**Title:** He’s coming! (Matt. 24:32-51) – The Certainty of Coming / Uncertainty of Timing

**Introduction:** The crowds knew him as the King of Rock and Roll. Just before dawn on January 8, 1935, Elvis Arron Presley was born. He had humble beginnings, but his voice quickly catapulted him into stardom. Movies and music made sure every person in America and most other places in the world knew his name. Because of his popularity, his venues had to prepare well in advance for his arrival. The crowds, composed mostly of young women, were often difficult to control.

In one instance, Elvis performed two shows at the Mississippi-Alabama Fair and Dairy Show in Tupelo, Mississippi. This was the same fair where he had performed at age 10. But there was a different reaction to him this time. One-hundred National Guardsmen surrounded the stage to control the crowd of excited fans.

Elvis seemingly had everything – cars, airplanes, Graceland Mansion, women, respect and money…lots of money. He died on August 16, 1977, a little over 40 years ago.[[1]](#endnote-1) The official cause was a heart attack. His fans still love him. He made $27 million last year (2016) which puts him at #4 on the Forbes list of highest grossing dead celebrities.[[2]](#endnote-2)

If only he could come back. Just think what a killing he could make today! Some people think he’s still alive. There are plenty of impersonators especially in Las Vegas who would like to convince you that they are him.

Elvis is dead. He’s not coming back.

Heaven knows Him as the King of the Universe. On December 25, 0, the Lord Jesus Christ was born to humble parents who had found shelter in a Bethlehem stable. (BTW, I was just kidding about the date, but I wasn’t kidding about the birth.) It was His voice that catapulted Him to stardom not because He sang, but because He spoke words that no one had ever heard. And He spoke them with authority.

When Jesus came into town, it wasn’t unusual for crowds to gather. He never pushed them away or tried to keep them at a distance. He always met their deepest needs. The crowds created problems for Him though because there was only so much crowd to go around. The former crowd getters got jealous of Him, trumped up some false charges, arrested Him and crucified Him. The official cause of death was heart failure.

He wasn’t interested in making money, increasing popularity or having airplanes. Who needs airplanes when you can just rise into the sky? And that is exactly what Jesus did. He had already told His disciples the same message the angels delivered as they watched Him rise into the sky. The King is coming back!

Elvis fans are ready for his arrival. They would greet his arrival with great excitement. Are you ready for the arrival of Jesus? How would you respond if He were to show up on your doorstep today? Let’s take a look at what Jesus had to say about His soon return.

1. **Jesus made it clear *that* He is coming** (vvs. 32-35)
2. There are signs. (vvs. 32-33)

I know all about signs, at least as far as summer is concerned. I learned as a kid what to look for. Warming temperatures, singing birds, budding trees, decreased interest in school assignments – these were clear signs summer was on the way. Jesus used one of these indicators of nature to make a point about his return. I’m just not sure that it’s the indicator that some have made it be.

On May 14, 1948, a miraculous event occurred. It was the fulfillment of prophecy. In one day, Israel became a nation again after almost 2000 years of dispersion. Jews began to return to their homeland. Almost immediately, they came under attack, but they miraculously defeated their foes. They continue to exist today even though it appears they have far more enemies than allies. God is doing something fresh and new among the Jewish people. But that doesn’t mean Jesus was referencing the events of recent history as the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Let me explain.

The image of a fig tree is sometimes used symbolically for Israel. Because of the symbolism and because of the historical events just mentioned, some have concluded the interpretation of the budding fig tree is Israel’s rebirth. This rebirth means Jesus’ return will be within one generation (v. 34). There are at least a couple of problems with this interpretation.

The first problem is Jesus used the fig tree as a “parable,” not a “sign.”

*“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”* (Matt. 24:32)

A parable draws a parallel between something that the people of Jesus’ day understood and a spiritual truth that they did not understand. It’s a comparison, an analogy. There *is* a “sign,” but it’s not the budding of the fig tree. The sign is “all these things.” Just as a budding fig tree points to – is the sign of – the soon arrival of summer, so “all these things” pointed to the Son of Man’s soon return.

The second problem with this interpretation is it fails to take into account that Jesus didn’t limit his parable to just the fig tree. In Luke’s parallel to Matthew, he records, “Behold the fig tree *and all the trees…*” (Luke 21:29) Jesus was referring to the nature of trees in general not just to fig trees in particular.

The third problem with interpreting the fig tree as Israel’s rebirth is it then necessitates Jesus’ return within one generation. There are some possible interpretations of “generation” other than what we would typically think of, and we’ll deal with those. But assuming Jesus was speaking literally, how long is a generation? My parents were one generation, I’m another, my kids are yet another and so on. I have a picture at home that has four of my wife’s generations in it. Is a generation 20 years, 40 years or longer? One author used Moses’ statement in Psalm 90 to say that a generation could be 70 or 80 years (Ps. 90:10). It would have to be that long for Jesus’ return to be within one generation of Israel becoming a nation again. We’ll reach the 70th anniversary of that event in 2018. Moses’ statement is about how long a *life* might last not a generation.

Jesus’ point had nothing to do with Israel’s rebirth but everything to do with Israel. And His point was simple enough that His disciples didn’t have to know history or prophecy to be able to understand it. All they had to do was pay attention to trees and to Jesus. Any child can do that and know “summer” is coming. They asked, “What will be the sign of your return?” (Matt. 24:3). He told them “all these things” – political upheaval, terrestrial and celestial shaking, the desecration and destruction of the temple, persecution both by those on the outside and the inside, a falling away from the faith and a proliferation of false prophets and false messiahs. These were the signs that pointed to His soon arrival. They are not hard to notice if you’re willing to pay attention. It’s just that, as I have evidenced here, signs can be so hard to interpret. It’s easy to get confused. Know this. Jesus’ return is close, closer than it was yesterday, so close that I can hear Him knocking on the door! Clear enough?

While we wait, we have something even more sure than signs to depend on (2 Peter 1:16-21). We have Jesus’ words.

1. There is surety. (vs. 34-35)

Jesus made two promises in this passage. The first promise is that the present “generation” would not die until all the events Jesus predicted happened. It would have been nice if the disciples had asked some questions along the way. “What do you mean, Jesus?”

People who don’t ask questions do so for a few reasons. It could be they don’t care. Not true here; the disciples cared. They wouldn’t have asked their original questions if they didn’t care about the future. People don’t ask for clarification if they think they understand. Sometimes, people don’t ask because it looks like everyone else understands. They don’t want to look stupid. So it’s left to us to ask the question they did not. “What do you mean, Jesus?”

Promises, like signs, can be misinterpreted. It’s important to define words to promote understanding. If I tell my 5-year-old daughter, “We’re going to get ice cream soon,” she gets all excited. She thinks that “soon” means within the next five minutes if not sooner. “Soon” might mean two days from now or longer to me. An investment broker tells a potential client that retirement is coming “sooner” than he thinks, and he’s talking about something that is 20 or more years away! The older you get, the longer the time frame that gets attached to the word “soon.” Jesus is eternal. What do you think “soon” means to Him?

We also need to consider the word “generation.” What did Jesus mean by “generation?” There are several possibilities. The first is Jesus was talking about the people living at the time Jesus originally said these words. The interpretation then would be, “Peter, all these events will be completed in your lifetime or in the lifetimes of the people that you pass every day.” Neither Peter nor his contemporaries witnessed the return of Jesus – part of “all these things” – so the first possible meaning of “generation” cannot be the correct one.

“Generation” could also mean people in general. Jesus had just told them that during the Tribulation, life was going to get more difficult than it had ever been (vs. 22). They didn’t have the whole story because John, one of Jesus’ original questioners, hadn’t written Revelation yet. Knowing what we now know about the Tribulation, the surprising reality is not how many people die. The amazing thing is that anyone survives!

Jesus could have also meant by His statement that it is the Jewish people who survive. That too would be amazing, even miraculous. The Jewish people could have easily vanished over the centuries. They are among the most attacked people in history. When Jesus’ disciples heard the Temple would be destroyed, they had to have wondered about the survival of the Jewish people as a distinct ethnicity. After the dispersion that happened in 70 A.D., who would have predicted there would still be a distinct people group who identified themselves as Jews and who still spoke Hebrew to come back to Palestine in 1948?!

There’s still one more possibility for this word “generation.” The generation – think Boomers, Millenials, etc. – that is alive when these future events begin (Rapture, Tribulation, Antichrist) will still be alive when they are completed with Jesus’ second coming. Any of these interpretations, except the first, could be and will be true.

There *will* be people who survive through Jesus’ return. Some of them *will* be Jews. And since the Tribulation only lasts seven years, it is logical to assume that some of the people who witnessed the Rapture will also witness the Second Coming. People will live through the most severe period of God’s judgment that has ever occurred. It won’t be because these people are superhuman or have developed some technology that gives them invisible shields. It will be because God is merciful! Jesus is not interested in destroying people but in saving them. He promised to rescue. But what good is a promise if the one making the promise isn’t trustworthy?

That leads us to Jesus’ second promise.

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”* (Matt. 24:35)

He says that when everything in your life has come crashing down and you feel like you have lost the foundation your life depended on, you can still believe the smallest detail of His words (Matt. 5:18). They remain firm. In a world where promises don’t mean anything, it’s hard to place enough confidence in the promises of Jesus to adjust your priorities, beliefs, and actions. When we’re trying to determine whether or not we can trust someone, we examine their track record. What kind of reputation do they have? Do they have any references?

Let’s examine the faithfulness of the promises of God. God came to Noah, told him judgment was coming in the form of rain but that he, his family and the animals would find rescue if he built a big boat. Depending on how you read Gen. 6:3, it may have taken 120 years before the first raindrop fell! But it *did* fall. And Noah and his family survived the longest (over a year) cruise in history. A few chapters later in Genesis, God made a promise to Abraham. “Leave your homeland, and I will bless you with a son” among other things. Abraham was 75 years old when God made this promise. He was 100 when he first held his newborn son in his arms. He had to wait 25 years for the promise to be fulfilled, but it happened. And all he could do was laugh with joy at the faithfulness of the promise-making God.

There are hundreds of promises – the Bible calls them prophecies – God has made and fulfilled. Most of them had to do with Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. Many more concern future events and have yet to be fulfilled. When God says something is going to happen, He will make it happen. It may take a *long* time, but it *will* happen.

“We may build with more assurance upon the word of Christ than we can upon the pillars of heaven or the strong foundations of the earth; for when they shall be no more, the word of Christ shall remain.” – Matthew Henry[[3]](#endnote-3)

Jesus will return. He promised. You can base your life on that foundation.

1. **Jesus left it unclear *when* He is coming** (vvs. 36-51)

Certainty helps us know how to react. Certainty on the road prevents accidents. I know what lane I’m supposed to be in, I know who has the right of way, and I know what to do at a stop light. Uncertainty can lead to dangerous responses. Who got to the four-way stop first? What does a flashing turn signal mean? Does the police officer on the side of the road mean I should slow down?

I like calendars and schedules and deadlines. Schedules give me certainty. They give order to my life. Most businesses couldn’t operate without them. Who would show up to work on time if there wasn’t a set time that they had to be there? “I’m supposed to be here at this time.” “I can’t say ‘yes’ to this opportunity because I’ve got a deadline coming up.” There is a schedule for Jesus’ return. It’s just that no human knows what that schedule is. People have tried guessing. It’s fruitless.

You can count on Jesus coming back. You can’t count on it happening tomorrow or even during your lifetime. Because there is no certainty to the timing of Jesus’ return, people will usually respond to the news of His future arrival in one of four ways. Their response puts them into a category.

1. Disputers (vvs. 37-42; Luke 17:26-36) – “I don’t have a Lord. I don’t believe He’s coming, so I’m not going to do anything about it.”

*“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.”* (Matt. 24:37)

*“It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building.”* (Luke 17:28)

Once again, Jesus makes a comparison. This time the comparison is between human activities at His return and the activities of humanity in the periods of Noah and Lot. The words that Genesis 6 uses to describe Noah’s society are “wicked” (v. 5), “evil” (v. 5), “corrupt” (v. 11), and “violent” (vvs. 11, 13). God uses similar terminology to describe Sodom and Gomorrah – “sin” (Gen. 18:20), “wicked” (Gen. 13:13).

Jesus doesn’t use these negative words to describe the activities of either place on the day of their destruction. In fact, the activities He mentions are activities you find in most any church. They were “eating and drinking” (v. 38; Luke 17:28). I bet you did that today in the church foyer. You’re probably going to do it again at the restaurant. It also says that people were getting married, and dads were giving their daughters away in marriage (v. 38). We experienced that in this very room just a few weeks ago. He speaks of parties and commerce and farming and construction (Luke 17:28).

None of these are inherently evil actions. They’re reasonable, potentially God-pleasing actions. Yes, they can be done in an over-indulgent, evil way. And yes, the people’s actions in Noah’s day and Lot’s day were wicked! There is no doubt. But that’s not the point of comparison Jesus is making.

Both societies were warned of impending judgment (2 Pet. 2:5; Gen. 19:14). Neither society believed the warning or did anything about it. Life continued as normal with all its usual activities right up until the point judgment came. For Noah, the sky rained water. For Lot, it was fire that fell from the sky.

We spoke earlier of God’s faithfulness to keep His promises. That includes His promises of judgment. You can dispute the Bible’s claim that there is a God, that He has a Son named Jesus, and that Jesus died and rose again to forgive you your sin. You can dispute that this Jesus holds any claim on you or that He has any right to tell you what to do. You can live life exactly as you want to all the way up until the day it all comes crashing down. But judgment *will* come. That is not God’s desire for you. He loves you!

Get on the boat. Leave the city. Listen to God’s offer of salvation. Don’t be a disputer.

1. Doubters (vs. 43) – “I have a Lord. I’m pretty sure He’s coming back, but I don’t know when, so I’m not going to do anything about it.”

*“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.”* (Matthew 24:43)

What do you do with those parts of your life that don’t get put on a calendar because they don’t have a deadline? You put them off. You procrastinate. I’m tempted to think it might have been better if Jesus had told us the exact moment He would return. At least then, we’d be more likely to prepare for it.

There’s a very good reason that Jesus didn’t tell us. He wants us to be prepared *all the time*. In school, it’s called a pop quiz. In the military, it’s a surprise inspection. They keep you alert, ready. In fact, you don’t mind them if you’re prepared for them. That’s what Jesus said we must be (v. 42, 44).

What is it you would be ashamed of if you were doing it when Jesus comes back? Don’t do that. What is it that you want Jesus to find you doing – forgiving someone, serving someone, thanking someone? Do that as often as possible.

It is here we need to introduce the term “imminence” with an “i.” It means this: “likely to occur at any moment; impending.”[[4]](#endnote-4) The sheriff rides through town with his bullhorn announcing the imminence of the levee breaking or the approach of the forest fire. I don’t know precisely when it’s going to happen, but I know it is happening, it’s going to happen soon, and I need to do something about it. I need to do it *now*! If I wait, there will be consequences.

In this case, the impending event is the arrival of King Jesus. Jesus is His eminence with an “e.” So we’re talking about the imminence of His eminence. It can happen at any time. The arrival of King Jesus is a positive thing. It’s something to be anticipated with great joy unless you haven’t made any preparations.

The person Jesus describes here doesn’t treat His return as if it is imminent. In fact, he’s not firmly convinced that Jesus is coming back at all or that Jesus’ return will affect his life. He believes in Jesus. He calls himself a Christian. He’s planning on going to heaven, and he probably will. But he thinks of Jesus in the same terms he thinks of those commercials warning him of his need to subscribe to a home security service.

He knows there are thieves out there. He heard someone got robbed in the neighborhood just down the street, but *he’s* never been robbed. The chances of him getting robbed are statistically low. He pays his taxes. The police will protect him. Besides, he’s got more important places to spend his money than on a home security system. His priorities rest elsewhere. Those commercials are just a ploy to get him to spend his hard earned money. And so he rationalizes his failure to do what he needs to do until he comes home one day to find his front door wide open and his earthly treasures gone. He planned to get around to it eventually; it just didn’t seem all that important at the time.

In the same way, he planned on telling his neighbor about Jesus, but he kept telling himself it would be better to wait for the right time. He thought about adopting an orphan from another country, but that’s expensive. And his cruise cost more than he was expecting. He thought about taking his family to church…

Jesus is coming when you least expect it. The only way for that to not be true is to expect His return all the time – to live every day as if this was the day He was coming back.

Anticipate His return. Don’t be doubtful.

1. Dutiful (vs. 45-47) – “I have a Lord. I’m convinced He’s coming back. I believe it’s soon, so I’m going to do something good about it now.”

*“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?”* (Matt. 24:45)

1. The relationship of the servant to the Master.

We finally get to a breath of fresh air. Someone is actually doing what they’re supposed to do when they’re supposed to do it. Imagine that! In the midst of this refreshment, Jesus includes words that many people find offensive – “slave” and “master.” Just in case you missed it, He says them twice (vs. 45, 46). Couldn’t Jesus have left those words out? Couldn’t we update them to “employee” and “employer?” Those terms would be politically correct and easier to swallow and digest.

Jesus chose these terms for a reason. An employee recognizes that she always has the option of saying “no” to her employer. An employee has rights and someone to come to his defense if those rights are trampled. An employee receives pay equal to the work she has done. An employee can quit. None of these are true for a slave.

A slave recognizes that his master owns him, that he has no rights and that his master can require of him anything he wants and expect the slave will obey. A slave, in most cases, is a lifetime reality. That kind of mentality is what Jesus requires of His disciples for us to fulfill the mission He has given us to do.

Don’t fight it. Accept it. His requirements are sometimes hard, but our Master is always good.

1. The responsibility of the servant to the Master

Jesus describes the servant as “faithful” and “sensible.” Faithful means “strict or thorough *in the performance of duty*; true to one’s word; loyal; reliable, trusted, believed.”[[5]](#endnote-5) Does that describe you? As a servant of Jesus Christ, our Master, we must provide food for the rest of the Master’s house. Who is it that provides food for the house of God? Pastors.

Weeks later, as the disciples and Jesus were sitting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). Peter would eventually place in his epistle the same message to the pastors he trained (1 Pet. 5:2-4). Jesus’ description and admonition here and in the next section definitely apply to pastors. We must feed our congregations, our fellow servants, and we have to do it now. Jesus repeatedly warned about the encroaching danger of false prophets and false messiahs. People have to know the truth to recognize a lie. If pastors don’t do their job, someone else will gladly feed the sheep, but they will only feed them junk food at best or poison at worst.

What Jesus said is also applicable to every Christian. Each of us has the responsibility to meet the needs – physical and especially spiritual – of our fellow servants. Jesus also said we have to perform this duty in a “sensible” kind of way.

Jesus didn’t explain what He meant by sensible. But Peter, one of the members of his original audience, did. He said that “sensible” includes doing it willingly and sacrificially (1 Pet. 5:2). When I think about all God has done for me (Rom. 12:1), and the example of service Jesus gave (Heb. 12:2), it only makes sense to serve willingly and sacrificially. Peter also says that sensible service includes humility. He uses the phrase “nor…lording it over” the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). We are not the master; we are fellow servants simply helping one another. We were all rescued through the same blood. We were all destined for the same terrible eternal fate. It doesn’t make sense for us to be prideful and act as if any of us is superior to someone else! This service makes sense for one more reason. It will be rewarded (1 Pet. 5:4).

Later on, in this message Jesus gave to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He used the term “faithful” again: “Well done, good and faithful servant…” (Matt. 25:21). That leads us to the last set of words that Jesus used to describe the dutiful slave.

1. The reward to the servant from the Master

They are “blessed” and “in charge.” These are the result of living according to your promises and being non-stupid. Now the Master isn’t required to give *any* reward.

In Luke 17:7-10, Jesus speaks of the bottom-line relationship between a master and a slave. You do what you’re supposed to do for the master *before* your needs are met. It doesn’t matter if you’re tired or hungry. You meet the master’s needs. And don’t expect a thank you, a pat on the back or a raise. Don’t expect to be noticed or acknowledged for your hard work. You’re supposed to be in the background. The only noticed servant is a servant that has done something improper. You do what you’re supposed to do because the Master expects it. It’s your duty. This is the typical relationship between a master and a slave.

But that’s what makes Jesus such a great Master! Jesus is not normal! He *does* notice. He *does* acknowledge our contribution to His mission. He *does* reward. There are many rewards that Jesus gives. He mentions two of them here.

The first is a blessing (vs. 46). Notice that it doesn’t say the Master will bless the servant. It says that he is blessed. It’s not active; it’s passive. It is a state of being. Some things have their own reward. Have you ever been in a situation where things were just functioning the way they were “supposed” to? Maybe it’s your family, or your Sunday school class, your neighborhood or even your team at work.

It’s Thanksgiving Day (or some other holiday). The whole family is there. You’re sitting back just observing, watching the interaction between family members, listening to the laughter, smelling the good food, feeling the warmth of a full belly. And suddenly tears start to roll down your face. Someone notices and comes over to find out what’s wrong. All you can manage to get out is, “I am *so* blessed!” When interactions function the way they were designed to, it carries its own blessing with it.

We were designed to serve the Master and one another. Fighting against that will bring frustration. Submitting to it will bring blessing.

The other reward that Jesus gives is advancement (vs. 47). When you do a job well, you will be asked to continue doing that job and to do other jobs as well (Gen. 39:2-4). “Wait a minute. Working hard means I will get *more* work to do? That doesn’t sound like a reward. It sounds like a punishment. Thanks for the offer but no.” Let’s put it in different terms.

How many of you would turn down a promotion? Maybe the promotion means you would be in a position requiring certain distasteful actions. It might involve more travel and time away from your family. There *are* times to turn down a promotion. This is not one of them. The perks of this promotion are awesome. He says we will rule and reign with Him (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4).

Some people like the rule and reign part, the “in charge” aspect. Power is a great motivator. But that’s not what excites me. The further you advance in your company, the closer your office gets to the office of the CEO until eventually, you get to interact with him directly. And that’s what excites me – the “with Him” part of the rule and reign. I get to be *with Jesus*. That’s what motivates me to be a dutiful servant.

So far, we’ve covered three possible responses to the knowledge that the King is coming. Let’s review. You can be a disputer, fighting against everything that would, in your eyes, ruin your fun and mess up your plans for your life. You can be a doubter, always questioning whether or not Jesus is going to return and what that has to do with you even if He does. You can be dutiful, serving as a faithful, wise slave who gets advanced, but, at the end of the day, is still a slave. There’s one more option.

1. Disobedient (vs. 48-51) – “I have a Lord. I’m convinced He’s coming back, but I believe it’s later. So I’m going to do something bad about it.”

*“But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards…”* (Matt. 24:48-49)

If Jesus’ primary audience for this section and the previous one is pastors, then the circumstance He describes here is *bad*. Can you imagine any pastor doing what Jesus describes? I don’t think Jesus can imagine any Christian, much less any pastor doing this! He doesn’t have to. He sees it every day. It pains Him. Proverbs 10:26 describes the effect of a messenger who is acting improperly:

*“Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes so is the lazy one to those who send him.”*

Jesus doesn’t describe this servant as lazy. He describes him as “evil”: “morally wrong or bad, immoral, wicked; harmful, bringing injury” (dictionary.com). How many Christians, how many pastors have harmed the name of Christ through their actions or their laziness? What’s supposedly the number one reason that people reject Christianity? Hypocrisy.

“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.” – Brennan Manning[[6]](#endnote-6)

For the slave Jesus speaks of, both his evil actions and his evil failure to act bring his eventual judgment. Look at his actions: “beat his fellow slaves.” Why would he do that? Because he forgets that word “fellow” and begins to think of himself as the master and them as *his* slaves. The good slave is humble. The bad slave is proud. The good slave works with. The bad slave stands over. The good slave is owned. The bad slave is owner. The bad slave brings shame to his master (Prov. 14:35). The good slave brings refreshment (Prov. 25:13).

Have you ever been in a church where the pastor beats his people? He constantly communicates with them– either calmly or more likely through hollering – that they are not doing enough, giving enough or coming enough. When he does that, he fails to balance his message with God’s forgiveness, His mercy, His grace and His love.

Yes, we are sinners and need correction. But a shepherd is gentle with his sheep. A businessman can also beat his “slaves” by not paying them a fair wage, demanding that they constantly increase productivity and berating them in public. The one who claims to be a Christian can become the source of persecution instead of the recipient of it (Matthew Henry, The Bethany Parallel Commentary, p. 210).

This slave’s inactions are equally as bad as his actions. Jesus says that he eats and drinks with drunkards (v. 49). There’s nothing necessarily bad about that. Jesus did it, and he faced ridicule and criticism because of it (Matt. 11:19). The difference is while Jesus was with these sinners, He was *accomplishing* His mission. The evil slave Jesus speaks of is with drunkards to *avoid* his mission. He requires of those he considers to be his slaves what he is not willing to do. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for doing the same thing (Matt. 23:4). It’s called hypocrisy. It may be that Jesus had the Pharisees in mind when He spoke of evil slaves.

Look at the reason this slave acts the way he does. Partially it’s in his nature. He’s evil. But the other part has to do with his eschatological beliefs – his beliefs about the future of planet earth and what God is doing with it, particularly his beliefs about when Jesus is coming back. He doesn’t believe Jesus is coming back for a long time (v. 48).

I read a book recently that drew a connection between people’s beliefs about eternity and how they presently live their lives. One of the premises of the book is that people who focus too much on Jesus’ return and their Heavenly home don’t spend much time working to make this world as good as it can be. The author says:

“Our eschatology shapes our ethics. Eschatology is about last things. Ethics are about how you live. What you believe about the future shapes, informs, and determines how you live *now* [emphasis added]. If you believe that you’re going to leave and evacuate to *somewhere else*, then why do anything about this world?”

If that’s what we have done – ignored God’s earth and the people on it in favor of our cushy retirement home – then God forgive us! He continues:

“A proper view of heaven leads not to escape from the world, but to full engagement with it, all with the anticipation of a coming day when things are on earth as they currently are in heaven.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

The author is right. Seeing eternity for what it is and realizing that Jesus is coming back can have a profound negative impact on the way we live our lives presently. It can make us pessimistic about any hope for society, and it can give us an escapist mentality especially when we are in pain.

He is also wrong. Watching for Jesus’ return with great anticipation need not make it impossible for us to enjoy today or cause us to ignore the needs that are ever near us. It *must* do the opposite. Knowing I will soon see Jesus and knowing He is coming back both as Judge and Rewarder motivates me to do just as He said. Love God in heaven and love people on earth.

The people Jesus speaks of are the religious leaders. They know better. Jesus said the most severe judgment was reserved for those who had the most information and chose to ignore it (Matt. 11:23; Luke 12:48). This slave will be judged. Jesus graphically describes the method of his judgment – “cut in pieces” (vs. 51; 1 Sam. 15:32-33).

Couldn’t Jesus have been a little more gracious with his terminology? Couldn’t He have just said that the slave died or even that the Master killed him? Remember that God is just. The punishment always fits the crime. What was his crime? Hypocrisy. He was already in pieces – “double-minded” as James says (James 1:8; 4:8). As he lived, so he died.[[8]](#endnote-8) The worst part is that death is only the beginning. Jesus is preparing a glorious place (John 14:1-3), but not everyone will gain entrance. One group that will be excluded are those who “love and practice lying” (Rev. 22:15). One translation puts it this way: “all who love to live a lie” (NLT).

Well, where do those who get excluded go? They go where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vs. 51). You say, “Would Jesus really do that?” Jesus says He’ll do it. If you don’t believe me, believe Him. The One who wants to be your Savior will one day be your Judge.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**Conclusion:** The King is coming. The “when” of Jesus’ return is not something that you can determine. Therefore it’s not something with which you need to concern yourself. You *can* determine your response to the fact that He is coming back. But which one is the right response – A, B, C (emphasize) or D?

Do you remember taking multiple choice tests when you were in high school or college? The teacher, knowing the correct answer, had great difficulty coming up with wrong answers that seemed feasible. There would usually be two answers you could immediately throw out.

Which two of our potential choices do you think would be the worst responses to the teaching that Jesus is coming back? (A and D) Why? They both get severely judged. In both cases, the people involved lost their lives because they ignored the warning they were given. The judgment they received lasted beyond their death into eternity.

Maybe you can identify with group A or group D. You don’t believe all this Jesus stuff, or maybe you do, but you’re not going to let it affect in a positive way how you live your life. That’s a dangerous place to be. But this test is one on which you can change your answer all the way up until either your heart beats for the last time or until Jesus comes back. Jesus is patient.

The primary reason why He hasn’t come back yet is that He’s waiting for you to change your answer and say “yes” to Him (2 Peter 2:9). Know this. If you don’t change your answer, judgment *will* come (2 Peter 2:10), and your bad grade will be recorded in the red of *your* blood instead of your bad grade being covered over by the red of Jesus’ blood.

We’ve narrowed our choices. We’re down to a 50/50 – B or C (emphasize). I don’t mean to dredge up bad thoughts, but do you remember the SAT? There were two issues with the SAT. It was hard, and it was timed. It is common for people not to be able to finish it. Thankfully, you don’t get penalized for wrong answers. You get points for all your right answers. So as people realize they are running out of time and that they still have some unanswered questions, they quickly start marking one column of responses on their answer document. That’s actually what the SAT prep courses advise you to do. Which answer do they mark? That’s right. It’s letter “C.” I think I gave it away when I emphasized it. I cheated a little bit, but in this case, it’s okay to give a little help.

When you are unsure of the correct answer on a multiple choice test, pick C. What’s wrong with letter B? In letter “B,” you lose something (1 Cor. 3:15). It’s not your life thankfully. Jesus compares himself to a “thief,” not a murderer. That loss will come at the Judgment Seat of Christ – a topic for another day. You still get to go with Jesus when He comes even though you weren’t anticipating His return. It’s just that you don’t get to take anything with you. The only response that results in gain for the kingdom of God and for you is letter “C.” Choose C. That’s what the word Christ – the Messiah – starts with. And He’s the one that is expecting you to be watching and working until He comes.

1. “Elvis is born”; Elvis; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Elvis Presleys earnings: $27 million in 2016”; Forbes; Zach O’Malley Greenburg; Oct. 13, 2016; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Matthew Henry, The Bethany Parallel Commentary, p. 207; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Online dictionary, retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Online dictionary, retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. “Two big reasons why people reject Christianity”; Christianity.com; Doug Ponder; May 11, 2014; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Love Wins* by Rob Bell; p. 46-47; published by HarperOne; NOTE: Though this statement from Rob Bell’s book is a good one, I do not agree with the overall premise of His book. Some will go to heaven. Sadly, some will not. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Alexander Maclaren, The Bethany Parallel Comm., p. 211 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Matthew Henry, The Bethany Parallel Comm., p. 211 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)