

“When is Jesus coming back? How will I know when He does?”

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### **Opening Prayer**

Good Morning and welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be here with you this morning. If this is your first time here, or your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. You have come during one of the toughest, yet most important, sermon series we have done recently here in our churches. Over the course of this month we are focused upon answering the tough questions that you, the congregation, have. We have gone through three of our seven top most requested topics, and today we tackle the fourth: “When is Jesus coming back, and how will I know when He does?” Before we dive in, a quick side note on all of these topics. Fifteen-twenty minutes max is all I have Sunday mornings to preach on these questions... each question of course could cover a lifetime of study. Part of the way we help to amend this is that our churches have small groups and Bible studies, and we also have the distinction that we are small enough where each of you hopefully know me. If you have questions, concerns, comments, whatever, then do not hesitate to talk to those church leaders, those Bible study leaders, or your minister. That is what we are here for. Additionally, please recognize that each of these topics are potentially contentious. Looking ahead to next week when we talk about homosexuality in the church, or the focus on suffering on the 27<sup>th</sup>, please know that our purpose in looking at these is to provide the truth and to put you into contact with Christ’s word. We recognize that these are touchy subjects, and we want to make sure that all of you know that you are allowed to come and dialogue with me over this. No matter how you feel on these tough subjects, know that you are loved and prayed for regularly by your church... nothing will change that. Please do be in prayer for your

church as well, and your minister, knowing that there is this potential for hurt in these topics. With all that being said, our focus for today is thankfully not all that contentious, although it can be quite confusing. The question is when is Jesus coming back and how are we going to know it for sure? Thankfully, Christ Himself answered much of that in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter twenty-four.

It may be a surprise to many of you who have looked at Jesus's second coming before that our focus on when He is coming back today is not based out of Revelation, or Daniel, or 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians. All of those books (and several others) hold prophecies concerning Jesus's return and the end times... but Jesus Himself answers the question of His return for us in this chapter in detail. To remove the mystery, Jesus tells us very clearly here that no one knows the exact hour that He is coming back. It isn't revealed to us, and it isn't ours to know at present. However, Jesus also makes it clear that while we don't know the exact date or time, we will know when His coming is upon us. Knowing these two things, our proper response is to stay alert and work hard because Jesus will return. With those spoilers out of the way, Matthew 24 begins with a prophecy from Jesus which paves the way for His talking about His second coming.

Matthew 24:1-2 reads "Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to pointed out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.'" This prophecy by Christ is in reference to the temple in Jerusalem, which in AD 70 (about forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus) was torn down. The temple stones had layers of gold on the outside, as well as stores of gold and silver inside. When

the Romans set fire to the temple the gold and silver inside and outside melted and ran in between the stones, so the Romans moved every stone and took all that gold. It was a horrible atrocity, and it started a mass deportation of the Jews from all of Judea that would only be reversed in 1947, when Israel was reestablished as a country.

(Answered prophecy within the last few decades.) This whole story is a set up for the coming end of the age, which the temple destruction would have been for the Jews. As Jesus is asked about the coming end of the age, He is also asked about “His coming” in verse three. His response has much merit for us today as we talk about Jesus’s return.

Matthew 24:4-6 “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place but that is not yet the end.’” Over the years how many times have you folks heard about Christ’s return, a specific time and place? At the very least we have heard much about the end of the world, and about how we have “decoded” things from history. Nostradamus, the Mayan calendar, Bob Jones, the History Channel etc. do not know the end. Verse 11 reads “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.” Beloved Congregation, know that when you hear from people that they know the date or the time... they are incorrect. We often wonder about the date and the time, we ask if it will be in our lifetimes, will we taste death before the coming of the Lord? To be honest, with what we know, the Lord has not revealed it to us. Wars and rumors of wars, plagues, famines, tribulation for God’s people (Jews and Christians), false prophets, and the gospel being preached worldwide all precede His coming... but that is all of what we know. Jesus makes this very clear in verse 36 when He says “But of that day and hour no

one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” Beloved Congregation, we just do not know the specifics, only the Lord knows. The Apostle Paul thought it would be in his lifetime, and just about every generation since has believed it was soon... but we just don’t know exactly how soon. However, while we may not have the specifics on the date and time, Jesus does make sure to tell us that we will for sure know when He does return. There are going to be no doubts about Christ’s return for His people... if they are watching for it.

Matthew 24:32-33 “Now learn the parable from the fig tree; when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know the summer is near; so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.” The parable that Jesus uses here is one of a fig tree. The fig tree is one of the most common types of trees found in that part of the world. They are everywhere. It is noted that it is common knowledge that when the fig tree starts leafing, it is a sign that summer is coming. For us in our part of the world, it would be akin to Jesus saying that when the trees start to change color that winter is coming. Jesus uses this parable to note that if folks are paying attention, they can see the signs of the times. It relates to Jesus’s return, and it also relates to the temple destruction that Jesus mentioned earlier. Quick side note: there is layered prophecy here. Jesus is talking about both the stuff that will happen in the next few years with the destruction of the temple and the Jewish persecution; and He is also talking about His second coming. If you read verse 34 “truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” It is in reference to the things that will happen in AD 70. If you read verse 36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” There He is referencing His second coming. Sometimes our

confusion comes from layered prophecies like this. Regardless, the important piece is that we are told to read the signs of the times... to pay attention.

If you are looking for some of those answered prophecies that have marked that Jesus's second coming is moving closer, we have many to choose from. We know that every tribe, tongue, and nation will have representatives in heaven (see the blessing in Genesis 12 or Revelation 7). In the last two thousand years those that call upon Christ as Savior have gone from a dozen to 2.2 billion, encompassing most nations, tongues, and races. It is estimated that within the next few years that the Gospel will be available in every single language. This is an answer to prophecy, and it marks the coming of Christ. Another would be the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. Until 1947 the people of God who are descended physically from Abraham had no home. Yet if you read prophecies regarding Christ's return, there is clearly a nation of Israel. For almost two thousand years there was no nation, and it certainly wasn't centered in what was their ancestral home... until just a few short decades ago. There are even small prophecies and mentions in scripture that we can look at and see evidence that God's plan is moving forward. Daniel 12:4 reads "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." Knowledge has always been increasing and humans have always traveled back and forth, but not quite like the last century. We, Beloved Congregation, cannot be blind to what the Lord is doing, although as 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter says in 3:3-4 many will not believe. "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'"

Don't be deceived, we are moving towards Christ's return, even if the exact time isn't made known.

Jesus also compares His second coming to the flood of Noah, which for us hammers the point home. "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark." As one of my commentaries noted, it wasn't that the people in Noah's time were doing bad things (at least in regards to being married, eating and drinking, etc.) but they were focused upon the things of this world rather than seeing the signs of what was coming. Consequently, destruction came, and they weren't prepared. Beloved Congregation, when we think about the second coming of Jesus we always focus upon trying to know the day and the hour instead of keeping alert for when He does come. What does being alert look like? It means acting like we expect that Jesus could come back at any moment, knowing that He could. This more than anything else, is what Jesus wants us to be concerned about in regards to His second coming. We are to know that He will come, and that until that time we are to be doing the things that He has called us to do... not knowing exactly when Christ will return.

Verses 42, our memory verse for the week says "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." We are told to be on alert, to be found ready. The rest of the verses we read this morning from Matthew 24 speaks about this. We read about how Jesus will come when we don't think He will. We read about how we are supposed to be found acting like a good servant when their master is away. (Think a good employee when the boss isn't around if that helps.) But what does this look like? What does a good Christian man

or woman do in preparation for Christ's return? There are many things that we are called to do, but we don't have to make it complicated. I have heard many times about the person who wants to wait until later to get something right. They will quit drinking too much next week after the party. They will start attending church regularly after the summer season. They will call their mother or sister or grandparents tomorrow. Beloved Congregation, we don't know the date or the time of Christ's return, so we should be doing these things today. You are called to live a life dedicated to Christ as His servant not ten years from now, but today! Youth, you are called to serve the Lord today, not just after you graduate high school or college. You who work, holding down a job is hard and raising a family is hard... but don't miss out on the great things the Lord has called you to do today! It isn't just about after you retire. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:13-14 tells us why we should have this view when it states "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." If there is one thing that you should take away from these conversations about Christ's return, it is that until the time He comes back we still have work to do. We are still called to go and make disciples, spreading the Good News that Jesus has saved all who call on Him from their sins. We are still called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, body, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Beloved, as we go forth today, we should live our lives knowing that Christ could return at any moment, because He just might. May we be found serving Him diligently until He calls us home or until He returns. Amen. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer**