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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“READY OR NOT (Here He Comes)”

Luke 12:35-48

☑ Hide and Seek was my favorite childhood game. It was fun being a Hider, trying not to get caught. It was fun being the Seeker, trying to catch the Hiders.

Of course, the Seeker was called *It*. *It* would stand in a central location, close his or her eyes, and count in a loud voice to twenty. *It* was supposed to count slowly: “One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi,” all the way to “Twenty Mississippi.” When *It* got to twenty, he or she would shout, “Ready or not, here I come.” Inevitably a couple of Hiders weren’t ready, and there would be a mad scramble for cover.

Four things were certain in the game: 1) *It* was surely coming; 2) *It* would come the moment he or she was ready; 3) *It* would come whether or not the other players were ready; and 4) the consequences of *Its* coming depended on whether or not the Hiders were prepared.

Little did I realize that my cousins and I were engaged in a theological exercise! To play Hide and Seek is to act out the Lord’s Return, because:

- ☛ Messiah surely is coming;
- ☛ Messiah will come when he is ready;
- ☛ Messiah will come regardless of our readiness; and,
- ☛ The consequences of the Messiah’s coming will depend on our readiness.

☐ Please turn with me to Luke 12:35-48.

■ In verses 35-36 Lord Jesus instructs us to **“Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that *when he comes and knocks* they can immediately open the door for him.”**

○ {2 Pet 3:4} Skeptics scoff, **“Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”** But Messiah repeatedly states that he is coming.

■ Verse 38: **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.”**

○ {2 Pe 3:9; 1 Co 15:15:24} **Messiah will come when he is ready. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness.” “The end will come...after he has destroyed all [worldly] dominion, authority and power.”**

■ Verses 40 and 46a: **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him.... The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour is not aware of.”**

○ {Mt 24:36, 42, NLT} **“No one knows the day or the hour when these things will happen.... You don’t know what day your Lord is coming.”** Messiah will come whether or not we are ready.

■ Verse 37: **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he**

comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at that table and will come and wait on them.”

■ And then verses 43-46:

“It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so [fulfilling his or her assigned responsibilities] when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is a taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants... and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. ”

○ {2 Ti 4:1} **“Christ Jesus... will judge the living and the dead.”** It follows that the consequences of Messiah’s coming will depend on our readiness.

‡ Question: *is the doctrine of Christ’s Return relevant in the twenty-first century? Does it, can it, should it have any practical impact on us day-by-day?*

I know believers for whom Eschatology, that is the study of Last Things – is, evidently, the *only* relevant doctrine. They adhere tenaciously, dogmatically, sometimes fiercely, to their interpretive systems. They view all of Scripture, human history and current events through the lens of the End Times.

I know believers for whom eschatology holds virtually *no* relevance. They dismiss the pertinent

Scriptures. They assume that, barring a universal extinction event, the natural order will continue forever. They do not consider that God is intervening to guide history and the cosmos to a definite conclusion.

Neither extreme is true to Scripture or conducive to faithful discipleship. In a nutshell, eschatological fanatics fail to love; eschatological agnostics fail to hope.

○ {1 Jn 4:8} What do we have apart from love? Without it we have nothing, we gain nothing, we are nothing, for **“whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”** Sacrificing love on the altar of eschatological fanaticism is unacceptable.

○ {1 Co 15:17-19} What do we have apart from eschatological hope? Without it **“we are to be pitied more than all others”** for hopeless **“faith is futile; [we] are still in [our] sins”** and all who die **“in Christ are lost.”** Abandoning hope in the swamp of eschatological agnosticism is unacceptable.

‡ *Is there a middle way* between the disastrous extremes of fanaticism and agnosticism? Is there an approach that glorifies God, holds fast to Scripture, and produces in us both *αγαπᾶ* love and hope? Yes, there is!

✈ It is living as though the event of Christ’s Return is universal and individual, one time and ongoing.

○ {Rev 1:7; 21:4; 1 Co 15:25} There will be a day when the Risen Son “[will come]...’ **and ‘every eye will see him.’**” His coming on *The Day of the LORD* will be universal.

○ {1 Th 4:16-17} It will be cosmic in scale and inescapable in impact. **“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and...the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them...to meet the Lord...”**

○ {Rev 21:4; 2 Pe 3:10} *This* Day of the LORD (with a capital *D*) is a one-time only incident. Christ’s Coming will set in motion a chain of events by which **“the old order of things”** will be ended. **“The heavens will disappear... the elements will be destroyed... the earth...will be laid bare”** to make way for the New Jerusalem and the New Earth.

Perhaps tomorrow is scheduled to be The Day of the LORD – or he might have it on hold for another two thousand years. There is no way for us to know.

This is what we usually have in mind when we talk about the Messiah’s Second Coming.

○ {Heb 9:27, TNIV} Even so, Christ’s Return is also individual and ongoing. Except for those who are still alive on *The Great Day* we are, each of us, **“destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”**

○ {Lk 23:43} For the Christ Follower death is an individual occurrence of the Lord’s Return. Jesus said to the thief, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise,”** and surely he extends this same promise to all believers. When we die our Savior will return from heaven to usher us into God’s presence. It will be our *personal* day of the Lord (w. a lowercase *d*).

This day of the Lord is ongoing. It happens only once for a given individual; but as people continue to die, Christ continues to come for them.

○ {1 Jn 3:2; Rev 21:4} In its scope this lowercase *d* day of the Lord is unrecognizable as a foreshadowing of *The* capital *D* Day of the LORD. Yet for those who die in Jesus it is similar in its impact: they **“see [Christ] as he is”** and so they are **“like him”**; the world, the flesh, and the devil are banished; all **“mourning [and] crying [and] pain”** cease; and death itself is ended. The only thing missing is bodily resurrection.

✎ There is one other similarity: Christ’s Return, both on the universal, one time Day and its individual, ongoing counterpart, has an element of judgment.

■ Luke 12:37: **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”** That is a favorable judgment with a happy reward.

■ But we mustn’t omit verses 47-48: **“The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows,”** and so forth. That is an unfavorable judgment with a grievous penalty.

○ {Rev 19:12, 16; 21:4} Are we prepared for the One with **“eyes...like blazing fire”** to seek us and find us? Are we prepared for the sinless Son of God to judge our works?

? *But what is readiness?*

Is readiness ascertaining the precise date of his return either on *The Day of the LORD* or *our day of the Lord*? No!

Is readiness withdrawing from the world and waiting for the rapture behind locked doors? No!

Readiness is fulfilling the Great Command and the Great Commission. Readiness is doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with LORD God. Readiness is worshiping in spirit and in truth, cultivating right relationship with neighbor and enemy, and proclaiming the Gospel. Readiness is discovering the will of God and doing it with abandon – all of this, not despite the fact that Christ might appear soon, but in sincere and fervent hope that his appearing is near.

Eighteen Mississippi... nineteen Mississippi... twenty Mississippi... Ready or not, here Christ comes – either for all humankind at The Great Day of the LORD, or for us individuals at death. Regardless, the question is the same: Are we ready?

○ Revelation 22:20: **“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come Lord Jesus.”**