

**As in the Days of Noah — Matthew 24:36–44**  
*James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church - 09 September 2007*

---

I wonder if you've ever imagined what it must have been like to have been there in Noah's day. The people had no excuse for not getting on board the ark, because Noah had told them what was going to happen: the Bible tells us that he was a preacher of righteousness. Yet they were caught completely unprepared. And in the end, it cost them everything.

In **Matthew 24:36–44**, the Lord Jesus Christ talks about Noah. He uses him as a kind of illustration to make a point. He's talking about what will happen at the end of the world.

i Return

**v36–39** tell us two crucial facts about the end.

The first crucial fact is that Jesus says he will return. At the end of time, at the end of the world, Jesus says that he will come back to this earth. That's what will bring about the end.

The second crucial fact is that nobody knows when Jesus will come back. He will come back unexpectedly. That's why Jesus talks about Noah. His coming will be unexpected and sudden. People will be going about their usual business and, in an instant, Christ will return.

ii Result

What will be the result of Christ's return, then? **v40–41** give us two snapshots of life to show what will happen when Jesus comes back. The first picture is of two men working in a field. At the moment Christ returns, one is taken, and the other is not. They end up in different places. The second picture is of two women grinding with a hand mill. At the moment Christ returns, one is taken, and the other is not. They end up in different places.

What does it mean for one to be taken and the other left? To be "taken" means to be taken to be with the Lord. The one who is left, on the other hand, is not taken to be with the Lord. The Bible is clear that there are only two possible final destinations for men and women. One is heaven. The other is hell. To be taken to be with the Lord is to go to heaven. Not to be taken to be with the Lord is to go to hell. That's what Jesus is telling us in this passage.

What makes the difference, then? Why do one man and one woman end up in heaven while the other man and the other woman end up in hell?

The Bible tells us that every man, woman and young person has a problem. It's that deep-down inside, we're sinners, all of us. That's why you will sometimes tell a lie. That's why you will sometimes have nasty thoughts about other people. That's why your children will sometimes disobey you.

The fact that we're sinners has a dreadful knock-on effect. It means that we deserve to go to hell. Sin makes God angry. It earns punishment from him, and that punishment is to be condemned to hell. That's bad news for people like us. If we're all sinners, and if all sinners end up in hell, then it's very serious indeed.

Thankfully there is good news too. In v40–41, one man and one woman get taken to be with the Lord. How? How is it possible if we all actually deserve hell?

The answer is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus never sinned. He was perfect when he died on the cross. And as he died, something remarkable and unseen happened. He took all the sin of all of his people. He took God's anger on our behalf. He took God's punishment on our behalf. He was our substitute. And that means that heaven is now open to people like us. If Christ has taken our sin, and if he has taken God's anger, and if he has taken God's punishment, then there's no reason for us to go to hell any more. Now we can go to heaven.

So what makes the difference in v40–41? Why do one man and one woman get taken and one man and one woman get left? It's this. Those who get taken to be with the Lord are those who believe in Christ. Those who go to heaven are those who believe in him while here on earth.

You see, Christ's death does not mean that everyone now goes to heaven. **John 3:16** says, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**" Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish (i.e. go to hell) but have eternal life (i.e. go to heaven). Those who believe in Christ are those who are taken to be with him for ever in heaven.

So how can you start to believe in him? You must pray. You must talk to God in prayer. You must confess your sin to him and ask Him to forgive you and to help you to turn away from it. And as you do that, you must start to trust in Jesus as your Saviour. Rely on him as the only reason why God should forgive you. Have faith in him, that his death on the cross really did take the punishment for you. Believe in him.

And if you do? Then your sin is counted as gone. God's anger is no longer against you. That punishment has been taken in full by Jesus. And you are on the road to heaven. When Jesus comes back, you'll be one of those taken to be with him.

### iii Readiness

**v42–44** teach what your response must be to all this. You need readiness. You need to be ready for the day when Christ comes back. In **v43**, our Lord talks about burglars. And there is one aspect of his return which is just like a burglar. He could come at any time. Therefore you must be ready all the time. You must be ready by trusting in him.

That's critical. When Christ comes back, your fate will be sealed for ever and ever. At that moment, eternity will be decided. (The same is true, in fact, of the moment you die, if that happens before Christ returns.) You will either be taken to be with the Lord in heaven for ever. Or you will be condemned to hell for ever. At that moment, it will be too late to change, just like it's too late after a burglar has already come, just like it was too late for people to get on board the ark once the rain started coming down.

So please be ready! Don't delay. Trust in Jesus Christ.