

Is 2022 the Beginning of the End? (Part 2)

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[Editor's note: Finally, we provide the promised Part 2 of "Is 2022 the Beginning of the End?"]

In the January 2021 issue, I wrote a feature which identified foundational biblical signs of the end of the world which were apparent in 2021. Foremost were **apostasy** and **lawlessness** (2 Thessalonians 2). You can review part 1 on our Web site. [www.faith-search.org. Under the Questions tab, select "Paraclete: News and Evidence" and navigate recent *Paraclete* posts on the right, or search for the article title.]

Part 2 will explore the New Testament for guidance on what Christians should know and do to prepare for Christ's return and receive His commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

What We Can and Cannot Know

It is good to be reminded what Scripture says about the return of Christ.

We CAN know...

- that **His return** is a certainty and is affirmed nearly sixty times in the New Testament. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).
- the **indicators** of the end times, which are for us to see and recognize. "Even so you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Mark 13:29).
- why His return is **delayed** so long. "The Lord is not slow about His promise... but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- the **order** of the resurrection at His return. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We CANNOT know...

- the **exact day and hour** of His return. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:33; Acts 1:6-7).

A Thief in the Night

In my decades of Bible teaching I have found a significant misunderstanding by believers of the "thief in the night" passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

"For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night." Yes, this is **true for the unbeliever**. If you read ahead, you discover the contrast:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day... so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" (vv. 4-6).

Paul's message is that the believer who trusts in the Word of God is not to be taken off guard. The Bible gives those who believe many "signs of the times" to anticipate Christ's return. For example, after citing many end times signs (Matthew 24:4-14), Jesus gave the parable of the fig tree:



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IN THE NEWS

Blinded Minds (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The word "Christ" you are trying to publish violates regulations on Internet Information Services, including, but not limited to the following categories: pornography, gambling, drug abuse, incitement.

This is from China's WECHAT CENSORSHIP TEAM, sent to Early Rain Covenant Church about its book review group's post, which included a reference to *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (the fifteenth century theologian).



The Bible speaks pointedly against the atheism of people (including their governments and institutions) as is being practiced in China:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened... For they exchanged the truth of God for falsehood... (Romans 1:21, 25).

Beginning of the End?

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Now learn the parable from the fig tree; when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door (vv. 32-33).

Jesus added that it will be like the unbelievers experienced at the time of the Genesis global flood who did not understand and were totally surprised and unprepared – “so shall the coming of the Son of Man be” (v. 39).

What Sort of People Ought We to Be? (2 Peter 3:11-12, 14)

In view of the certain return of the Lord, the apostle Peter reiterated the “thief” motif (v. 10) and the coming destruction of the heavens and the earth (vv. 10, 12), and asked, “What sort of people ought you to be?” (v. 11) He summarized His answer in v. 14: “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...”

Jesus taught several parables to highlight the responsibilities of believers during His bodily absence. In each case there is an absent lord. What was expected while the lord was gone? That can be summarized with three words: Watchful, Prepared, and Faithful.

Be Watchful

Being alert is the predominant theme to believers in all the passages on Jesus’ second coming. For example, “Be on the alert” (Matthew 24:42; 25:13); “Be on your guard” (2 Peter 3:17); “be alert and sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6); “And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’” (Mark 13:37). The Gospel of Luke (21:34) puts it in a very personal way: “But be on your guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that this day will not come on you suddenly like a trap.” This is also the point of the parable of the fig tree cited above.

There is another important teaching of Jesus in the “faithful and wise servant” (Matthew 24:42-51) parable. It speaks to the care of a “household” and the relation of all within it to the absent lord. In his *Gospel According to Matthew*, G. Campbell Morgan makes this application: “We shall prove our loyalty in the Church of God to the absent Lord, by the

measure in which we serve one another” (p. 289). In this sense, being watchful is a corporate (Church) response.


Be Prepared

For whatever reason, the foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 failed to prepare for the inevitable, but delayed, arrival of the bridegroom (representing the second coming of the Lord). Oil often represents the Holy Spirit who enters the penitent (Galatians 4:6), resulting in forgiveness and identity as children of God. As Paul said to believers, “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Romans 8:9b). Thus, Jesus said to the foolish virgins, “I do not know you” (v. 12). Since there is nothing in this parable about an expectation for entrance to the marriage feast based on service done, it is instead about relationship or the lack of it. To be prepared, then, is personal – to **establish a relationship with the Bridegroom**, as in John 1:12-13: “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God...born of God” (NIV).

Be Faithful

Three servants of a master are given a portion of the master’s “goods,” each “according to his own ability” (Matthew 25:15). The point of the parable is their accountability to the master for the return on His investment. Faithfulness was rewarded with commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant...” (v. 21, 23).

What investment did Jesus give to His followers and the Church before He ascended? Luke reports it: “...[Y]ou shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ followers for the past 2,000 years will be asked to report the fruit of that investment. How have we participated in expanding the Kingdom of God, both individually and corporately, in this interval until He returns?

Whether 2022 is the beginning of the end we cannot know with any certainty, but we are to attend to the signs. Two things we are to know. First, our desire to see the Lord should prompt us to say with the apostle John, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Second, our love for Him should prompt us to seek His commendation—“Well done, good and faithful servant!”—by being watchful, prepared, and faithful. 

IN THE NEWS

Unintended Consequences


The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did a survey of 7,705 high school students during the pandemic measures enacted in 2021. It was alarming to discover that 44% reported feeling “persistently sad and hopeless.” Even more troubling was the finding that 26% of girls surveyed had contemplated suicide during the year.



These unintended consequences of the pandemic isolation measures prompted the American Academy of Pediatrics in October 2021, to declare a **national emergency in child and adolescent mental health**.

It is the hope of *FaithSearch* that youth and adults in stress would **turn to God and the Bible**. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus made a promise to believers: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27, NASB).

The apostle Paul also counseled the Philippian believers:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV). 

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