with simplicity. Jesus is coming back to earth. We don't know when, but we do know how He wants us to live until He does.

Some context before the text. This portion of Matthew's gospel is known as the "Olivet Discourse." As Jesus taught about prophecy, the main focus was not charts or timelines, but readiness, watchfulness, and faithfulness. In the first 35 verses Jesus described the conditions that will characterize the time before His return:

- False messiahs and spiritual deception
- Wars and rumors of wars
- Famines, earthquakes, and troubles
- Persecution of believers
- Increasing lawlessness
- Many falling away from the faith

He warned His followers not to panic or be deceived because these events are "the beginning of birth pains," not the end itself. He also declared that:

- The gospel will be preached throughout the world
- Terrible tribulation will come
- False prophets will perform deceptive signs
- And His return will ultimately be unmistakable and glorious

Verse 35 is one of the great ones to memorize: **Matthew 24:35 (ESV) — 35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

(NLT) — 36 "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

- Why do you think it is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return? If we knew the precise date and time how would people likely live?

37 “When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. **38** In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. **39** People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes. **40** “Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. **41** Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.

- Scholars debate which part of Jesus’ second coming is described in this text:
 - One view: Those “taken” are taken in judgment; those “left” are preserved (often understood as entering the kingdom).
 - Another view: Those “taken” are believers gathered (raptured); those “left” remain for judgment.
 - I understand this passage to refer not to the rapture, but to Christ’s return after the tribulation. In that moment, those “taken” are taken in judgment, while those “left” are those who remain to enter the kingdom.
- Other debates about the timing of the great tribulation (for information only):
 - **Pre-Trib:** Rapture before tribulation
 - **Post-Trib:** Rapture at Christ’s return after tribulation
 - **Partial Preterist:** Many prophecies fulfilled in AD 70; return still future
- Faithful Bible teachers differ on how every prophetic detail fits together in Matthew 24. But they overwhelmingly agree on the main point: Jesus is coming again, His return will be sudden and certain, and His followers must live watchfully and faithfully until He comes. That brings us back to Jesus’ words:

42 “So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. **43** Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. **44** You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

- Jesus reinforced his message with this parable (example):

45 “A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. **46** If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. **47** I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. **48** But what if the servant is evil and thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’ **49** and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? **50** The master will return unannounced and unexpected, **51** and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Again, there are differing interpretations of this passage and in particular who the “evil servant” represents.
- Being a servant in the household would indicate professing faith in Christ and the debate is whether that person is unsaved or just backslidden. Verse 51 certainly pictures severe judgment.

- What is not up for debate is that those of us who ARE followers of Christ should focus on being the “faithful, sensible servant.”
- Jesus said, “...keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.” and, “You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.” Let’s apply that to our lives. First, look back at verses 48-50, what can we learn NOT to do from the bad example of the evil servant? Now consider the faithful servant’s example. What are some practical ways we can keep watch for Jesus’ return?
- Some verses to ponder on this topic:
 - **1 Peter 5:8 (NLT) — 8** Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.
 - **Titus 2:11–13 (NLT) — 11** For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. **12** And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, **13** while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.
 - **Revelation 16:15 (NLT) — 15** “Look, I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their clothing ready so they will not have to walk around naked and ashamed.”
 - **2 Peter 3:11–12 (NLT) —11** Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, **12** looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames.
 - **Romans 13:12 (NLT) — 12** The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:6 (NLT) — 6** So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded.
- If we summed up those verses this might be our list:
 - Stay alert
 - Resist sin
 - Live godly
 - Think eternally
 - Share the gospel
 - Stay ready
 - Live holy
 - Put off sin / put on righteousness
 - Anticipate His coming with a sense of urgency

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Illustration: Cleaning the house with a little boy in the mix.
- Jesus has left us with an assignment; will He find us busy when He returns?
- Here’s an idea, put up a sticky note that says, “*This could be the day!*”
- When kids play hide and seek, what does the “seeker” always say after they stop counting and open their eyes?

- Just like kids playing hide and seek, one day Jesus will say to His followers, “ready or not here I come!” Let’s make sure we are **READY** because this could be the day!