

## THE (TIME OF THE) TRIUMPH OF GOD IS UNKNOWN BUT ANTICIPATED BY GOD'S PEOPLE

### Matthew 24:32-51

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

#### INTRODUCTION

While there are a multitude of various opinions among Christians regarding all the details leading up to the final return of Christ to the earth, every true Christian affirms that Jesus Christ will one day return personally, visibly and powerfully to this earth to judge the living and the dead and to usher in God's eternal kingdom (Matthew 24: 27-31, Acts 1:11, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 1 Thess. 4:13-17, etc.). In the passage we are examining today, Jesus gives three reasons Christians are to remain alert for that return. He also gives us instructions on how we are to remain alert.

#### STUDY

1. Describe the metaphor Jesus uses in v. 32 in your own words. How is it similar to the metaphor of "birth pains" from v. 8?

*In v. 32 Jesus uses a different metaphor from the "birthing" process metaphor to communicate a very similar point. He tells us that our situation in relation to his visible return is like what we experience at the end of a long winter. We know that summer is coming when we see the branches on trees get tender and the buds begin to swell and put forth their leaves. Again, like the metaphor of labor pains, it is a picture of a present process that points to a certain end. Leaves begin to sprout and thereby, let us know that summer is coming.*

2. According to v. 33, what realities do "tender twigs" and "sprouting leaves" correspond to? What is the "it" that is near, like summer is near?

*The "it" refers to the visible return of the Son of Man he just described in v. 31. Therefore, the "all things" includes everything else he has*

*said except for vv. 27-31. So he tells the disciples when they see false Christs, false prophets, false teachers performing miracles, professing Christians deceived, famines, earthquakes, wickedness increasing in the church and the world, professing Christians abandoning their faith and betraying other Christians, the gospel being preached to all the nations of the world and the fall of Jerusalem, then they should know that the return of the Son of Man is near.*

3. Based upon v. 36, how do we know that "near" does not mean, "immediately" or "in a very short time"?

*He says in v. 36 and illustrates the point in the following verses, that no one, including himself in his pre-resurrection state, knows the time of his return. Therefore, he does not know when he is going to return and so he cannot be saying I'm coming back immediately or right after the fall of Jerusalem. How could he say that when he doesn't know when he's coming back? Therefore, "near" does not mean, "in a very short time".*

4. What is it we are to conclude when we see trouble, deception and the gospel being preached to the nations?

*We are to conclude that Jesus could come at any time. These are all labor pains and sprouting leaves and we should know that at any moment, the Son of Man could appear, like lightning that flashes from the east to the west, to destroy his enemies, save the elect and remake the heavens and the earth.*

5. How does tragedy, trouble, false teaching, apostate Christians normally make you feel? How does Jesus want you to view these things?

6. How often do you think, "Today, Jesus might come back"? How does that make you feel to think about the fact that Jesus could come back today?

**Christians are to stay alert because Jesus could come at any time.**

7. According to v. 36 who doesn't know when Jesus is coming back?

*Immediately after telling the disciples and us that he could appear at any moment he tells them and us that no one, not the angels in heaven, not even he in his pre-resurrection, pre-glorified condition, knows when that day will occur. It is great error when anyone claims to know when Christ is going to return. Additionally, it is inaccurate to say while we cannot know the day or hour we can know the month, year or decade. The entire point of vv. 36-44 is that we will have no clue as to the immediacy of the return of Christ. While we know he could come at any time we can never know if it is at this time. All who say that the return of Christ is more likely in our day than it was in any other day are doing exactly what Jesus says you cannot do in these verses. The only certain thing we can say is what the apostle Paul says in Romans 13. Today is closer than yesterday. There is a clock ticking down to the end of the world in heaven and we are closer to that day today than we were yesterday but there is no sign that can tell us if it is more likely in our lifetimes than it was likely in the lifetime of the apostles.*

8. What did the world "in the days of Noah" share in common with the world that will exist when the Son of Man returns?

*God had determined a time that he was going to destroy the world and all of its evil inhabitants. He revealed his plan to his chosen people, Noah and his family. They did not know when it would happen only that it was near and so they prepared for that day by building the ark and collecting the animals. The rest of the world lived as if their way of life would never end. They ate and drank and gave in marriage and married. They did nothing to prepare for the day of judgment. The day that God told Noah to enter the ark and then he closed the door was just like any other day until the flood came. The coming of the flood was completely unexpected by the entire world, except for Noah and his family, though they did not know the day until God told them to enter the ark.*

9. What do verses 40-41 add to this picture?

*There will be no warning that the day of final judgment has arrived. People will be going about their business and suddenly one will be taken and another will be left. "Being taken" could refer to the angels "taking" the elect in the resurrection of living believers (v. 31) or it could refer to unbelievers being taken in judgment (v. 39). It doesn't really matter. The point is that humanity will be divided on that day into two groups, those being saved and those being condemned. It will be completely unexpected. On that day two men will be at work on the assembly line at the GM plant, suddenly, one will be taken and the other one will be left. On that day, two moms will be watching their children play at the park, one will be taken and the other one will be left. On that day, two students will be sitting next to each other in class, one will be taken, the other one will be left.*

10. How does the metaphor of a robber add to the idea of unexpectedness and preparation?

*If a homeowner knew when he was going to be robbed he could set the alarm to wake him up at that hour and only stay awake during that period of time. However, no one knows when the thief is going to come. Thieves do not tell their victims the hour they are going to show up. They don't even give them a period of time, such as, "I'll be coming to rob you between 1am and 3 am" so that the homeowner only has to stay awake for a short period. No, the only way to keep thieves at bay is to continually be alert and to protect yourself by locking the doors, installing alarm systems, paying the police, etc. You don't know when the thief might come so you incorporate activities into your daily routine to prevent the thief from gaining access. While a homeowner thinks it is unlikely that a thief will come on any day, he knows that it is possible on every day and so he establishes a daily routine to prepare for what he thinks is unlikely.*

11. How does it make you feel to know that while Jesus could come at any time, you never know if his coming will be at a particular time?

12. What daily routines are you engaging in order to be alert and watching for the return of Jesus?

**Christians are to stay alert because we do not know when Christ will come.**

13. In verses 45-51 Jesus uses another metaphor. He describes a master who leaves on a journey after putting one of his slaves in charge of all the other slaves while he is gone. How does the “faithful and wise slave” behave while he is gone?

*He spends his days, during the master’s absence, doing what he was assigned to do. He makes sure the other slaves are provided for and directed in their tasks. He uses his time and the resources entrusted to him to take care of his master’s property.*

14. How does the wicked and foolish slave behave while he is gone?

*He begins to treat his fellow slaves with cruelty. He lords it over them. He abuses his power and privilege and rules over them harshly. He begins to use his master’s resources to pursue the pleasures of this life. He holds great parties and indulges in satisfying his appetite for the best foods and wines. Then, just as he said, the master returns and finds his slave, whom he entrusted with his property, who promised to care for his property, abusing his position and his master’s property.*

15. What is the fundamental difference between the two slaves that produces the different behaviors?

*The second slave is called an evil slave. He is evil because first, he begins to reason falsely within himself. He concludes that since the master hasn’t returned yet, then his return must be a long way away. In fact, it is clear by what he does that he is persuaded that his master is not ever going to return. The evil slave looks at the absence of the master as evidence that the master will never return. The faithful and wise servant remembers the master’s promise that he was going to return and ignores the fact he hasn’t yet returned. The main difference between these two slaves is that one believes what the master said while the other one does not believe the word of his master.*

16. How does the master respond to each of the slaves?

*When the master returns from his journey he finds the faithful slave going about the work he was assigned. The master rewards that slave with greater responsibility and a higher position of honor in his household upon his return. When the master returns and finds the evil slave, whom he entrusted with his property, who promised to care for his property, abusing his position and his master’s property. The master, justly, destroys him and throws him into hell, into eternal, conscious suffering.*

17. How can you tell if you are believing or not believing the word of Christ?

*Not getting along with other Christians proves that you do not believe that Christ is coming back. When you judge and criticize and do not love other Christians you do so because you don’t believe that Christ is going to call you to account for how you treat others. Second, when you spend your time and money on leisure and houses and food and sporting events and drink and hobbies and computers and vacations and clothes and TV and spend no time and money on building the kingdom of God you are simply revealing that you have no faith. When you live as if happiness can be found here, on planet earth, and do not spend any time investing in the pleasures of heaven, you are living as the evil slave. Faith in the promises of Christ always produces a lifestyle of love towards other Christians and a life that invests time, money and emotion in the building of Christ’s kingdom. It means sacrifices are being made in our lives in order to advance the interests of Christ in the world. We don’t all do it the same way, but we all must be doing it, if we believe that the master is going to return.*

18. What are you doing each day to take care of your fellow slaves and to use your master’s resources to advance his interests in the world?

**Christians are to stay alert because we know we will give an account to our master.**