

Are You Ready? Matthew 24:32-44

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Nope!

1. Edgar Whisenant had been an unknown Bible student until 1988, when he wrote a little booklet titled, ***88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988***.
 - a. his message was that the Rapture of the Church would occur on the Jewish New Year of that year, between Sept. 11th & 13th.
 - b. the 88 'proofs' were based on a collection of dates & calculations Whisenant had supposedly "***discovered***" in the Bible & history.
2. He had no doubts about his date, stating: "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong." During one interview he said, "I would stake ***my life*** on [it]."
3. Although ***most*** Bible scholars & teachers rejected Whisenant's predictions, a few supported him, including TBN, the Trinity Broadcast Network.
4. Nearly ***5 million copies*** of Whisenant's book were sold.
5. When nothing happened by the end of Sept. 13th, Whisenant ***revised*** his prediction, saying the rapture would come at **10:55 AM on Sept. 15th**.
6. When that failed, he moved it to **October 3**.
7. Of course, that date passed too but Whisenant remained undaunted.
 - a. he told ***Christianity Today*** magazine, which is kind of the ***Time*** magazine of the Christian world,
 - b. "The evidence is all over the place that [the Rapture is] going to be in **a few weeks**."
9. Well, after a few weeks passed, Whisenant finally '***discovered***' his error.
 - a. he claimed that he'd made a slight miscalculation of one year because of a mistake in the Gregorian calendar. Jesus was actually going to return during in **1989!**
 - b. Whisenant published his discovery in a ***new*** booklet, ***The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1989***. He said, "The time is short. Everything points to it."
10. This publication was subsequently retitled ***The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1990*** and has since been retitled each year as ***The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1991, 92, 93, 94*** and so on. He continues to revise his date **annually**.

B. Foolish

1. Whisenant is foolish in the extreme in making such predictions for the simple reason that Jesus made it quite clear ***no one knows*** the **day** of His return.
2. But in the very same passage He said we could not know the day, He said we would know the generation that would witness His coming again.

II. TEXT

A. Matthew 24

1. Matthew 24 is a passage well known to the students of Bible prophecy.
2. As we'll see in greater depth on Wednesday evening, the chapter begins with the disciples asking Jesus what signs will herald His return in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

3. The rest of chs. 24 & 25 is Jesus' reply, laying out a rather complete picture of the Last Days.
4. It's in our text today that Jesus turns from speaking about what signs the disciples were to look for, to the more important issue of *how they were to live* in light of His return.
5. Now - What many people fail to consider when they study this section of scripture is its *context*, the setting in which these words were spoken.
6. I think you'll agree that understanding the setting adds some great insights usually missed here.

B. Setting The Scene

1. This takes place during the week before the crucifixion. It's either Monday or Tuesday – the previous Sunday had been *Palm Sunday* & the *Triumphal Entry*.
2. That's when Jesus rode into the City of Jerusalem, presenting Himself to the Nation as her Messiah-King.
3. The city was jam-packed with some 2 million pilgrims who'd come from all over the ancient world to celebrate Passover.
 - a. many of them were camped out on the slopes of the Mt. of Olives,
 - b. and as Jesus crested the hill riding the donkey, word spread like wild-fire that the marvelous wonder-working prophet from the North had come.
 - c. the people took off their outer garments and cast them onto the path, turning it into a royal highway.
 - d. they cut down the branches of palm tress and used them to line the sides of the path as a kind of processional hallway.
 - e. and they shouted the words of Psalm 118, which gave expression to their acceptance of Jesus *as* Messiah & King of the nation.
4. This praise & acclamation carried Jesus all the way into Jerusalem & onto the temple grounds, where the reception was far less welcoming.
5. When Jesus stepped into the outer court, He found it filled with a kind of swap meet, a religious marketplace that was making merchandise of the holy things of God.
6. He would have none of it and strode through the courts overturning the tables expelling the merchants.
7. Then he came face to face with the priests and religious experts.
 - a. these were the nation's *leaders* – those who'd been entrusted with the spiritual & political authority.
 - b. this was a crucial moment - a time of testing: Would they accept Jesus as Messiah as the common people had?
 - c. their response would decide the *fate* of the nation,
 - d. for if they rejected Christ and refused to honor Him as their King, yielding their authority to Him willingly, then the long hoped for Kingdom would be taken from them.
 - e. there can be no kingdom without a king – so the fate of Israel hinged on *how* these leaders would respond to Jesus.
8. Jesus came to the temple just so He could present Himself to these leaders and

- see how they'd respond.
9. Though He knew they would **reject** Him – still the moment had to come.
 10. Over the next couple days, He returned to the temple so they could interview Him and discover who He really was.
 - a. they asked Him questions about His authority.
 - b. they posed Him what they thought were **impossible riddles**; He answered them without batting an eye.
 - c. they grilled Him with the deepest of their theological questions, debates that had raged in their schools for generations, and He settled them instantly.
 - d. then, to cap it all off – He healed the blind & lame; people who were long-time invalids and well-known to the leaders of Jerusalem for they had seen their pitiful condition for years. But at Jesus' word, they were made whole.
 11. In light of all this, we'd think the leaders would be convinced & join the common people in their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah.
 12. But such was not the case – the leaders moved from simple **opposition**, to **hostility**, to **hatred** and finally to **outright anger** and a **plots to kill** Him.
 13. Jesus knew the direction their hearts were moving & in chs. 21-23, we read of parables He told that were meant to challenge the leaders with just how really wrong-headed & hearted they were in opposing Him.
 14. Ch. 23 contains a list of **warnings** He gave about the **consequences** they would experience if they persisted in resisting Him.
 15. Because there was no repentance on their part, the chapter ends with Jesus expressing His deepest sorrow over the City of Jerusalem because in their rejection of Him, they will lose **EVERYTHING**.
 16. In just 40 years, the Nation will lie in smoking ruins under the brutal foot of Roman conquest.
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17. So **now**, as we come to our text, understand that chs. 21-25 all take place in about a 2 to 3 day period.
 18. Jesus has just left the temple grounds **for the last time**; the rejection by the leaders is **final**, & Jesus is filled with sorrow over the devastation that will come to the City.
 18. As they're walking away from the temple grounds, that gorgeous structure built by Herod the Great – the disciples tried to cheer Jesus up by commenting on the beauty of the place.
 19. Jesus, knowing what the future held, told them that **soon** it would all lie in ruins.
 20. This **stunned** the disciples. So they asked Him when this would happen and what would be the sign of His return.
 21. Jesus answered them by telling them what the rest of history will hold, from that day, right up to the end when He comes again.
 22. But He knew that many generations would pass before He returns, so He told them of **the importance of always being ready**, because the passage of time, and the long delay could easily cause His followers to think He **wasn't** coming!
 23. The loss of the hope of His return would lead to a lazy & sloppy lifestyle that would not be proper for those who've been saved from sin, for heaven.

24. It's in vs. 32-35 that Jesus turns to speak of the *urgency* of being ready for His return.

C. Vs. 32-35

32 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: [STOP]

1. This is where we catch one of the greatest insights from understanding the **setting**.
2. Jesus speaks these words while sitting on the side of the Mt. of Olives, looking back toward the temple mount which is just across the little Kidron Valley, about a half mile away.
3. He's sitting on the same hillside where just a couple days before he'd cursed a fig tree because while it *looked* like it should have fruit on it, it didn't!
4. Jesus had used the fig tree as an **object lesson** for the disciples.
 - a. just as He'd come to the tree hungry, looking for fruit,
 - b. He was coming to the temple at Jerusalem, looking for *spiritual* fruit.
 - c. and just as the fig tree had leaves, and so *advertised* that it bore fruit,
 - d. so there was quite a religious show going in the temple.
 - e. but neither the tree, nor the temple produced any **real** fruit.
 - f. the result was that just as Jesus cursed the fig tree & it immediately withered – so Israel would be cursed & wither away.
5. This is now the first reference to a fig tree since that whole affair a day or two before—and the disciples **could not help** but think back to the fig tree Jesus had cursed, and the larger lesson it taught about the nation.
6. **Even more**, as they sat there on the Mt. of Olives, there's a good chance they were sitting near that withered tree.
7. Jesus draws their attention **back** to it, and as He does, the earlier parable is renewed & expanded.

32 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

8. The tree Jesus had cursed had leaves on it, a sign that the season was turning from Spring toward Summer.

33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!

9. The “**it**” Jesus is referring to is the main question the disciples had asked – **When** He would return.
10. They'd asked what things would stand as signs posts to show His Return was close.
 - a. we'll take a look at the signs Jesus gave Wednesday night.
 - b. this morning, there's just **one sign** that we're going to look at, & its found right here in v. 32 – the sign of the fig tree.
11. You see, Jesus had used the fig tree as a symbol for Israel a couple days before because the OT scriptures repeatedly speak of the fig tree as figurative for the nation.
 - a. In Jeremiah 24, the *people* of Israel are likened to figs.
 - b. in Joel 1 the *land* of Israel is summed up as a vine & fig tree.

- c. in fact, over & over in the OT, from 1 Kings through the prophets, the land of Israel is likened to a vine & fig tree.
 - d. when the people are faithful – the vine is full of grapes & the boughs of the fig tree are heavy with fruit,
 - e. but when the people turn from God, the vine & tree are barren.
12. When Jesus cursed the fig tree, the disciples knew He was announcing God's judgment on Israel for their rejection of the Him.
 13. That judgment came in 68-70 AD when the armies of Rome descended on the land to crush yet another Jewish rebellion.
 - a. and this time the Romans decided they'd have enough of the troublesome Jews - so they set out on a campaign to **eradicate** them.
 - b. Galilee fell first, then they marched on Judea and laid siege to Jerusalem.
 - c. the battle was long & bitterly fought with heavy casualties on both sides.
 - d. when the Romans finally broke through the City walls, they were so infuriated they committed horrible atrocities & murdered 10's of thousands of women & children.
 - e. the glorious temple was burned to the ground & dismantled, stone by stone, in literal fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.
 14. The Jews were banned from entering the district of Jerusalem altogether!
 - a. a pagan temple to Jupiter was built on the temple mount,
 - b. and as a final insult, the land was renamed **Palestine**, after Israel's longtime enemy & rival, the Philistines who lived nearby.
 15. The point is this--just as the fig tree on the Mt. of Olives withered & died, so the nation of Israel for all intents & purposes withered & died as a nation in 70 AD.
 16. And that was it's condition until May of 1948 when the world, in a moment of sympathy for the horror suffered by the Jews under Hitler's Holocaust, moved in a **brief spasm** of reparation and allowed the Jews their own nation and homeland once again.
 17. Israel declared itself a nation on May 14th, 1948; the USA immediately recognized her, and the UN quickly followed suit. [And that was probably the **last time** Israel, the US and the UN agreed on anything!]
 18. The fig tree, once dead, was renewed to life.
 - a. and the land, that had been badly neglected & abused by it's Muslim landowners for centuries – began to spring to life.
 - b. the Jewish immigrants bought the land, cleaned the silt out of the rivers and bays,
 - 1) drained the swamps, replanted forests,
 - 2) plowed & planted fields, put in extensive irrigation
 - 3) built powerplants and factories
 - 4) and turned the once dead land into a thriving 1st world country that today is Europe's 3rd largest importer of citrus and it's **largest** importer of flowers!
 - 5) Israel has become a center of the world's gold, diamond and platinum industry
 - 6) and Israeli research facilities are on the cutting edge of technological

development in many fields.

19. In 1947, Palestine was a desert wasteland, barely able to support a half million people.
20. In 2004, Israel is a lush & fertile garden that supports a population of nearly 7 million.
21. In v. 32, the parable of the fig tree is a lesson that **began** a couple days before when Jesus had cursed it for its barrenness.
 - a. **here He makes it clear the parable goes on** – the fig tree, at one time dead, will once again spring to life and send forth leaves.
 - b. life will flow into its dead branches & twigs once again.
 - c. and when it does, that's a sign that the season of its fruitfulness has come.
22. Jesus then says that the generation that witnesses all these things, including the renewal of the dead fig tree, the rebirth of the nation of Israel, **will also see His return**.
- 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.**
23. Jesus puts His official seal of approval and endorsement on these words – nothing can alter them, not even the dissolving of the very heavens and earth.
24. So, what does Jesus mean by “**this** generation?”
 - a. He could not have meant the generation to which He was speaking at that moment because many of the signs He gave in the previous verses they didn't see.
 - b. the generation He was referring to was the generation that witnessed the budding of the fig tree, the rebirth of the nation of Israel.
25. Now, there's much discussion on what constitutes a generation.
 - a. some say it's 40 years, others 60, and some say it's a hundred years.
 - b. to be frank, I'm not real sure how many years constitute a Biblical generation, or if we ought to even try to assign a **number** to it.
 - c. the point is that it refers to a specific group of people who all live within the same time-context of one another – they all share the same specific period of history.
 - d. thinking of a generation in that way, it's about a normal life-span of anywhere between 60 to 90 years.
26. It's now 2004; 56 years have passed since the rebirth of Israel.
27. And God has regathered the Jews out of many nations into her land and has restored them to life.
28. **We are the generation** Jesus referred to here in v. 34.
 - a. I wasn't born until 1955, but I'll tell you what – I've **seen** the budding of the fig tree up close and personal.
 - b. I've seen the vineyards, the forests, the acres & acres of olive & date groves.
 - c. I've seen the fields of flowers, the cosmetics produced there.
 - d. I've seen the extensive housing tracts and modern shopping malls.
 - e. I've eaten Domino's pizza and McDonalds in Jerusalem!
 - f. Israel isn't just flowing with milk & honey – it's flowing with chocolate

- milkshakes, Coca-Cola, and Dr. Pepper.
30. We *are* the generation Jesus referred to in v. 34.
 31. And that means that *we* are the generation that will see His return!

D. Vs. 36-44

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

1. Jesus is referring to His return, which is the main question the disciples had asked at the beginning of the chapter.
2. While the rebirth of Israel identifies the last generation before He comes, that’s as narrow as the time frame will get.
3. No one but the Father knows the exact time of the Lord’s return.
4. So guys like Edgar Whisenant are out to lunch when they start setting dates for Jesus’ return.
5. Jesus elaborates -

37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

6. What Jesus says here is crucial because it helps us understand *what* coming He’s referring to.
 - a. He must be referring to the Rapture of the Church and **not** the Second Coming.
 - b. here’s why – when Jesus comes back visibly in the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation, what will it be like on Earth?
 - 1) is it going to be business as usual or total chaos?
 - 2) prophecies regarding the Tribulation period present a scene of utter devastation on Earth.
 - 3) the population of the Planet will be about half what it was 7 years before.
 - 4) the air will be choking to breath, the water bitter to the taste, and violence will be rampant – yeah, it’ll be a lot like the San Fernando Valley in August!
7. How does Jesus describe things here in vs. 37-38? It’s business as usual!
8. It’s normal everyday life – as most of history has known.
9. So Jesus can’t be referring here to the Second Coming – He speaking of the Rapture of the Church, which takes place *before* the Tribulation.

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10. Jesus uses the analogy and example of Noah here because it’s the perfect parallel to the Rapture.
 11. Noah spent 120 years building the ark – and the entire project was one long warning sign to that generation that judgment was coming.
 - a. but besides Noah’s family, no one heeded the warning.
 - b. the signs of the Last Days and the coming judgment of God on this sinful and Christ rejecting world are abundant & clear.

- c. and just like the people of Noah's day, the people of this generation go about their lives as though it will all just go on forever.
 - d. listen to these words from 2 Peter 3 – [3-4]
First off, you need to know that in the last days, mockers are going to have a heyday. Reducing everything to the level of their puny feelings, they'll mock, "So what's happened to the promise of his Coming? Our ancestors are dead and buried, and everything's going on just as it has from the first day of creation. Nothing's changed."^[1]
 - e. Peter then goes on to say that these last days' mockers will **repeat** the error of the people of Noah's day.
12. Jesus then speaks more about what will happen when He comes in the Rapture.
- 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.**
13. Again, it's a picture of life as usual when all of a sudden, a *distinction* is made between one person & another. A dramatic *separation* is effected.
14. What Jesus says here reminds us of the parable of the wheat & tares;
- a. how they grew up together until the time of harvest,
 - b. then the wheat was gathered into the Lord's storehouse while the tares were collected for burning.
15. And now, the application -
- 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**
16. Okay, I have to admit it – v. 44 bothers me!
- a. because it seems to say that if we're expecting the Rapture, it won't come.
 - b. it's only when we're not expecting it that it will—that hardly seems fair!
 - c. is God playing a trick on us; like I do sometimes when I get home before Lynn & Karsse and I hide in the closet.
 - d. they walk into the house and think I'm home because my car's out front.
 - e. so I wait a good long while till they think I must be out running or out with a friend.
 - f. then when they're sure I'm *not* in the house, I jump out of the closet and scare them silly!
17. That's not the game God is playing with us.
18. Jesus is just saying that we mustn't camp on our pet ideas on how the signs of His coming will be fulfilled, and when we don't see things falling in to the neat little last days scenario we've set for them, think that the Lord's return must be way off in the future.
19. No – we don't know when the Rapture will take place – and because we don't know, we need to be ready when? **AT ALL TIMES!**

III. CONCLUSION

A. Watch!

1. In v. 42 when Jesus said, “**Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming,**” what did He mean?
2. What are we supposed to be on the lookout for?
3. It’s not *prophetic signs* He wants us to watch for.
4. He wants us to keep a close watch on our *hearts*, that we don’t slip into the place of spiritual neglect that would lead to spiritual apathy & moral sloppiness.
5. It’s a *self-watch* He’s calling us to.
6. The very best way to be ready for the Lord’s return is to be so close to Him already that when He comes, there’s not much distance to go.

B. Enoch’s Example

1. Bible students have long seen in the example of Enoch in Genesis 5 a picture of the Rapture of the church.
2. We read that Enoch walked with God, and then was not, for God took him, meaning he never died, God just took Him to heaven.
3. The best way to understand what happened to Enoch is explained by an 8 year old who was telling her Mother the story she’d learned in Sunday School one day.
 - a. she said, “Enoch walked with God, and God walked with Enoch.”
 - b. “Everyday they walked and talked, talked and walked.”
 - c. “It’s what Enoch liked to do more than anything in the whole wide world. And God liked it that Enoch loved it so much ‘cause He liked it too.”
 - d. “But one day, Enoch and God walked so far, and talked so long God said, ‘Look Enoch, now we’re closer to My home than yours. Why don’t you just come home with me?’”
 - e. “So he did – and Enoch’s been in heaven ever since.”
4. Friend – Walk with God! Talk with Him – every day.
5. Any one of these days now – Jesus will say to us – “Let’s go to my house!”
6. Are you ready?

[1] Peterson, E. H. (1995). *The message : New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs* (2 Pe 3:1). Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress.