

# Living with the End in Mind

Thomas Robinson, *Matthew—Conflict and Vision 4*, February 21, 2016

## **Matthew 24:32-51**

### **The Parable of the Fig Tree – Sure Signs**

<sup>32</sup> “From the **fig tree** learn the parable: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup> So also, **when you see all these things**, you know that **he is near**, at the very gates. <sup>34</sup> Truly, I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until **all these things take place**. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but **my words will not pass away**.”

### **Example of the Surprising Flood and The Son of Man’s Presence**

<sup>36</sup> But concerning **that day and hour no one knows**, not even **the angels** of heaven, **nor the Son**, but **the Father only**. <sup>37</sup> For as were the days of **Noah**, so will be the **presence (parousia) of the Son of Man**. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before **the flood** they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and **they were unaware** until the flood came and carried everyone away, so will be the **presence (parousia) of the Son of Man**. <sup>40</sup> Then **two men** will be in the field; **one** will be swept along and one left. <sup>41</sup> **Two women** will be grinding at the mill; one will be swept along and one left. <sup>42</sup> **Stay awake**, therefore, for **you do not know on what day your Lord is coming**.”

### **Parable of the Unexpected Break-in**

<sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the **master of the house** had known in what watch of the night **the thief** was coming, he would have **stayed awake** and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also, **be prepared**, for **the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**.”

### **Parable of the Faithful and Prudent Servant**

<sup>45</sup> Who then is the **faithful and prudent servant**, whom his Lord has **set over his household**, to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> **Blessed** is that servant whom his **Lord will find so doing when he comes**. <sup>47</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.”

### **Parable of the Violent and Disolute Servant**

<sup>48</sup> But if that **wicked servant** says to himself, ‘**My Lord is delayed**,’ <sup>49</sup> and begins **to beat his fellow servants** and eats and drinks with drunkards, <sup>50</sup> the Lord of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know <sup>51</sup> and will rip him to shreds and put him with **the hypocrites**. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

---

## **Matthew 24:2, 15, 29**

<sup>2</sup> (Jesus said to his disciples) “You see all these [temple buildings], do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ...

<sup>15</sup> “When, therefore, you see ‘*the abomination of desolation*’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel [11:31; 12:11], standing in a holy place (let the reader understand), <sup>16</sup> then let those in Judea flee to the mountains....”

<sup>29</sup> “Immediately after the distress/tribulation of those days, *the sun will be darkened, | and the moon will not give its light, | and the stars will fall from heaven ....*” [Isa 13:10; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Acts 2:20]

## **Daniel 7:12-14**

<sup>13</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

## **Amos 5:18-19**

<sup>18</sup> “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, <sup>19</sup> as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him....”

## **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself with a command, with an archangel’s voice, and with a trumpet of God will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be seized together with them in clouds to a meeting of the Lord in air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

---

## **Looking into the Future with Certainty and Fog**

People have always wanted to know about the future. Jesus started this discourse by astonishing his disciples: The temple will be destroyed! They want to know more. That’s cataclysmic! For Jesus it’s a judgment on a broken temple and misguided leaders – divided between sell-out to Romans or violence against outsiders. He mourned over Jerusalem. No clear vision of God’s promise to the whole world. No path to peace and inclusion. No recognition of God’s Messiah. Here, Jesus talks to his disciples before his crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, etc. The disciples know nothing of a “second coming” yet. They want to know when Jesus’ presence as king will be manifest. When the temple will fall and the ages will change. Jesus draws on well-known words of prophets: Daniel, Isaiah. He points to his vindication in the near future, but in a way meaningful & open-ended for them. “*When you see all these things...*” Abomination, sun dark.... Matthew records this in the light of events that have changed the reader’s perspective.

Jesus also uses his own distinctive way of teaching in parables: images and stories that catch the imagination and shape the disciples for the future rather than predicting events. The future is partly shaped by our own choices. Jesus wants the disciples to learn to live expectantly and open to surprises they can’t yet imagine. A wisdom down to earth but radically open to God.

## **Jesus Shapes Disciples for Wisdom in an Unfolding Future**

Our text is a series of parables. The fig tree says there will be signs: “all these things.” But Jesus asserts by his own authority that his presence and judgment are very near – this generation. Matthew shows us his resurrection and knows of the fall of Jerusalem as fulfillment.

As in prophets like Amos, Jesus points to God’s intervention as dark and fearsome. The flood becomes a parable of the wholly unexpected event that sweeps things away before it. Even the most radical Jewish groups (Zealots, Essenes) wanted Temple and Law to continue and Gentiles to be excluded. This coming cataclysm would change everything. Only the Pharisees survived. But the cataclysm would be complex with more elements than the disciples could imagine.

## **Wakefulness and the Value of Each Moment**

Jesus tells three parables of a Master of a House and his servants. The disciples are to learn both from the master and servants. Basic wisdom: Stay awake. Be prepared! (vv 42-44).

The uncertainty of the future is important. The Master doesn’t know when the break-in will come. The servants don’t know when the Master/Lord will come home. They show prudence or evil by the way they deal with the uncertainties of the future. Choices must be made that matter.

We live between certainty and uncertainty. We need to live with the end in mind. We know God is doing something great. We don’t know exactly what and certainly not when! We live each moment into a future we help shape. The only wise way to live is following the way Jesus has shown us. Living fully in God’s presence every moment. The end belongs to God. Stay awake!