>>>>>>> *Matthew – Lesson 48* <<<<<<<

1) In verses 32 all the way through to 51 Jesus is explaining clearly that His return will not be on anyone's timetable but God Himself.

2) He is explaining to the disciples as well as us what our lives should be like in the meantime.

Matthew 24:32–35(ESV)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

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

1) Jesus' illustration of the fig tree is meant to teach the disciples that they will be able to recognize when the events He has described are approaching their fulfillment.

2) The repeated phrase "all these things" in verses 33 and 34 connects the illustration with the preceding discourse, particularly the events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction.

3) The statement that "he is near, at the very gates" may be understood as indicating that Jesus' return is approaching, without necessarily requiring that it occur immediately.

   a) In this sense, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE may serve as a significant historical marker.

      i) It may also act as a "stake in the ground" pointing the disciples toward the ultimate return still to come.

4) One last series of comments concerning the phrase, "He is near, at the very gates" in verse 33.

   a) Some translations render this phrase as "it is near." In the Greek, the subject is not explicitly stated, so the language permits either "He" or "it" is.

   b) We must therefore consider the context.

   c) Simply put, if the phrase is translated, "He is near, at the very gates," then "He" would naturally refer to the Son of Man or Christ, who has been the central figure in verses 27, 30–31.

   d) However, if the phrase is translated, "It is near, at the very gates," the situation becomes somewhat more difficult.

      i) There are two possibilities:

         (1) In one case, "it" could refer to the event Jesus has been describing, in particular the coming judgment / vindication associated with the destruction of the temple and fall of Jerusalem.

         (2) Another possibility is that "it" refers to the anticipated coming of Christ, rather than necessarily to the immediate destruction of Jerusalem itself.

      ii) The latter interpretation which I prefer, would allow either "He" or "it" as the translation while arriving at essentially the same meaning.

         (1) Once all this takes place, the stage is set for Christ's return and not any time before that.

1) In this next passage, Jesus finishes explaining to his disciples why He has not answered their question directly about when the exact time of His return.

2) He also clearly explains how they should act in the meantime.

Matthew 24:36–44(ESV)

No One Knows That Day and Hour

36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,
nor the Son, but the Father only. 37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the
coming of the Son of Man. 38 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, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will
be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be
taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and
one left. 42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is
coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of
the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let
his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is
coming at an hour you do not expect.

3) There are several things to notice about these first verses, 36 through 41.

   a) Again, Jesus makes it clear that the only one who knows the time He will return is God the Father – not the angels and not even Jesus Himself.

   b) Here is another set of verses which emphasize the fact that the second coming will be markedly different from the time of tribulation He described around the destruction of the temple.

      i) There will be no time to run, no time to return to your house to get a cloak – the taking of those who are God's people will be instant.

      ii) Just a comment here, I had never made the connection before but this leaving some and the taking of others maybe the actual separation of the sheep and goats we will get to in a bit – just a thought?

   c) There is also the fact that life will be going along in a normal fashion.

      i) Nothing special will be going on and then suddenly, Christ will return.

4) All of this leads to the point of the rest of these verses – be prepared.

   a) "…stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming…"

5) To the disciples directly and all of us who come after He says:

   a) "…you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Do we feel that urgency of being prepared for the Lord's return or do we feel pretty confident in where we are? Why? Why not?

6) He then tells a parable demonstrating the seriousness of failing to be prepared.

Matthew 24:45–51(ESV)

45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 47 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know 51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

7) Here Jesus describes a servant that is more than apathetic – he is taking advantage of the fact that he thinks the master will be delayed.
   a) This is the perhaps the case of those who recognize there is a God and Christ but choose to live lives filled with sin thinking that they will "someday" repent and everything will be o.k.
   b) The truth is it is not, nor will it ever be!
8) I found the comment in verse 51 interesting – "cut him to pieces and put him with the hypocrites."
   a) To cut him to pieces or as some translation have it "to cut a person in two" refers to a form of judgment used in ancient times.
   b) The picture is one of severe judgment.
9) From my part, adding that to the place described, I want no part of it.

Just an opinion question – do you think it is necessary for a person to believe in eternal punishment in order to truly understand what it means to stand against God?

   a) As a preliminary criterion – no. However, if one comes to know the word and truly believes in Jesus then understanding that there is an eternal punishment is inescapable.

10) Ok, moving on.
11) This next parable is a natural fit after the previous dissertation regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming.
12) The title overall might be "The Bridegroom Is Coming: Are You Ready?"

Matthew 25:1–13(ESV)
The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go

rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' [10] And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. [11] Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' [12] But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' [13] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

13) This parable in context becomes one of spiritual vigilance – how we should lead our lives as Christians until Christ returns.

14) There is a passage in Jerimiah that I found particularly interesting in that it really might fit nicely in this situation.

Jeremiah 8:7 (ESV)

[7] Even the stork in the heavens
knows her times,
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane
keep the time of their coming,
but my people know not
the rules of the LORD.

a) I think there is an implication here that as God was saying to the Israelites, living by the rules of the Lord is how they should naturally be – like these birds that know when and how they are to do things – migration etc. by nature.

b) Perhaps the connection can be made that we when we are buried with Christ into His death and raised to live a new life, the new life should be like that.

i) As we mature in our faith living as Christ wants should become as natural as breathing.

c) The issue with us is like that of the unprepared virgins – we know what we should do to be prepared for the Lord's return but we don't.

i) In our busy lives, we can easily let our spiritual disciplines slip and miss opportunities to grow in faith and service.

ii) Preparing for the day of the Lord means maintaining our relationship with Him and being active in good works, so we are not caught unawares.

iii) We cannot be as one who rejects that life God intends for us to live as we please where selfishness and complacency are at the core of what we do.

d) No matter the reason, we must work at removing any and all obstacles and live according to God's word and what he desires for us.

e) This is the only way we can be sure we are prepared when the Lord comes.

i) This means keeping ourselves aware of our progress or lack of in our Christian life.

15) The big difference between us and the animals is that they have no choice – God designed them to live as they do by nature.

a) They have no requirements beyond nature and God has no expectation of them beyond nature.

b) They are not under the curse of eternal death because of sin as we are.

c) So, ours is a choice to become committed to the rules of God to live as He desires and, it cannot be something we just "kind 'a do." It is a commitment to God and a life pleasing to Him to the end.

16) Big Idea here is that believers are called to be wise and prepared for the imminent return of Christ.

a) By being prepared, we are ensuring that we are spiritually equipped and actively living out our faith to enter into the joy of the eternal banquet.

What things can we do to be like the wise virgins?

b) Foresight to carry extra oil represents a life of preparedness and spiritual vigilance.

c) Believers today must live with anticipation of Christ's return.

d) Maintaining spiritual disciplines and nurturing a growing relationship with God, ensuring that their 'lamps' remain lit.

i) Involves consistent prayer, studying the Word, and engaging in acts of love and service.

e) We must guard against apathy and not being prepared by regularly 'filling our lamps' – keeping our faith alive and active so we are not caught unprepared.