

Lesson Two - The Unknown Day and Hour of Jesus' Return

(*End Times*, pages 41-51 and 199-215)

Goals

1. To confirm that, in spite of many claims to the contrary, only God knows the time and date of the second coming of Christ.
2. To recognize that our lack of knowledge about the date of Christ's second coming is a blessing.
3. To learn the fate of those who die in the Lord before the glorious day of Christ's return.

Opening Prayer - Lord God, your wisdom and knowledge is unmatched. As we examine today what we don't know and what you know, keep us humble and ever mindful that you hold the entire world in your hand, including the time when you will come again. Bless our discussion and study today. Amen.

Introduction

1. Many major sports leagues and places of employment have enacted policies regarding random drug testing. For what reasons does it make sense to have a drug test be random rather than scheduled?
2. Teachers and parents might say things like "I'll be back in a little bit. Don't misbehave or you'll be in trouble." For what reasons is the authority figure vague about the amount of time they will be gone?
3. In both scenarios, how might the workers, players, students, or children respond to these things?

No One Knows the Day or Time

4. Turn to **Acts 1:7** and **Matthew 24:36,42**. Who alone knows the time of Jesus' second coming?
 - a. Explain how Jesus could say "not even the Son" in Matthew 24:36.
5. Looking at **Matthew 24:44** and **1 Thessalonians 5:3**, fill in the following blanks: In addition to being unknown, the moment of Jesus' return will also come _____ and _____.
6. There are a number of phrases and illustrations in the Bible which indicate this coming could happen at any moment. Look up **Hebrews 10:37**, **James 5:8-9**, and **Revelation 22:20**. Write below the words or phrases that teach this truth in these verses. What other phrases or illustrations from other sections of Scripture come to mind?

7. The second coming is near, yet two thousand years have passed since the announcement was made multiple times. Turn to **2 Peter 3:3-9**, noting two explanations for the apparent “delay”.
 - a.
 - b.

What comments, questions, or thoughts do you have?

Date Setters

It is tragic that so many well-meaning people throughout the history of the church have tried to determine the date of the second coming of Christ. Church history, regrettably, is littered with the failed predictions of date setters. The plague of date setting has afflicted Christians in the United States as much as in any other place. In America, two nationwide denominations have arisen that set dates for Christ’s return. They are the Seventh-day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. There have been at least 150 known failed attempts to predict the End.

8. Recalling what we read earlier from **Matthew 24**, along with our discussion last week, look up **Acts 1:7-8**. There will undoubtedly be more predictions about the Last Day. What emotions and thoughts go through your mind as you hear those things?

What Happens to Those Who Die Before the End?

9. Open to **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, **Luke 23:43**, and **Philippians 1:23**. What happens to a Christian if they should die before Judgment Day?
 - a. What gets left behind for believer and unbeliever alike?

10. So, if the judgment of the soul is conclusive and irreversible (and it is), what two purposes does a final judgment serve, like the one we see depicted in the parable of the Sheep and Goats?
 - a.
 - b.

11. Agree or disagree and explain: Christians want Judgment Day to come before they die so that they don’t have to experience heaven without their bodies.

12. There are a number of false teachings with regard to what happens to the soul at death. The following are the three main ones you might encounter. In your groups, match one of the following Bible passages with the false teaching which that verse refutes: **Hebrews 9:27; 1 John 1:7; Luke 16:22-23.**
- a. Soul sleep – The soul lies dormant and unconscious from the moment of death until Judgment Day. Refuted by:
 - b. Reincarnation – Popular in Eastern thought (especially Buddhism and Hinduism), this teaches that the soul comes back in a new body or form to reexperience the world and attain a higher spiritual standing. Refuted by:
 - c. Purgatory - This official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church teaches that purgatory is a place of severe torment and punishment where most believers go after death. Prayers and masses for the dead can reduce the time spent in purgatory. Refuted by:
 - d. Give some reasons why you're thankful the Bible doesn't teach any of these doctrines.

Summary

Only God knows the time and date of the second coming of Christ. All human claims to the contrary are to be rejected. God has not revealed the moment of Jesus' return because, in love, he does not want us to fall into spiritual sleep. He wants us to remain watching and ready at all times by living each day in repentant faith in Jesus our Savior. Those believers who die before Christ's second coming live with Christ in the bliss of heaven, awaiting the glorious and bodily resurrection of the Last Day.

What questions, comments, or thoughts do you have?

Closing Prayer (CW 9, v. 1 and 5)

**Jesus, your Church with longing eyes
For your expected coming waits.
When will the promised light arise
And glory beam from heaven's gates?**

**Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for your appointed hour,
And fit us by your grace to share
The triumphs of your conquering power. Amen**

During the week, feel free to read Revelation 2:1-3:22, noting the key differences between the seven churches to whom John writes.

Next week: While We Wait for Jesus' Return (What we will experience and the Antichrist)