



Sermon Series: Looking Forward to Christmas

To be used with Session 6: Looking Forward with Expectation

Sermon Title Possibilities: “When the Sequel Surpasses the Original!”

Scripture: Matthew 24:32-44

Connection To Unit Theme: This series of messages has almost entirely revolved around some level of expectancy pertaining to Christmas time, and how we ought to keep our hearts and minds focused on the correct things. However, there is another important thing that we must look forward to, not just during this time of year, but every moment of everyday, and that is the Return of our Savior. The people who were living at the time of Christ’s Birth had that to look forward to, but those who are living now have His Second Coming to look forward to. All of us hope to be one of the fortunate few who are living when He returns, so that we don’t have to experience physical death. However, whether we get to Heaven after having died, or we are taken up through the rapture, we know in our hearts that somehow, we shall get home one day. As nice as Christmas time is, this is even better.

Introduction: Home Alone, Back to the Future, Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Toy Story. These are just a few examples of excellent movies that had sequels. In other words, they were so good and so well received, that it was insisted that the stories be continued. Some movies are even so beloved that they come a series of movies, with a part 3, 4, 5, or even higher. However, in most cases, no matter how exciting a sequel may be, rarely do we see situations in which the quality of the original is surpassed. The initial chapter typically sets the tone and provides a foundation for the following chapters to build from, but most people agree that the original is almost always the best. However, there is one exception to this pattern that we will see one day.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus came once, and that He will one day come again. As amazing as His initial arrival was, He has another arrival on the way that will surpass even the greatness of His initial arrival. This is one of example of a sequel that we know will be better than the Original. And given all that we’ve learned and experienced since the Original, one can only imagine what awaits us when He returns.

1. Matthew 24:32-35 - “There Will Definitely Be a Sequel!”

Any time a good movie comes out, speculation runs rampant about whether another installment is on the way. Sometimes it is teased in the original by leaving the story on a cliffhanger ending, while in other cases, members of the cast will drop cryptic hints on social media indicating that more is on the way. However, it is never fully known until it is officially and publicly confirmed that there will definitely be a sequel! In Matthew 24, Jesus uses the Parable of the Fig Tree to provide confirmation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and to make clear that this will definitely take place. The parable essentially says that once the tree reaches a particular

condition, this is an indication that the season of summer is nearby. In short, the way the tree looks is indicative the current season, and the approaching season. In a likewise manner, Jesus promises that there will be indicators that His return is near. Which in the context of the analogy of this message, there will be indicators when the sequel takes place. This is not speculation or a rumor, but this is something that will definitely take place one day.

2. Matthew 24: 36-39 - “Anticipation Without a Date!”

So many of us anticipate certain things and dates every year. The obvious example is Christmas time, as this series of messages has revolved around this time of the year. Some anticipate the arrival of their birthdays, while others look forward to anniversaries. Parents always anticipate the birth of their children, while some individuals look forward to Election Day or the day of a particular sporting event, but whatever the case may be, everyone anticipates a particular day for a particular reason. The one thing that all of us who anticipate days have in common is that often, we are aware of what that date is. We know when our birthdays are, we know when we are getting married, we know when an election is, and we know when a movie comes to theaters. However, how do we handle a situation where we are anticipating a day that we are not even aware of?

In verses 36-39 of Matthew 24, Jesus continues with His revelation that once He dies, resurrects, and ascends to Heaven, He will one day return. He has made it clear that this will in fact occur. However, He adds a very intriguing clause: no one, including him, knows when! This places us as believers in the situation of anticipating a return that we have no idea the time of. Generations have looked forward to being present on earth to witness it, only to meet physical death, and many of us hope to be the fortunate group that is here when He comes. But we’ve already gone home, or we are here when it happens, the reality is that He will be back. And despite us not knowing when, and having no choice but to wait and see, this is indeed something to look forward to.

3. Matthew 24:40-44 – “OUTTA NOWHERE!”

I am a lifelong fan of WWE wrestling, and one of my all-time favorite superstars is Randy Orton. One of wrestling’s biggest and longest tenured names, Orton is known for his devastating finishing move, “The RKO!” The move, which is taken from his actual initials, is a quick and effective move that Randy can hit on any opponent at any given time. So much so that the commentators typically say, “RKO outta nowhere!” This creates a sense of urgency since this move has been hit, which likely means the match is about to be over, but it also communicates to the audience that the person on the receiving end of the move never saw it coming!

Jesus describes His eventual return in a similar fashion to the RKO; it’ll be outta nowhere! Even though we will know that it’s going to happen one day, we have no way of knowing when. And like the RKO, it will catch all of us off guard. This is why Jesus tells us to be alert. To remain ready, because it can truly happen at any given moment on any day. No second is off limits for Jesus to come back. Jesus’ closing words in verse 44 are particularly intriguing, “...the son of man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.” In other words, no matter how much you try to prepare, no matter how many predictions you make, and no matter how much you think you may know, Jesus will come back at a time when none of us will anticipate Him. Therefore, we

ought to live our lives with the reality in our minds that this could be the day. Why? Because when He does finally show up, it will truly be outta nowhere!

Conclusion

There is nothing like having something to look forward to. It helps us get through difficult days and adds an additional level of excitement to our lives, especially if we are encountering hard times. And while Christmas time provides that for many of us, Jesus teaches us that looking forward to Him is even more rewarding. As exciting as Christmas can be, there is only so much that we can enjoy during this time of the year. Not to mention, Christmas time is not without its issues. Christmas is not devoid of delays, inconveniences, painful moments, and even tragedy. This is why several individuals, for example, don't look forward to holidays because of past bad experiences. However, Jesus is the only reason we have something to look forward to that will be without any kind of issues. With Jesus comes true peace, joy, and happiness...all of which in eternal fashion. We ought all do our best to enjoy this season, but let's not forget that another season is coming one day, and it'll be better than anything we have ever seen, experienced, or dreamed of. Get ready, because if you thought the original was something, you ain't seen nothing yet!

Author Bio

Joseph T. Howard, Sr., M.Div. is an ordained Minister of the Gospel residing and primarily serving in Atlanta, GA. He is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Joseph is married to the love of his life and a powerful minister in her own right, Bianca Robinson Howard, and together they have two children: Rose Victoria & Joseph, Jr.