

A Living Understanding of the End Times

**Kay-Chong Yeo
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Preface

Matthew 24:3: “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

Jesus commanded one generation of believers to know that His return was near – the generation that would be alive to see all the trends and signs that He prophesied about in Matthew 24.

Therefore, it is vital to have a clear and biblical understanding of the End Times, especially in such a time as this. Many in the Body of Christ believe that we are living in the generation where Jesus will return.

If this is true, there will be many implications and questions – What does Scripture say? What does it mean for our generation if this is true? What is going to happen? Will it get better or worse? How then shall we live and what then shall we say in order to prepare ourselves and others? Who is Jesus when He returns?

It is so vital for us to answer all these questions if we are indeed living in the generation of Jesus’ return so that we can prepare ourselves to be that overcoming, victorious and mature Bride that Jesus is returning for.

This School seeks to provide answers to questions of what is going to happen, what God is looking for and how we should live in light of all of this. This is so that we can know God’s heart, make sense of what is happening around us from the Word of God and rise up to be His Voice wherever He has placed us – in our churches, workplaces, families, social circles etc.

Chapter 1

Jesus' Command to know the Signs of the Times

- Knowing the Generation but not the Day or Hour

A. Introduction

1. Jesus commanded one generation of believers to know that His return was near. It was the generation that would be alive to see all these things or the signs that He prophesied in Matt. 24 (Matt. 24:33-36).
2. As a believer who loves Jesus, we are eager to know what is on His heart, and thus what He meant by "all these things" that will lead to His glorious return to the earth. The Man we love has given us much insight into what He considers to be the important things to know about the generation in which He returns. He wants us to know them because we will live differently.
3. If we are living in the last generation, then we need to know it. There are two questions that many ask.
 - a. Can we know if we are living in the last generation?
 - b. How will we know if we are living in the last generation? What are the signs?
4. The good news is that there is much biblical information on this because Jesus wants us to be prepared for His End-Time purposes. Jesus would not tell us of the circumstances around His coming then say no one could know it.
5. By observing the biblical signs of the times, it is possible to know the generation of Jesus' return yet without knowing the day or hour. My opinions on this generation are based on observation of the biblical signs, not on personal revelation such as prophetic visions. We must insist that our faith be based on what the Bible says, not on personal revelations about the timing of His return.
6. The signs of the times can be divided into three categories. We focus our attention on sign events and sign trends to progressively strengthen our faith that we are getting near to Jesus' return.
 - a. Sign events: these are predicted in Scripture and alert us to the timing of Jesus' return.
 - b. Sign trends: both positive and negative sign trends will signal His coming.
 - c. Prophetic experiences: subjective personal experiences alert us to the End Times.

7. The apostles and the OT prophets also prophesied of sign events and trends. When we combine their prophecies with Jesus' prophecies then we get a much more complete picture. Jesus' most in-depth teaching on the End Times is called the Olivet Discourse. The most complete record of this prophecy is in Matthew 24-25. Mark and Luke gave a shorter account of it (Mk. 13; Lk. 21).

B. Learn the Parable of the Fig Tree: Know the Generation of His return (Matt. 24:32-42)

1. Jesus is answering the apostle's question concerning what signs would indicate His return. (Matt. 24:3)
2. Jesus gave us three commands in Matt. 24:32-42.
 - a. He commanded us to learn the parable of the fig tree (v. 32).
 - b. Then to know that His coming was near (v. 33) and therefore, to watch (v. 42). We "see" more clearly (v. 33) as we watch more consistently (v. 42).
 - c. Have you learned this parable? Do you have a biblically informed opinion about the significance of this generation?
3. The lesson of the parable of the fig tree is easy to understand. The fig tree loses its leaves in wintertime and does not sprout till late in the spring. Thus, when the leaves of a fig tree begin to sprout, we know that summer is near.
4. In the same way, when the prophetic sign events and trends take place together making global headlines, then we know that the end of this age is near. They must occur in a way that makes headline news worldwide. This is to constitute a prophetic sign that has a message from God in it that could be discerned by the Body of Christ.
5. As the fig leaves signaling the summer can be seen by anyone who is paying attention, in the same way, the events signaling the second coming will be obvious to anyone looking for them.
6. How long is a biblical generation?
 - a. A generation in Scripture ranges from 40 to 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16; Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10; Matt. 1:17; Acts 7:6). Moses spoke of Israel's captivity in Egypt as lasting 400 years or 4 generations (Gen. 15:13). Thus, a generation could refer to 100 years.
 - b. There were 14 generations from Abraham to David (Matt. 1:17) each averaging about 70 years.

7. "All these things" in (v. 33 and v. 34) include the prophetic signs spoken of in Matt. 24:4–28. There is only one generation in which God's people will see all the trends and events of Matt. 24 occurring at the same time at an alarming measure or making headline news on a global basis. Jesus commanded His people in that generation to know that His coming was near.
8. For the first time in history, most of these trends and some of the necessary developments that will lead to the events are happening in an alarming measure at the same time on a global basis. For example, Israel had to become a nation before the abomination of desolation could occur.
9. It seemed incredible to the apostles that all these sign events and trends would occur in a global way in one generation (v. 34). This was the unspoken issue that Jesus addressed by comparing the passing of the heavens and earth to the truthfulness of His words or prophecies (v. 35).
10. The emphasis on Jesus' words in v. 35 is not on His general teachings, but on the reliability of His prophetic words concerning the future given in Mt. 24. As impossible as it seems that all these events would occur together in one generation, the prophetic words of Jesus guarantee it.
11. Jesus compared His prophetic words in Mt. 24 to the reliability and durability of heaven and earth. Paul taught that the form of this world is destined to pass away (1 Cor. 7:31).
12. We are called to know or recognize the generation in which the Lord returns. One will only look up and lift up their heads if they know it is drawing near (Luke 21:25-29).

C. Like the Days of Noah: Unaware of Living in a Prophetic Generation

1. In Matt. 24:32-39, Jesus emphasized that the people alive in the generation in which He returns are to know with confidence that it is the generation of His return. He gives a significant qualifier to this command, namely that we not take it a step further and seek to know the day and the hour.
2. Jesus emphasized that we would not know the hour of His return (Matt. 24:39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13). The Father has strategically hidden that from His people so that we live free from fear and filled with understanding, only as we search the Word and stay deeply connected to Him. It is ironic that this qualifier to the command to know the generation is used as an argument against knowing the generation. We must seek relationship with the Father because only He knows.

3. The main message in this passage is that people who could have understood the prophetic significance of the generation they lived in, did not. The surprise with which Noah's flood came on the majority illustrates the ignorance that Jesus wants His people to avoid. Jesus pointed out how the majority were unaware, even in the face of the preaching of Noah (2 Peter 2:4-5).
4. The surprise of Noah's flood proves the widespread problem of lacking prophetic understanding and faith in a significant history changing generation. The people in Noah's day were caught totally by surprise as they went about the ordinary activities of daily life.
5. Noah and his family prepared for an entire generation without knowing the specific day or hour (Heb. 11:7).
6. One of Jesus' main points is that many living in that generation will not know it (Matt. 24:37-39). Thus, they will make wrong decisions because of their fear, offense towards God or ignorance of what the Scripture says is happening. Though it is possible for them to know it, many believers will not see it because they did not care about the last generation being important to Jesus.
7. Believers can know the generation just as Noah did, even though it will come suddenly to those without understanding. However, it will not catch the righteous off guard (1 Thes. 5:1-6).
8. Many use Matt. 24:36 to justify their unfamiliarity and their lack of study of biblical prophecy. They use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended in its context.
9. Jesus had just laid out main signs necessary to prepare the Body of Christ for that generation. I exhort you to not give way to such shallow arguments. Stand your ground. God has given His word with clarity.
10. As believers who love Jesus, we are eager to know what is on His heart and thus, what He meant by "all of those things" that will lead to His glorious return to the earth. The Man we love has given us insight into what He considers to be the important things to know about the generation in which He will return. He wants us to know them because we will act differently and make different decisions if we understand what is happening.
11. It is essential to have understanding in that hour so that we embrace what is right and refuse what is wrong. For example, the greatest counterfeit justice and unity movement will emerge in that hour. It is referred to as the harlot Babylon worldwide religion (Rev. 17). Many believers who are not aware of what is happening, will embrace the harlot Babylon religion, thinking it is good.

12. Our faith is to be stirred by searching the Bible to gain understanding of what the Word says about the prophetic signs that declare the generation in which the Lord returns.
13. God could easily settle the issue of timing by telling His prophets in the Church today, but He has chosen to leave the specific day and hour unknown so that we must cultivate a heart of faith with hunger to know what is on His heart about that generation. Jesus taught that most of the people living in the generation of His return would not know it (Matt. 24:37-39).

D. Jesus rebuked His generation for not discerning the signs of the times

1. Jesus rebuked His generation for not discerning the signs of His first coming. Asking for a sign was legitimate because Joel prophesied that God would send signs just before the Messiah came (Joel 2:30). The Pharisees' hypocrisy was in asking for signs beyond those Jesus did, to test Him (Matt. 16:1-4).
2. Jesus rebuked them for not seeing the prophetic signs of the times for that generation. However, the signs of that generation were not recorded in the OT. If they were rebuked for missing signs not in Scripture, how much more responsible are we to know the biblical signs of the times?
3. Israel's unresponsiveness to Jesus was related to them not knowing the time of "their visitation". He wept over Jerusalem because they did not respond rightly. He had warned the cities of Israel (Luke 19:41-44).
4. Paul taught that the Church should know the times and seasons related to Jesus' second coming (1 Thes. 5:1-6).

E. Overcoming obstacles: the Fear of man

1. Many draw back from teaching on the End Times because of the fear of man. Peter warned the saints to first be aware of the dangers of a scoffing or mocking spirit. The first thing we need to know is what we are up against. All who stand for God's truth in the End Times will be resisted by scoffers or mockers from both outside and inside the Church (2 Pet. 3:3-4).
2. Many will scoff and mock the necessity to understand, proclaim and prepare for the Lord's return. Scoffers will argue that people have always said that Jesus was coming. It was a top priority to Peter to warn the saints to not become cynical. Rather, we are to be "anointed observers" of the signs of the times. We must not let a mocking spirit steal these truths from our heart. We do not want to impart a mocking spirit to our children and grandchildren.

3. I urge you to boldly challenge all the ideas that you hear. Refuse any that you cannot see in Scripture for yourself. I urge you to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if the things that Paul said were so (Acts 17:10-11).

F. We are exhorted to watch and pray

1. We are exhorted to watch and pray: ten times related to preparing for the End Times (Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Luke 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:6; Rev. 16:15).
 - a. To watch is to cultivate faith and understanding that agrees with what the Word and the Spirit say about Jesus' return.
 - b. We prepare by watching what the Spirit is saying in Scripture, in circumstances, and in our life.
2. Scripture: Search out what the Bible says (OT/NT) about the signs of His coming. There are over 150 chapters in the Bible that focus on the End Times.
3. Circumstances: With a heart of faith, watch the sign events and trends that are predicted in Scripture progressively unfold. Set your heart to be an "anointed observer" of these.
4. Personal life: Be alert to the Spirit's stirring and challenges in your personal life and ministry. Many unique things are happening at a high level at the same time for the first time in history, yet this alone will not move a spiritually dull heart. We are to keep alert to our communion with God so as to always be in a disposition to agree with the Spirit.