

AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Matthew 24:43 (NKJV)

43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

It is Jesus who first introduces the idea that His coming will be like a thief coming in the night (cf. Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). The Old Testament prophets NEVER spoke of Christ's coming in this way because they only dealt with the second phase of His second coming – namely His coming to the earth. The rest of the New Testament then builds on this “coming as a thief” analogy. Paul, John, and Peter all borrow from Jesus in this regard which is one reason I say Matthew 24 is the prophetic seed plot for the rest of the New Testament.

Thieves come without warning, without signs, without any heads up. This fits perfectly with illustrating how Christ will come before the Tribulation Period at the Rapture of the Church. It will come unexpectedly because there are no clear signposts to indicate its arrival. Yes, we see the day coming generally in that we see the last day's trend of apostasy, but there are no definitive signposts (cf. Heb. 10:25; 1 Jn. 2:18).

It is common for some dispensationalists to say that the rapture is completely disassociated from the beginning of the Day of the Lord and they argue that therefore there may be a gap – perhaps a fairly large one between the rapture and the start of the Day of the Lord which begins with Antichrist signing a 7-year covenant with Israel.

I don't believe in this “gap theory”. I believe that the rapture takes place and immediately history segues into the Day of the Lord judgment. A key reason for believing this is that here in Matthew 24:43-44 Jesus illustrates that His coming will be like a thief in the night. And then as we turn to 1 Thess. 5:2 we find Paul saying that the Day of the Lord also comes as a thief in the night. What is true of the one is also true of the other because in fact they are closely connected – with BOTH coming UNEXPECTEDLY as a thief in the night.

Matthew 24:43–44 (NKJV)

43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NKJV)

2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

I take it that the coming of Christ at the Rapture and the coming of the day of the Lord are like two sides of the same coin. The coin is the coming as a thief. On the one side of the coin is the coming of Christ, on the other side of the coin is the coming of the Day of the Lord. They are distinct, but yet closely related in that the one immediately segues into the other. Thus, both happen without warning.

We also see this earlier in the text. In verse 38 we find the people are carrying on with life in a normal way UNTIL the day that Noah entered the ark. In verse 39 the people did not know UNTIL the flood came and took them all away. The single coin here is the word "UNTIL". On the one side of the coin is UNTIL Noah was safely tucked inside the ark – which corresponds to deliverance via the rapture. On the other side of the coin is UNTIL the flood of judgment came – corresponding to the day of the Lord judgment.

The rapture comes as a thief in the night as does Day of the Lord. The one ushers in the other. They are like two sides of the same coin. When the one happens the other follows. It is an immediate segway. Thus, the rapture in effect introduces the Day of the Lord which immediately follows on its heels.

Matthew 24:44 (NKJV)

44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Christ plainly says here that this aspect of His coming (the rapture) will happen when we do not expect it. This is the very opposite of verse 33 which says "***when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!***"

The only reasonable explanation is that there are in fact TWO phases to Christ's Second Coming. The first phase is totally unpredictable and unexpected. That relates to the rapture. The second phase is predictable for those who will be alive in the Tribulation Period.

The next event on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture but we have no idea when it will take place. Christ has plainly told us this. So to set any dates is wrong!

Early in my ministry in a service we were singing the song, "***What If It Were Today?***" It has a line that says, "***Jesus will come someday***". I happened to be sharing a songbook with a brother and when we got to that line he inadvertently sang, "***Jesus will come today***". I got to laughing so hard I could hardly continue to sing.

Jesus may come today, but we don't know. Many have set dates – they have all been wrong. No one knows when Christ will come for the Church.

That is why we are to "***live ready***". We get ready by putting our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And then we live ready by ever being watchful and vigilant in our daily walk.

In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul said the Corinthian church was "***eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ***", and then at the end of this letter he signed off by saying "***Maranatha***" (an Aramaic word) in 1 Corinthians 16:22.

Maranatha = "Our Lord Come"

"Mar" = ("Lord")

"ana" = ("our")

"tha" = ("come")

The early Church was looking for Christ to come at any time and therefore greeted one another with the greeting, "Maranatha" (Our Lord Comes).

Perhaps today! Live ready! Maranatha!