

Title: If only I knew  
Text: Matthew 24.36-51  
Theme: Stay ready for Christ's coming  
Series: Matthew #112  
Prop Stmt: The return of Christ is so certain, that you must live in a state of readiness.

Read Text:

I watched a good bit of the U of M, MSU game yesterday. If you are a U of M fan, your heart was absolutely broken, stomped on, ground up into tiny little pieces and thrown away. In fact, for a moment, I actually found myself having pity, and then I thought, what is wrong with me? I am going soft in my old age, so I repented. If you were an MSU fan, you were stunned into delirium. No one saw that coming. However, if you already know the outcome, if you recorded it and watched it later in the evening, you would not really be surprised, right? Knowing the ending makes it difficult to fully engage in the moment, which is why for most of us, if we record a sporting event, we don't want to know what happens. There was a member of our church whose cardiologist told him that he had to stop watching U of M games because he was going to have a heart attack. So, he had to record them, and then his wife would gently tell him the score and then he would decide if he could handle watching it or not.

Christ tells us some things about the future, but he does not tell us everything about the future. Christ says that you are not going to know everything about the future. You do not know when Christ is coming back. Christ did not know when He was going to return, so anyone who says that they know when Christ is coming back is lying. So, here is the sermon. Do not be preoccupied about the timing of Christ's return. Instead, be focused on being faithful because Christ is going to return.

I. **The Return of Christ will be a surprise to most.** (36-44)

A. **No one but the Father knows when.** (36)

Verse 36 is absolutely fascinating. I love it when Jesus does these sorts of things. His point is clear. You do not know when the Son of Man is going to come. So, don't try to figure out. The angels don't know. In fact, the Son doesn't even know when he is coming back. So, if the Son doesn't know, what makes you think that you can get it figured out? You can't! But, wait a minute! Did Jesus just say that there is something that he doesn't know? Yes, he sure did. But, isn't Jesus God? And isn't God supposed to know everything? Yes and yes. So, what is going on here?

When the Son of God chose to become the Son of Man, he had to become man. God became man without denying or giving up his deity. But, in becoming man, he voluntarily set aside the independent use of his rights, privileges and attributes as God. In other words, when God became man, he became fully man. He really became one of us and he did not use his Godness to rob him of the opportunity to fully immerse himself in being one of us.

What that meant was, he had to listen to his teachers so that he could learn. He had to study for his tests so he would remember what answers to give. He had to practice running in order to be fast. He had to practice soccer in order to improve. He did not rely upon his Godness as a shortcut for his experience as a man. He was a man. He was hungry, like we are hungry. He was thirsty, like we are thirsty. He was tired, like we are tired. He was tempted, like we are tempted. He experienced pain, rejection, discouragement, and exhaustion like we do. He was God and he did miracles, but those miracles were not performed for his own convenience. Back in chapter 14 we studied the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000. He did that for the physical and spiritual benefit of all the people and not because the drive-thru at the local Matzo Meal was backed up and he didn't feel like waiting.

Later that night when the disciples had headed across the Sea of Galilee in a boat without him, he did not think, "Oh rats. Oh well, I'll just walk on the water." No, everything that he did as a miracle was done in order to convince the people that he was God. Which is so interesting because most of us have a difficult time grasping that he was a man, when they had a difficult grasping that he was God. As God, he knew everything. But, in becoming a man, he voluntarily set aside his free and independent use of his omniscience. Therefore, his knowledge, his conscientious knowledge (that which he was conscious of) was limited for the time to what he learned as a man, and to what God (Holy Spirit) revealed to him. There were times when the Spirit of God would reveal things to him that would put his deity on display. But, the Spirit of God did not reveal everything to him. At this point in his ministry, the Spirit of God had not revealed to Christ the day and hour of his return. Does Christ know that now? Absolutely! But he did not know it then. Why not? Why did Jesus have to learn things? I think you know the answer, don't you? He had to learn things so that he could fully experience life as a human, like us. He had to learn things so that he could not only relate to what we go through, but so that he could live perfectly in our place. When I explain the gospel to you I tell you that Jesus did more than die on the cross for your sins. The fact is, Jesus had to do more. He had to live in your place. He had to live the life that you could not live. And he did! What kind of a life was it? Yes, it was a life of perfect obedience. But it was more. It was a life of perfect faith-driven obedience. He did exactly what the Father and the Spirit directed him to do without knowing everything. Every moment, he obeyed in faith.

Matthew 4.1 says that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." I do not think that Jesus lived everyday with complete experiential knowledge of everything that was going to happen. He only knew what was revealed to him. That is why there are times when he knows the thoughts and motives of others. It was revealed to him. There are other times when someone touches him and he wants to know who touched him. We cannot accuse Jesus of not knowing our needs and not knowing what it is like to be us. We are tempted to. We are tempted to think that since he was God that he had some kind of Teflon coating and therefore, it wasn't really the same. No, it was really the same. He trusted in the Father even though the Father did not reveal everything to him. So, if Jesus trusted the Father perfectly, and the Father chose not to

reveal everything to Jesus while he was on the earth, do you think that you can trust the Father even though you do not know everything? That is why this verse is so fascinating.

It is almost like this little throwaway line but is in reality the point of this entire narrative, isn't it? Jesus is telling his disciples that they had better be ready and stay awake and look for his return. The fact that you do not know when he is going to return does not diminish the fact that the Son of Man is going to return. But believe me, the Son of Man is going to return. Believe me, like I believe the Father. I am taking this by faith. You do the same and if you do, you will live like it. But if you live like it, you will be weird. You will be thought of as crazy because....

#### **B. Most will be unaware. (37-39)**

Does it surprise you that our world scoffs at the idea of a worldwide flood? No, not at all. It scoffed at Noah! That is the point. They were eating, drinking marrying and giving in marriage, meaning, they were living life as if nothing was going to happen. They were unaware, NOT because they were uninformed, but because they did not believe Noah. They mocked him, although he warned them. They thought he was crazy for building this monstrous ark. But, in choosing not to believe him, they were clueless as to how close the judgment of God was upon them.

That is why I have always maintained that it really does not matter if someone finds the remains of the ark or not. People believe what they choose to believe. You could find the ark intact in a glacier in the Himalayas, build a cog wheel train up to it and give tours and have thousands of people see it, have National Geographic, the Learning Channel and news outlets show it, do you think the world and her leaders at the U.N. will conclude, wow, if God really flooded the world several thousand years ago, because of his judgment against sin and has promised to do the same, we had better repent while there is still time? Do you honestly think that would happen? The coming of the Son of Man is certain, but it will not feel certain by our world. All of the experts will not believe it, just as all of the experts wrote Noah off as being crazy. Therefore,

#### **C. Most will be unprepared. (40-44)**

Now, look at this carefully. What happens to the people who were unaware? They were unprepared for the flood. Jesus says that the same thing is going to happen. People are going to be unaware and just as those who were unaware and unprepared were swept away, so too, the people who are unprepared are also going to be swept away or taken away. For example, (40) there will be two men in the field. One will be taken and one will be left. (41) There will be two women grinding at the mill. One will be taken and one will be left. Where will they be taken? Well, where were the unaware and unprepared people of Noah's day taken? Where were they swept away to? They were taken to judgment. This is what fits the context, doesn't it? Jesus uses an illustration to make the point that being unprepared is a bad thing.

Look at the example that Jesus uses in verse 43. Jesus describes a house that was robbed in the middle of the night. Jesus says that if the master of the house had known what time in the night that the thief was coming that he would have been ready for him.

It reminds me of the story of the guy who broke into a home one night and he heard a voice that said, "I see you and Jesus sees you." It seriously freaked the guy out. He didn't know if he actually heard it, or if it was his conscience. So, he froze. After a bit, he began to move and he heard it again, "I see you and Jesus sees you." This is crazy he thought. I have got to find out what this is. He shone his flashlight in the direction of the voice and saw a birdcage. Inside was a parakeet who again said, "I see you and Jesus sees you." Now the intruder laughed with relief until he noticed the pit bull under the cage and heard the parakeet say, "Attack Jesus."

What happens to the people who are not prepared? Bad things happen to them. The master of the house lost what he had. The man in the field and the woman at the mill were taken away in judgment, just like the people in Noah's day. That is why Jesus says two times, "Therefore."

- v.42 – "Therefore, *stay awake* for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."
- V.44 "Therefore *you also must be ready*, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

So, what does it mean to stay awake? What does it mean to be ready? After all, this is the event that stands as the culmination of history. If you knew that Jesus was going to return one month from today, you could max out every one of your credit cards, right? You could empty your IRA and live it up. After all, you do not need to plan for the future. After all, in one month, everything is changing. Are you going to study for that test? Are you going to research for that term paper? Are you even going to go to school? Are you going to make your kid go to school? Are you going to go to work? Are you going to pay your bills? Are you going to change your oil, sharpen your blades and cut the grass? Are you going to be responsible?

But, we do not know when. So, how are we supposed to live? What does being awake and being ready look like? Is it unspiritual to plan for the future? What should we do? Buy gold? Develop an escape plan? Actually when Jesus talks about staying awake and being ready it is actually rather mundane. I would say it this way. Being ready for Christ's return means to keep your eye on the sky while you cut the grass. In other words fulfill your responsibilities, but do them realizing that you do them for Christ in anticipation of his return.

I read where someone asked the reformer, Martin Luther what he would do if he knew that he was going to die tomorrow. He said, "Plant a tree." In other words, he would do whatever it was that he had planned to do. The impact of your life is not made up of the spectacular but of the mundane. The impact of your life is found in how we day after day, milk the cows, plant the seed, clean our rooms, wash the sheets, cut the grass, change the

diapers, cook the meals, love our family, clean our rooms (that's because most of the kids didn't hear it the first time), go to work, do our jobs, wash the windows, fix the furnace, go to school, exercise, clean the house, pay the bills, practice the piano, stick to the diet, read our Bibles, love God, hate sin, pray, love our neighbor, forgive one another, serve one another, share the gospel, worship, give and fight for faith. Being ready means fulfilling your responsibilities with faithfulness. You see...

## II. **The Return of Christ will be a time of accountability.** (45-51)

So now, Jesus engages the disciples by asking them this very question. *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?”*

The picture is that of a steward. The master has gone away and has left this steward in charge of the household. What is the steward supposed to do? He is supposed to take care of the master's household. He is supposed to feed them. See to it that they are properly fed! In other words, do your job. Fulfill your responsibilities. Look at the result of that. Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who are faithful.

### A. **Blessing for the faithful** (45-47)

*“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”*

When Jesus promises or pronounces a blessing on someone, it is a huge deal. If you sneeze and I say, “God bless you” I am expressing a desire that God shows favor to you. My desire for God to show you favor does not mean that God will necessarily show you favor today. However, if Jesus says “Bless you!” You are blessed! You are the recipient of the favor of God. When you remember who you are (servant) and you remember who he is (master) and you remember what your job is (e.g. giving people their food in the proper time) and you do it and you remember that he is coming back and you serve in anticipation that he could show up and eat with you at any given moment, then when he does show up, you are ready and he is thrilled because you have done your job and his household is in good order. The result of faithfulness in this area is honor and greater responsibility and greater trust.

However...

### B. **Judgment for the wicked** (48-51)

*“But if that wicked servant says...”* Whoa! Stop right there. What just happened? The blessed servant heard the master and believed him. The blessed servant heard the master and his faith in the master's words drove his obedience. Right here, the wicked servant says, that is the wicked servant heard the master's words, but he says, he surmises, he interprets for himself, he places his word over the master's word, he ignores the master's word, he chooses not believe him, and when he ignores it and does not believe it, he forgets it and over time it begins to sound like a fable, a myth, or an old wives' tale.

The wicked servant gets into serious, soul-damning, destruction-securing trouble because he listens to himself instead of listening to the master. He is unaware and unprepared for the coming of the master, not because he did not know but because he chose not to believe it, and over time, like the parable of the 4 different types of soil, he does not produce fruit.

In fact, notice what he does in verse 49. He lives as if he is in charge and therefore he lives as if he can do what he wants. Beating his fellow servants and getting drunk are simply expressions of a heart that says, "I can live however I want and not get into trouble." V.49 says that "he begins..." In other words, he does it one day and gets away with it. So, he does it another day and gets away with it. Every day that he does that, dulls his mind to what the master told him, until his life of living as he wants is so loud that it drowns out what the master said.

The consequences are not necessarily immediate, but when they come, they come fast, furious and are irreversible. The master is incensed that someone should take their authority and responsibility over people and abuse the people under their care. His response is severe. He cuts the servant in pieces, and puts him with the hypocrites. He will put him with the hypocrites, because he is a hypocrite. He pretended to be faithful and pretended to care about the master's estate, but he didn't. Therefore, because he misrepresented the master, he is going to face serious consequences. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a reference to hell.

September 11, 2001 changed life for us in this country. Terrorism was brought to our shores, our cities, our buildings, and our families. A friend of mine was in Manhattan on that day. As the World Trade Center towers collapsed, he ran. Like thousands of others he ran. In that moment when he began to realize the magnitude of what was happening, he ran. If he did not run, he would have gone from being a spectator to being a victim. He ran into a building and sat under a stair well and only later did he come out. As he walked and walked and walked in shock and confusion he realized that his shoes were covered with the dust and debris of the destruction and then he realized what some of that dust and debris consisted of. My friend was never the same.

If he had known what was going to happen, he would have never gone to Manhattan. Obviously, if anyone knew what was going to happen, they would not have gone to work at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon or gotten on those planes. We did not know this was going to happen, and we were stunned. Schools closed early, stores shut down, people gathered with their families and went home. We all wondered what was next?

Today, life has become daily again. It is different than what it used to be, but the different is now the new normal. And many people can go for long periods of time and never think about the September 11. Jesus has said, over and over, the end is coming. The end of this world as we know it, is coming. The end is coming because he is returning. Life is not going to go on like it has. It is going to radically change. Some of you really need to take this heart. For some of you, your world is so wrapped up about yourself. Your idea of

sacrifice is forgoing dessert for two days so you can squeeze yourself into that new pair of designer jeans, or being inconvenienced because your new cable package is missing one of the food networks.

Life is bigger than your daily activities. If your daily activities are comfortable, thank God for them, but hold them with an open hand, do not presume upon them and above all, do not live for them. Some of you get stressed out over what to order at the restaurant and what to wear. Your world is too small. Way too small. If that is your life, you are in danger of living with unimportant things as being important because you have pushed the important things to the periphery. Take this warning to heart. You are in danger of living for the daily activities instead of living for the Day.

However, if your daily activities are a strain, if you constantly feel the wind in your face and the grind of going uphill and your life is hard; feel the strain. Acknowledge the grind. But do not give in to it. Do not let that define you, because the strain is not eternal, Christ and his kingdom are. Seasons of grief come and for some they stay awhile. But for the follower of Christ, they all have an expiration date.