

# Matthew 24:42-44

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2442-44/>

*Jesus ends His answer of the three questions with an admonition to the disciples to be ready at all times.*

The parallel Gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:33, Luke 12:39-40, and Luke 21:36.

As Jesus left the temple in Jerusalem, which He predicted would be torn down, His disciples had asked Jesus three questions regarding this prediction, and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). He answered their questions in reverse order with the temple in view as they sat on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3).

The disciples' first question was, "When will these things happen?"

Jesus answered this question last. His answer was: These things will happen within a generation of the signs that I have described (Matthew 24:34), but no one but God the Father knows in advance the day or hour of My return (Matthew 24:36).

The disciples' second question was, "What will be the sign of your coming?"

Jesus answered this question second. His answer was: You won't need a sign. When *the Son of Man* returns it will be unmistakably apparent that I have come (Matthew 24:27). But here are three precursor events to signal my coming so that you will know when the time is near. These events are the Abomination of Desolation (Matthew 24:15); the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21); and the Darkening of the Sun, Moon, and Stars (Matthew 24:29).

The disciples' third question was "What will be the sign of the end of the age?"

Jesus answered this question first. His answer was: The sign that the end of the age is ready to come is that the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations (Matthew 24:14). This will take place after the increase of birth pangs such as international wars and natural disasters (Matthew 24:7); persecutions (Matthew 24:9-10); and a disintegration of society into lawlessness (Matthew 24:12).

Throughout His answers, Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples to not be misled by the many false prophets and fake Messiahs (Matthew 24:4-5; 24:11; 24:23-26).

After answering the disciple's three questions, Jesus gave them an admonition to be ready and remain faithful (Matthew 24:43-51):

*Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*

The reason Jesus said *therefore* was to let the disciples know that in light of all that He had just told them, they should apply what He was about to tell them. And what He commanded them was to *be on the alert* for these signs to begin, because they did *not know which day the Lord is coming* back. Since Jesus had previously spoken of His return occurring after specific signs took place, it seems that Jesus is now adding another element, namely that He plans to return in the air in order to gather His own unto Himself.

This is indicated in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. There Paul explains that Jesus can come back at any time to receive to Himself both those who are alive as well as those who have preceded His return in death. This appearing seems to precede His return after the signs, at the end of the period of great suffering Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

This return of Jesus could come at any time. The signs could begin any time. By application, believers should always be ready for His return.

And when our Lord comes, He will come as a King and a judge. Those who have believed in Jesus as Savior, and are therefore His children, should ensure that they are ready to have their deeds judged to determine their reward.

At this point we should pause and consider what this means for believers. Everyone who has ever believed in Jesus is a member of God's eternal family (John 1:11-12). They have been born into God's family solely by God's gift of grace on the basis of faith in Jesus (John 3:14-16; Ephesians 2:8-9). They have a gift of eternal life which cannot be lost or taken away from them (John 10:29, Romans 11:29). Their life with God forever is forever secure (Romans 8:38-39).

Why then does Jesus tell His disciples to *be alert since* their life living in the presence of God is not at stake?

He tells them to be vigilant so that they do not forget or fail to understand the nature of the trials they suffer or lose their reward in the kingdom (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:1-5). He does not want them to lose heart or grow weary in doing good and miss their kingdom inheritance (Matthew 19:21; Galatians 6:9; James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12-113; 2 Peter 1:9-10; Revelation 21:7).

He wants them to endure to win the eternal prize that comes from pleasing the King upon His return (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philippians 3:8, 14). He wants them to endure so that they will reign with Him (Romans 8:17-18; 2 Timothy 2:12). He does not want them to lose their reward at His judgment, and merely be saved so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Hebrews 10:35-36). He desires not only for them to receive the gift of eternal life, but also to gain the experience of eternal life as a reward (Romans 2:7).

This has been Jesus's gospel message about His kingdom from the very beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:17; 6:1; 6:33; 7:13-14; 8:11-12; 10:32-33; 10:37-39; 13:24-30, 37-43; 13:44; 13:45-46; 13:47-50; 19:16-26; 19:27-30; 20:1-16; 20:25-28; 22:2-14)

After His admonition to *be alert* because *you do not know which day your Lord is coming*, Jesus compared the suddenness of His *coming* to the suddenness of a *thief coming in the middle of the night*.

*But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.*

As *the thief* comes at an unknown and unexpected *hour*, so too will *the Son of Man* come. Jesus didn't mean by this that *He* was *coming* to steal something. Jesus was simply saying that *He* will come at a time people will not be expecting Him. That's when thieves come, when they aren't expected.

This comparison could apply both to the time Jesus will come to meet His people in the air (see [commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)) . It also could apply to those who are oblivious to the signs, just as in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-38).

If the owner of *the house* would have *known at what time the thief* was going to come, *he would have been alert* and ready so that *he would not have his house to be broken into* and *have his possessions taken from him*. *He would have locked his doors*, secured his things, and been vigilant to ward *the thief* away.

Jesus reiterated His point: *For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*

The way we remain *ready for the Son of Man's* return is to live our lives every single day in such a way that we won't be ashamed at His coming. As Paul told the Corinthian believers, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Luke recorded an extended version of Jesus's exhortation.

"Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."  
(Luke 21:34-36)

Notice that the reason Jesus told them about these things was not so that they would avoid the trials, but that they would have strength to endure and suffer them well so that they could stand unashamed at His *coming*. *He* did not want them to be distracted or drunk on the pleasures or fears of this earth.

Again, Peter shared his apostolic insight into what Jesus was saying in his second letter (or epistle), "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away

with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Peter’s application of this passage was for his readers to “be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” as they “look for these things” to take place (2 Peter 3:14).

Jesus’s illustration about *the thief* is also similar to what *He* taught His disciples on the Sermon on the Mount when He counseled them to not store up treasures for themselves on earth, where moth, rust, and thieves can steal them, but to store up imperishable and eternally secure treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). In both illustrations, Jesus taught His disciples how to gain the most out of life. At the Sermon on the Mount, *He* taught them to seek rewards from Him. These are rewards that will last. The rewards of the world fade away.

Here on the Mount of Olives, He taught them to stay vigilant so they would not lose the rewards they’ve gained.

Jesus’s admonition to be vigilant for His return was followed by four parables:

1. “The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants” (Matthew 24:45-51)
2. “The Parable of the Bridesmaids” (Matthew 25:1-13)
3. “The Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25:14-30)
4. “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” (Matthew 25:31-46).

All four of these parables were likely shared to help the disciples remember, process, and apply what Jesus was teaching them about His coming and the end of the age.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>42</sup> “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*.”**