

A Storytelling Commentary on Matthew 24:36-44

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This story is part of the apocalyptic discourse in Matthew. This is a middle section in that discourse between the coming of the Son of Man and the injunction to watch. The theme is the lack of knowledge about when the coming will actually. The story begins with this theme: "about that day and hour, no one knows." The theme is restated in the climax of the second episode: "for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." It is also the climax of the story, "for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

This is an intimate conversation between Jesus and his disciples. Therefore the tone is quiet and close, not loud and proclamatory. Jesus is giving a kind of secret information to the disciples. Speaking in something of a whisper would be appropriate.

The structure of these three episodes is relatively straightforward. The theme is announced at the beginning—"About that day and hour, no one knows"—and is then developed in relation to the days of Noah. The second episode is about the separation as a sign of the surprise and the not-knowing: two women in the field, two women grinding meal, and so on. The injunction is to keep awake and to have an attitude of preparation because you don't know when the coming of the Son of Man is going to happen. That is reinforced in the third episode, the parable of the thief.

The verbal threads that connect this story are related to its theme of "no one knows." "No one knows" is what is announced at the beginning. The verbal thread of the coming of the Son of Man or the coming of "your Lord" is at the end of each of the three episodes. This verbal thread will help you connect the three episodes.

A general suggestion in learning this segment is to focus on these three different metaphors for the coming of the Son of Man: the days of Noah, the two in the field, and the parable of the thief in the night. Each of these metaphors can be developed as a specific element of inside information about the signs and appropriate attitudes in relation to the coming of the Son of Man. So while no one knows the exact time, the ending is a sure thing. The Son of Man will triumph and the Kingdom of God will be established as a government of peace and justice.

Advent is about the spirit of waiting. The stories in this month leading up to Christmas are about waiting for the coming of the Messiah. This is both a thematic and a spiritual element of these stories. A basic theme in working with these stories is praying for the virtue of patience. It is also about hope. These sayings invite us to yearn for the coming of the Son of Man initiated by the birth of the Messiah.