

June 27, 2010

IN THE MEANTIME...

MATTHEW 24.36-51

The exact time of the coming of the Son of Man is unknown, but this ignorance and the delay of his coming should not encourage lack of vigilance concerning our responsibilities. Rather, Jesus' servants must remain faithfully vigilant because the day will certainly come.

24.36: To what time is this section referring? AD 70 or the last day second coming? Some say subject has changed to last day as Jesus starts referring to "that day" of which they are ignorant. Jesus just spoke about the knowledge they could have of the previous events.

I believe he is still referring to events of "this generation." There are types and patterns of last day scenarios.

Structure: two sets of three parable-type vignettes. First three: 24.36-51; second three: 25.1-46.

Overlapping themes: (1) the sudden appearing of something or someone, (2) delay of arrival of a significant person, (3) exhortations to watch and be always prepared, (4) divisions between faithful and unfaithful, and (5) judgment scenes in which the faithful are rewarded and the wicked are punished.

1. THE DAYS OF NOAH (36-42)

No one knows (36): Change of emphasis from the general to the specific; generation to "day" and "hour" now. Of the specific day and hour that all of this will take place no one is knowledgeable.

Ignorance in this section vs. knowledge in the previous does not mean it is a different situation. They may know much about what will happen in that generation, but they cannot know the specific time.

No one knows except the Father. Angels = God's throne-chariot army has no knowledge of when the attack will take place.

The Son is even waiting for the orders to lead the attack.

How could God the Son not have knowledge of anything? He is the incarnate God who can grow in wisdom and knowledge (cf. Lk 2.40).

Incarnation involves some limitations of his divine attributes. He has chosen to limit himself in his humanity.

Note that Jesus is showing us something about his identification with us and his example for us in matters of faith. The Son himself must be patient and wait, trusting that the Father's timing is perfect.

As in the days of Noah (37-39): Normal activities of life going on ("eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage").

This does not mean that they were going about their normal lives and had no warning about what was coming. Noah preached for 120 years while building the ark (cf. 2Pt 2.5).

Judgment was delayed. They did not know the day or the hour. They paid no heed to the warnings.

Judgment came swiftly. Those unprepared could not then make preparations.

Parallel also to the fact that this is the destruction of the old creation and the making of the new.

One taken and one left (40-41): Sometimes understood as some sort of "rapture" experience where one is taken to safety and the other is left for destruction.

Imagery is more of exile. Cf. 2Kg 24.10ff.; 25.12; Jer 40.7; 52.16 - Nebuchadnezzar takes many into exile while leaving poorest of the land to labor.

Again, normal activities of life. Practically unaware that the world is about to end.

Stay awake! (42): Note that this is addressed to the disciples: “You (in the verb) stay awake!”

What exhortation is *not*: “Start trying to calculate when this will take place.” Their responsibility is to stay spiritually alert and not worry about the day or the hour.

Again, while they were to pay attention to the general patterns and warnings, they are not to be distracted from faithful living by sitting around and trying to figure out the exact time.

2. A THIEF IN THE NIGHT (43-44)

Emphasizes the unexpectedness of the event. The thief is not predicted.

Who is the master of the house? The disciples (cf. 24.45ff.). They have the responsibility to guard and protect it.

Who is the thief? The Son of Man. Seems like parallels to Passover and the death angel. He slips in the house and “steals” the firstborn sons who are not being protected.

They don’t know the specific time, so they must always be ready.

3. THE TWO TYPES OF SERVANTS (45-51)

The faithful and wise servant (45-47): The servants have the same charge: guard and protect his house giving food to his other servants at the proper time.

First response: the faithful and wise servant. Faithful = loyalty to the master.

Wisdom: the ability to see things from the proper perspective. Wisdom is *not* having all of the answers to life’s enigmas and coming out with airtight solutions.

The wise servant is not the one who has figured everything out. The wise servant is the one who lives with his perspective governed by the word of Jesus. The wise servant lives according to that word no matter if he understands the events going on around him or not.

“Blessed” - in a state of favor with the master (see Beatitudes). He is rewarded. The reward = more responsibility.

The wicked servant (48-51): “My master is delayed.” “Delay” is an important theme in Scripture.

Adam and Eve. God creates, places, and leaves them with the promise of return. The interval is the test of faith.

Noah, Abraham, Israel at Mt. Sinai (cf. Ex 32), Israel and the king.

God gives his promise and then delays its fulfillment. Will you continue stay faithful even though you don’t see all things as they will be?

The wicked servant takes the delay as a sign that the master is not really coming back. But he will return and reckoning will occur.

Cut in two = covenant curse. Will receive the inheritance of hypocrites (i.e., those who bear the name but don’t live according to the responsibilities).

Weeping - place of pain and sorrow. Gnashing of teeth - grinding of one’s teeth in anger and hatred.

1. The delay of our Lord’s coming should not encourage us to be reckless and unfaithful in living. Rather, we should remain ever vigilant.

2. The reward for faithfully managing the responsibility given to you is more responsibility.