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Sermon Notes

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The Day and Hour Unknown

Matthew 24:36-41

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"

Centuries of Speculation about the Timing of the Second Coming of Christ:

- In 1530, Martin Luther hurriedly finished and published his translation of the Book of Daniel into the German language so the people would be ready for what he considered to be the imminent end of the world. The Islamic Turkish empire under Suleyman the Magnificent had defeated a large Christian army at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526

"The world runs and hastens so excellently towards its end, that I often feel very strongly as if the Last Day would come sooner than we can complete translating the Holy Scriptures into German."

Luther finished translating the Scriptures into German less than four years after that statement! That's how imminent he thought was the return of Christ...

Amazingly though, Luther DID set a date for the Second Coming of Christ, and he thought it would be exactly 500 years

- Church Fathers in the early history of the church also set dates based on the "Seven-Day" week of creation and the statement in Psalm 90 and 2 Peter 3 that "with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day." So they believed all of human history would take six thousand years, and the seventh thousand years would be Christ's thousand-year reign on earth. The most detailed treatment of this scheme was worked out by Hippolytus of Rome early in the third century in his *Commentary on Daniel*, with the conclusion being that the defeat of the antichrist and the end of the world could be expected around the year A.D. 500
- In the 19th century, some theologians in England looked at the current events and saw the awesome power of the Turkish empire and began publishing works predicting the downfall of the Turks through the Second Coming of Christ. One of these men was named George Stanley Faber; in 1806 he published one work

on the end of both the Turkish power and the power of the Roman Catholic pope whom he thought to be the Antichrist; he published again in 1853

Using the number 1260 discerned, supposedly, from Revelation 11 and Daniel 12, Faber sought out to determine the time of the end. Like Luther before him, he believed the final antichrist would be a combination of blasphemous Papal religious authority and terrifying Islamic military might. Therefore, he determined that the year A.D. 606 was eschatologically significant because, according to him, that was the year that 1) the Roman bishop was declared to have supremacy, and 2) Mohammed entered the cave at Hera to receive his visions, thus beginning the Islamic faith. Thus, he added 1260 to 606 and arrived at an approximate date of 1864 for the time of the End. Since the Ottoman Empire was the most powerful manifestation of Islamic power at that time, Faber concluded that the end of the Ottoman Empire would certainly occur around 1864. The end of the Roman Papacy would also occur that year, and a restoration of national Israel would take place

1864 came and went with no noteworthy changes to the Ottoman Empire or to the Papacy

- In the 20th century, the most famous predictions of the end of the world have come through Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*. Though Lindsey made no direct predictions of the timetable, he hinted that the establishment of Israel as a nation in Palestine in the year 1948 started a countdown to Armageddon and the end of the world; he used the "Fig Tree" passage in Matthew 24 and the "one generation" statement of Matthew 24:32-34 to say that it was possible the Second Coming of Christ could occur within one generation of 1948. A biblical generation, according to Lindsey, was 40 years... so he said it was possible Christ could return by 1988. 1988 also came and went with no Second Coming of Christ
- Another speculator who zeroed in on 1988 was a man named Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA engineer and Bible student who predicted the [Rapture](#) would occur in 1988, sometime between Sept. 11 and Sept. 13. He published two books about this: *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* and *On Borrowed Time*. Eventually, 300,000 copies of 88 Reasons were mailed free of charge to ministers across America, and 4.5 million copies were sold in bookstores and elsewhere. Whisenant was quoted as saying "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town," and "[I]f there were a king in this country and I could gamble with my life, I would stake my life on Rosh Hashana 88
- Trinity Broadcast Network picked up on this and started airing programming that would prepare people for the imminent Rapture. Finally, the great day—September 13, 1988—arrived... and left.

When nothing happened by the end of September 13, Whisenant revised his prediction, suggesting the rapture would come at 10:55 AM on September 15. When that failed, he revised it to October 3.

Even when that date passed, Whisenant remained undaunted: "The evidence is all over the place that it is going to be in a few weeks anyway," he told *Christianity Today*.

After his "few weeks" had transpired, Whisenant finally saw his error. He claimed that he had made a slight miscalculation of one year because of a fluke in the Gregorian calendar. Jesus was actually going to return during Rosh Hashanah of 1989! Whisenant published his discovery in *The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1989*. "The time is short," he said. "Everything points to it." This publication was subsequently retitled *The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1990* and has since been re-titled yearly as *The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1991*, 1992, 1993, 1994 and so on. He continued to revise his date annually, until he finally gave up.

- Interest in the dates and timing of Christ's return goes all the way back to the Apostles themselves:

Acts 1:6-8 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- Standing over ALL these date-setting efforts are the repeated statements of Jesus in Matthew 24-25:

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Matthew 24:42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

Matthew 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Matthew 25:13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Today, we are going to dig into the secrecy of the TIME of the return of Christ... what that secrecy teaches us about God, about Christ, and about how we should live our lives on earth

I. The Timetable Hidden... Even from Jesus (In Those Days)

A. God Hides Himself and His Plans

Isaiah 45:15 Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

Psalms 97:2 Clouds and thick darkness surround him

B. God Reveals Himself and His Plans

Genesis 18:17 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

Exodus 33:18-23 *Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." ²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."*

Ephesians 3:4-6 *In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

C. God Decides What to Hide and What to Reveal... and When

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

Matthew 11:25-26 *At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

D. The Exact Timing of the Second Coming is Set and Knowable

1. God works out EVERYTHING according to the purpose of His will
2. That includes the exact time and circumstances of Christ's Second Coming
3. God knows exactly what He is doing; nothing is left to chance

E. BUT... God Has Hidden It From Us

Matthew 24:36 *"No one knows about that day or hour..."*

F. God Also Hides It from the Angels

1. Angels in the bible are frequently very inquisitive into the plans of God
 - a. In the Book of Daniel especially, angels ask other angels what this or that means, or especially how long something will take

Daniel 12:5-6 *Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. ⁶ One of them said to the*

man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"

b. 1 Peter talks about angels' inquisitiveness

1 Peter 1:12 Even angels long to look into these things.

2. God has hidden this particular issue from all angels and their inquiries

G. Amazingly... Even Christ Did Not Know in His Days on Earth

1. Incarnation an infinite mystery!!

2. Charles Wesley, "Hark the Herald Angel Sings"...

"Mild He lays His glory by..."

Philippians 2:6-7 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

3. Rejecting the kenosis theory... Jesus was FULLY GOD while on earth

4. BUT He voluntarily limited Himself

a. Glorious... But no outward display of radiant glory

b. Omnipresent... but choosing to limit Himself to one place at one time

c. Omnipotent... but choosing to allow people to kill Him

d. Omniscient... but choosing to limit His knowledge

5. Evidence of His omniscience

Matthew 12:25 Jesus knew their thoughts

Luke 22:8-10 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. ¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters

John 11:14 So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead

John 18:4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

John 19:28 knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

6. Evidence of His limitation on knowledge

a. Growth as a boy

Luke 2:52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

b. "Who touched me?"

Luke 8:42-46 As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

c. Jesus LEARNED obedience

i) God has NEVER learned anything and He never will

ii) Jesus, in His incarnation, learned obedience

Hebrews 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

d. This verse

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

H. Infinite Mystery Here!!

1. How can you be omniscient and not know things?

2. But Jesus was and is God in the flesh

I. I Believe Jesus Knows it NOW!!!

II. As It Was in the Days of Noah... People Will Not Be Ready

Matthew 24:37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

A. Since the Day is a Mystery, People Must be Ready

1. Consistent application over the next 58 verses is "YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN, SO BE READY CONSTANTLY!"

2. However, unbelievers do not believe the end is ever going to come

3. So people will not be ready
4. It will be just like the days of Noah when the ark was being built

B. The Second Coming is Like the Flood of Noah

1. The people of that generation were exceedingly wicked

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

2. The days before the flood: impending wrath and judgment

Genesis 6:17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.

3. God raised up Noah not only to build the Ark but to warn the people of the impending doom
4. Noah a “preacher of righteousness”... proclaiming to the people the way of safety, the way of deliverance

2 Peter 2:5 [God] did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others

5. So also the Second Coming of Christ will bring overwhelming judgment, wrath from God on a wicked world

2 Thessalonians 2:8 then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

Revelation 19:11-15 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

C. Without Faith, It is Impossible to Get Ready

1. Part of faith is to believe and to flee the wrath to come

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world

2. Part of unbelief is to NOT believe and make no preparations for the coming wrath

III. Life Goes On (As It Always Has), Until...

Matthew 24:38-39 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

A. Life Goes On

1. Part of the wisdom of God in concealing the Day of the Second Coming is to ensure that, in some ways life will be as it always has
2. This is a great delusion... people think because God has never interfered up to this point, He never will
3. But there is a plain-jane sameness to the unfolding of life as recorded in these verses
 - a. Eating and drinking
 - b. Marrying and giving in marriage
 - c. Not wicked events... necessary to the future, necessary to the continuance of life as they've always known it

B. People always assume things will be the way they always have

2 Peter 3:3-7 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

C. Getting specific: a wedding prepared in the days before the Second Coming

- a. The bride is excited about her special day
- b. She gets up on the big day and has a professional hairdresser do her hair... she looks in the mirror and likes what she sees; maybe it's a little wilder

than she liked, with some extra whispys flying out too far; she argues with the hairdresser; Jesus will return in 4 hours and 53 minutes, but she knows nothing about it

- c. She has breakfast with her mother and talks about the wedding... it has dominated her mind for weeks now, and the big day has finally arrived; she eats lightly... a bowl of fruit and some low-fat yoghurt, because she wants to be sure the bodice isn't too tight; she fusses with her mother over the dress her mother is planning to wear; they argue for a minute or two, but her mother backs down quickly... she remembers the emotions and nervousness of a bride's wedding day and she doesn't want to ruin it; Jesus will return in 3 hours and 10 minutes
- d. The prospective bride returns home and begins to pack the little bag she'll use to take to the church; her magnificent wedding gown has already been delivered there, but she packs her jewelry and her cosmetics and her shoes; her maid of honor, a friend from college comes in and they look at each other and squeal with girlish excitement!! Letting off steam, they jump up and down, in each others' arms... then they settle on her bed and talk excitedly about the future... they had NO IDEA what was coming... They assume the bride and her groom will have years and years together; when they get up from her bed, the Second Coming of Christ is just 2 hours and 16 minutes away
- e. She drives to the church and with her mother and her maid of honor, she dresses in her magnificent wedding gown; her father is rich and bought her the most expensive gown available in their hometown... she admires herself in the mirror; her mind is dominated by the wedding... she is nervous; she worries about a bunch of details: will her groom be there? Will he do okay? Will the justice of the peace do a good job? Will anything strange happen? She can hardly imagine that the Second Coming of Christ is now a mere 47 minutes away.
- f. The big moment has finally arrived: the music swells, and she begins her processional down the aisle; all eyes are on her, all heads turned toward her; at that precise moment, the skies are ripped apart and the angelic army descends with the Rider on the White Horse leading the way; the trumpet call of God explodes through the air; the voice of the archangel cries out a command, and the angels are dispatched

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

D. Jesus Ends Life as We Know It

1. Everyday life interrupted

- a. Bankers in Germany in their office in Stuttgart for another day of money-making, profits, investments, and trading
 - b. Wheat farmers in the Ukraine working out in the fields, laboring for a magnificent harvest that will never come to pass
 - c. Biochemical researchers in England planning their next experiments... the director of research has called a meeting and the scientists are filing into the conference room, planning a new pharmaceutical product that they think will revolutionize blood pressure treatments.. it will NEVER come to pass
2. All over the world, life on that final day will begin as it always has... merchants selling, shoppers buying, architects designing buildings, coal miners going down into the mines, people planning great things for a future

3. GOD INTERRUPTS EVERYTHING

IV. Those Taken Up and Those Left Behind

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Matthew 24:40-41 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

A. The Beginning of the Eternal Separation

1. Those taken are the elect gathered up to meet the Lord in the clouds and be with him forever
2. Those left behind are the non-elect who will spend eternity in hell

Matthew 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

B. Many Passages Teach This Separation

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 13:40-43 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

Matthew 13:47-50 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

C. The Precision of the Separation

1. The angels know exactly who the elect are
2. At this point in history, every elect person has already declared his/her allegiance to Christ by repentance and faith in Him... they have stood up during the days of persecution under the Antichrist... the angels each have their assignment and they make NO MISTAKES
3. The elect and non-elect have been in VERY CLOSE PROXIMITY to each other up till this moment... two men working together in the fields, two women grinding with a handmill; by extension, people sitting next to each other on a park bench, people standing together on a crowded Japanese commuter train from Kobe to Osaka... the angels don't miss a single elect person, nor do they take up a single non-elect person

D. The Basis of the Separation

1. The sovereign choice of God before the foundation of the world: election
2. The repentance and faith of these chosen ones when they heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation

V. Applications

- A. Come to Christ Now, While There is Time
- B. Do Not Be Deceived by the Ordinary Humdrum of Life... Christ Will Interrupt Human History When He is Ready
- C. Do Not Seek to Set Dates or Pursue a Knowledge that God Will Not Give
- D. Labor on the Kingdom Until He Comes
- E. Be Ready Constantly... Both for the Day of Your Death and the Second Coming

F. Be Faithful Stewards of What God Has Entrusted to You

G. Do Not Be Deceived by the Worries of this Life and the Deceitfulness of Wealth

H. Say “Come Lord Jesus!!!” YEARN FOR THAT DAY!