

“Ready for His Appearing”

Matthew 24:29-51

January 17, 2021

I want to thank Lee Smith for bringing us the ministry of the Word last Sunday. I hope that you will all take the opportunity to get to know Lee and Carol. They bring to our church family a rich legacy of pastoral ministry and the refreshing air of grace.

You'll all be relieved to hear that Lee got the skunks out of his basement this week. But he's not the only one in the neighborhood with a skunk problem. His neighbor, Edith, had her 8 grandchildren visiting over the weekend and after a quick trip the grocery store, she returned to find the house eerily quiet. As she entered the living room, she found all 8 grandkids huddled together staring intently into a box. As she crept closer, she was horrified to discover that the box contained a liter of baby skunks. In her alarm, she cried, “children, RUN!!” The children, startled by her sudden outburst, each grabbed a skunk and ran to a different room in the house.¹

Well, often things do indeed get worse before they get better. And that is certainly true of the end times, but it is no laughing matter. Last week in Luke 24:1-28, we learned from Jesus that we can expect times of great tribulation in the last days. Jesus predicted the fall of the Jerusalem and the temple which would happen during the lifetime of his hearers (2). He warned us that false Christs will come, seeking to mislead many. There will be wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes. And these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs (5-8).

Then days of tribulation will come in which believers will be hated and killed, causing many who have the appearance of a disciple to fall away (9-10). In those days, Jesus says, lawlessness will increase, and most people's love will grow cold (12).

¹ Adapted from Chuck Swindol, <https://www.insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/deep-water-faith>

Remember, Jesus is telling His disciples these things just hours before the events leading up to His death begin to unfold. So these are not trivial matters. Jesus has an essential purpose in telling us these things before they happen. That purpose is to prepare us to guard our hearts against the perils of tribulation and deception that will intensify in these last days.²

Jesus clearly states His two-fold purpose:

- Vs. 4: “**See to it that no one misleads you.**” In fact, six times, Jesus warns us to not be misled, and to not believe the false prophets (4, 5, 11, 23, 24, 26).
- Vs. 6: “**See that you are not frightened.**”

Along with these warnings Jesus also encourages us that “**the one who endures to the end will be saved**” (13). So Jesus is preparing us to be steadfast and faithful in the horrible testing of the last days. But with so many deceptive false prophets claiming to be the Christ, how will we know when Jesus Himself comes again? Jesus says in vs. 27, “just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of man be.” In other words, He will not come secretly. His coming will be public and evident to all people. Whether you live in Nebraska or Nepal, His second coming will be seen by all.

Now as turn to the remainder of Matthew 24, Jesus will describe what His 2nd coming will be like and our need to be ready. Main Idea: **Because we do not know the hour Jesus will return as Savior and Judge, we must be ready and faithful, eagerly awaiting our great salvation.** Let's begin with [vs. 29-31]. Let me highlight 5 characteristics of the second coming.

1. **Christ's return will be surrounded by events of cosmic proportion** (29).

There are 4 cosmic effects in vs. 29:

- *the sun will be darkened* (now obsolete³),
- *the moon will not give its light* (it can't without the sun),

² John Hiigel, Partnering with the King, pg. 225.

³ Rev 21:23; 22:5

- *stars will fall from the sky* (as a result of...),
- *the powers of the heavens will be shaken*. That is, the equilibrium of the universe will be disrupted as the Creator and Sustainer interrupts His created system with an overwhelming surge of divine power, overwhelming the normal orbit of planets and stars.

Some scholars see figurative language here, but I believe its best and fitting to take these things literally. Heb 1:3 says Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power.” Col 1:16-17 remind us that all things were created by Jesus, for Jesus, and through Jesus who holds all things together. So it would not be surprising that when Jesus displays His divine glory in the climactic event of His return, that all creation would tremble as it did when Jesus died.⁴ Luke records that these events will be so terrifying that men will faint (lit. stop breathing) from fear at the shaking of the heavens and the nations will be dismayed at the intensity of the sea’s waves (probably resulting from the lunar and gravitational disruption as the heavens are shaken).

2 Peter 3:10-12 describes the intensity of the 2nd coming as both terrifying and glorious so as to motivate believers unto godly living:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”⁵

2. **Christ’s return will be visible and recognizable to everyone on earth (30, 27).**

⁴ Mt. 27:45, 50-52;

⁵ See also Isaiah’s description of the day of the Lord: *“Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore, all hands will fall limp, and every man’s heart will melt. And they will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, and they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises, And the moon will not shed its light. Thus, I will punish the world for its evil, And the*

According to vs. 30, Jesus will appear in the sky and all the people of the earth will see Him coming on the clouds. There will be nothing secretive about His return. Like lightning in the sky (27), His return will be public, visible, and His identity unmistakable.

3. **Christ’s return will be a stunning display of divine glory (30).**

Vs. 30: *“and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”* Here Jesus is identifying Himself and His second coming as the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13 where One like the Son of Man was coming on the clouds of heaven and presented before the Ancient of Days and was given “dominion, glory and a kingdom that all people, nations and men of every language might serve Him.”

In the Bible clouds often symbolize the manifestation of God’s presence and glory. God revealed His presence to the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God manifested His presence over the tabernacle and in the most holy place by means of a cloud (Num 9:15-22; Lev 16:2). When Jesus ascended to the Father, He ascended into the clouds (Acts 1:9). And when He returns with all the Father’s glory and authority as sovereign King, He will come on the clouds of heaven. In His first coming, Jesus’ glory was veiled in flesh. He looked like an ordinary man. But in His second coming, His divine glory will be on full display.

4. **Christ’s return will result in great mourning for unbelievers (30).**

Vs. 30 tells us that all the tribes of earth will mourn when they see Him come on the clouds. There will be a sudden realization that the Christ they

wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless...Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of his burning anger” (Isa 13:6-16).

have rejected has come as their Judge. Deep regret will be combined with terrifying expectation not only of physical death as the heavens convulse, but also the dread of judgment from the Sovereign King whom they have rebelled against and whose mercy they have spurned. Revelation 6 describes the last days with earthquakes, the sun turning black and the moon becoming like blood as the stars of the sky fall to earth. And Unbelievers will cry out to the mountains and the rocks, “fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb for...who is able to stand?” (Rev 6:12-17). The second coming will be a day of dread and mourning for those who have rejected Christ.

5. **Christ’s return will result in great salvation for believers** (31).

[Vs. 31] Remember that by this time, according to vs. 14, believers have taken the gospel to all nations, so when Jesus comes, He will gather His people from every part of the globe and He will bring with Him the redeemed from heaven (Rev 19:14) as the angels gather all of the redeemed together under the protection and deliverance of Jesus as our Husband-King and Savior.

Beloved, the cosmic collapse at the unveiling of Christ in His infinite power and glory will be met by many with terror. But not for the believer! When I read of the heavens convulsing at His coming, I do not feel dread but hopeful expectation and joy. I cherish these verses as a precious promise like a bride cherishes her ring. And one day every believer’s heart will leap for joy at the trumpet sound just as a bride’s heart leaps for joy when she hears the trumpet fanfare and the doors are opened to present her to her groom. Beloved, Jesus is our bridegroom who will come for us. He is our Savior and He will be our triumphant Husband-King.

Yet we do not know the hour in which He will come, so we must be ready. Jesus goes on now to illustrate 4 reasons as to why we must be ready.

1. **Be ready, because the coming of the Lord is near** (vs. 32 -35).

[vs. 32-35] Just as figs are a sure sign of spring and you know that summer is imminent, so the events that Jesus described in vs. 1-14 would begin to happen soon. The last days would be inaugurated during the lifetime of Jesus’ disciples. So when Jesus says, “this generation” will see “all these things,” I take Him to mean that the distress of vs. 1-14 that He just described as leading up to His 2nd coming, will begin in the lifetime of His disciples, though it will continue to unfold beyond their lifetime.⁶ It is also possible that there would be multiple fulfillments of these things, some during their lifetime and some beyond. The temple would be desecrated and destroyed, persecution of Jesus disciples would begin, and the gospel would begin to be preached to all nations. This is not to say that there would not be an ongoing intensification of these things beyond their lifetime.

For the record, there are at least 5 different ways scholars have attempted to interpret vs. 34. This is because timing is always the most difficult aspect to determine regarding end time events. So while many questions remain about the timing of events, what is clear and undisputed is that Jesus will return personally and gloriously to save His people and judge the earth. And so we agree that we must be faithful and ready for His appearing. So sure is the return of Christ, that Jesus says in vs. 35, “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Beloved, we are living in the last days which began in the time of Christ. As days of tribulation intensify in these latter days, we should not grow disheartened for fearful. Rather, we should be encouraged that his return hastens upon us.

2. **Be ready, because we don’t know the hour of His coming** (24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13).

[vs. 36] How is it that the Father knows the appointed hour, but not the Son? When Jesus was on earth, he surrendered the independent use of His divine attributes to the Father (Phil 2:6-7). So that He only functioned within the realm of knowledge the Father revealed to Him during His earthly life.

⁶ See D.A. Carson, Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, pg. 507.

The point is that we don't and can't know the precise timing of Jesus' return, therefore we must be ready at all times. Jesus actually makes this point 4 times in the remainder of chapter 24 and again in chapter 25 (24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13)

3. **Be ready, not distracted by the mesmerizing routine of daily life** (37-44).

[vs. 37-44] The point of these verses is that right up until the return of Christ, ordinary life will continue to happen. And though evil will intensify, people will still live regular life. They will eat and drink, go to work, get married and have children. So Jesus cautions us against getting mesmerized by the routine of daily life. We must maintain a sense of spiritual urgency for the days in which we live. Don't let earthly life so consume you that it makes you numb to the reality of God. Walk in the fear of God. Share the gospel with your friends. And live as though you may not have tomorrow.

Jesus is calling us to the constant vigilance of one who guards his house, not knowing when a thief may come.

4. **Be ready, faithful and prepared to give an account for your life** (45-51).

[45-51] Jesus calls us to assess our lives in light of the reality that there will only be two kinds of people in the end. Those who are ready for His return, and those who are not. Don't live as though you have borrowed time. And don't live as though you will not have to give an account for your life today. We know neither the day that we will die nor the day that Jesus will return.

If you live faithfully unto the Lord, doing what He has called you to do, with the character and faith that He requires, you will be ready for Him to return at any time and you will be among those who are blessed by His return. But those who are not ready, giving their lives to worthless (or only temporal) things, and failing to steward this life as a gift from God, will be met with eternal punishment.

Beloved, don't miss the urgency of Jesus' message. Jesus will return at a time we do not know, and we must be ready. The question is, what does it mean to be ready?

Being ready *doesn't mean* having it all together as though we've perfected life. It *doesn't mean* doing lots of things that you hope will gain points with God. Being ready means that you are in a right relationship with God. It means knowing Christ and being reconciled to God through Him. It means that you have surrendered your rebellious independence and sin to come back under the loving authority of Jesus as your Master.

In vs. 48, the evil slave is the one who continues to live in rebellion against his master, disrespecting other people, disobeying his master's orders and living as though his life is his own rather than belonging to God. The good slave does what pleases his master because his heart is right with his master.

Beloved, the good news of the gospel is that Christ laid down His life on the cross in payment for our sin, to settle our accounts with God so that we could be reconciled to Him. Why would He do this? Because he loves us with the same heart with which God loves us. *"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). God has given His Son for you. Have you received Him? John 3:36 says, **"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"** (John 3:36).

Beloved, Jesus is coming at a time you do not know. And when He comes, He will either find you trusting in Jesus and welcome you into eternal life, or He will find you living for yourself and unleash the wrath of God on your sinful rebellion.

Today is the day of salvation. If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9). Don't delay!