

Alert, Ready, and Faithful 2-12-06

Matthew 24:36-51 (NIV)

³⁶ "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. ⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We are picking up where we left off, in the middle of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus was giving His last words to His disciples before His betrayal. In our passage for today, He is still answering their question, "When will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3b (NIV) Instead of giving a time frame, He told them of things that would take place before the end of the age. He could not give them a certain number of years because He said, ³⁶ "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

To become a man, Jesus emptied Himself of His omniscience. (Philippians 2:6-7) You might ask how He could predict all these things. He was quoting the signs that the prophets gave. What was not in the prophets He was able to teach because of His communion with the Holy Spirit and His understanding of His Father's character. (John 15:15) If Jesus did not know the day of His return, who are we to guess? Kim pointed out to me that most of the false Christ's and false prophets build their following around a date that they have divined to be the end of time. Every time you hear a prediction, a great big red flag should go up. You would be perfectly justified in telling the person that Jesus said, "No one knows!" Do not be misled!

Jesus went on to give them more descriptions of what the time would be like. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus is giving them an analogous situation so they could wrap their minds around it by relating to an historical event. When the world became so wicked that hearts were hardened

Commented [notes1]: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:15 (NIV)

beyond hope of restoration, God had to bring judgment to end it. (Genesis 3:5-6) But Jesus adds more detail so we will not miss what He is trying to convey.

³⁸ *For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; In other words, they were going on with life unconcerned about God and judgment or the destruction in their world that sin was producing. How do we know how destructive life had become? We can read the account and God's reasons in Genesis 6:¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.* (NIV) When sin is unrestrained it ends up in violence. When selfishness reaches a place of reigning in our hearts, we become violent physically and verbally and in our thought life. Violence says that I am all that matters. The violence in the Middle East is not only about religion. It comes from power hungry men who seduce naive people often through religion. It is greed that wants to control areas of land and people for personal gain of power and wealth. The world Noah lived in was one of daily violence and yet people accepted it as normal and went about their lives participating in it without the fear of judgment. (Psalm 11:5)

³⁹ *and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. They could not see it coming. Noah preached to them, but they scoffed at His warnings. (2 Peter 2:5)* No one gave it a second thought. Jesus said they did not see it coming until they saw the wall of water about to hit them. That is exactly how it will be at the Second Coming. The world will be filled with violence, and yet we will go about our lives as if we would live forever, never considering that the end is about hit us like a flood. (Psalm 49:12) Though some forms of violence are down in the USA, violence is certainly on the rise in our world. We are somewhat protected from it in rural America, but we see it in the world news. France and Denmark are on the verge of war between the immigrant population and the natives. Muslims around the world are rioting because of cartoons of Mohammed. Nigeria, Sudan, and other African nations are living under a constant state of violence. Iran and North Korea are on the verge of developing atomic weapons and have vowed to wipe out other nations. Russia is controlled by a violent underworld. We are rapidly becoming like the days of Noah.

⁴⁰ *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.* Some see this as the wicked carried away to judgment and those that remain to be those saved during the tribulation that will live through the reign of Christ in the millennium. My opinion is that it is the rapture. We will see all these signs that Jesus spoke of, and as He said earlier, if we endure to the end we will be saved, rescued out of it all. God will remove His own from the earth before He pours out His wrath. The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God and we will rise to meet Him in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Recently, the *Left Behind* books and movie made the rapture a topic of conversation. The first book told stories of people suddenly disappearing all over the planet, and of the chaos that resulted, a chaos that the Antichrist will take advantage of. Imagine if that took place at this moment? The book tells of a church in which half the

Commented [notes3]: 5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.
Genesis 6:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 5 The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.
Psalms 11:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;
2 Peter 2:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.
Psalms 49:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV)

congregation and the preacher remained. Realizing the rapture had taken place and they did not rise, they searched the Scriptures and came to accept Christ as their Savior. (John 3:36) If the rapture took place today and you remained, would you explain it away, or fall on your knees and repent, not getting up until you knew you had received salvation? (Isaiah 1:18)

⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. The command to us is to keep watch or be in a state of alertness. Jesus was telling them a second time that no one knows when. He will tell them again just before the ascension. (Acts 1:7) Besides, He may come for you today. Live in a state of watchfulness. Do not pass from this life knowing you have not done what God called you to do. Time has a way of slipping away from us. Have you noticed that we are half way through February of 2006? Become urgent about the things God has called you to do. (Ephesians 5:15-17) Ask the Lord to give you a plan of action and then do it. Serve wholeheartedly today. What do you want to be doing when the Lord comes for you? I hope I am sharing the love of Jesus with someone in some way. I want to be found being about my Master's business. Don't you?

⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Jesus is not coming when we would expect. That is why we always must be ready. (1 Thessalonians 5:4) We may be able to tell the time is near, but it is man's natural tendency to think it will be a little later. Throughout church history, believers have expected Jesus' return in their lifetime. (Hebrews 9:28) That is how it should be. We should have a watchful attitude. Consider the expectancy you would have if you knew that tonight a thief was going to try to break into your home. You would stay awake, watch, and listen. Jesus is telling us to have that same daily attitude. (1 Thessalonians 5:6) I would venture to guess that most of us do not have that kind of expectation. The expectation itself keeps us in check and helps guide us to use our time as we should.

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?" ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Jesus tells us we are in a Master servant relationship. Yes, He calls us brothers, but ultimately He is the King and expects our willing submission to His goodness. (John 15:15) We are all called to serve. This reminds us of Joseph, who was a servant to the captain of the guard, Potiphar. When Potiphar saw Joseph was faithful and diligent, he put him over his whole household. (Genesis 39:4) When Jesus returns, if we gave our fellow servants their food (physical and spiritual sustenance) when they needed it, Jesus will give us more responsibility. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. When you get to heaven you are not going to sit on a cloud and play a harp. Those who were faithful with a little will be given more to do, and I can guarantee you that you will love your new assignments. (Luke 19:17) No one will ever get bored in heaven.

⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink

Commented [notes8]: 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."
John 3:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."
Isaiah 1:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."
Acts 1:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.
Ephesians 5:15-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 1 Thessalonians 5:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.
Hebrews 9:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.
John 15:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.
Genesis 39:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 17 "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'
Luke 19:17 (NIV)

with drunkards. "Hey, He's been gone for 2000 years. What is the sense of urgency? Besides, He is a God of love, right?" (2 Peter 3:3-4) This is a description of those who live for self, who in their selfishness inflict pain on their fellow servants. Their life lost all discipline, and the world and its lusts lured them back.

In the parallel account in Luke, this warning was recorded. ³⁴ "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. Luke 21:34 (NIV)

We can debate until Jesus comes back about whether or not you can lose your salvation. Here is the very best I have heard on the topic. If you are afraid that Satan will make you stumble and cause you do something for which God will not forgive you, you need to trust in the Lord and recognize that He is the One who keeps you. (Psalm 121:3) Remember that He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4) You have the Great Shepherd watching over you. Do you think He will fail to keep you? (Hebrews 13:20)

If, on the other hand, you are tempted to compromise and fall back into the world because you are assured of your salvation and think that whatever you do God will forgive you, you had better repent and make sure you were saved in the first place. (Luke 9:62) That kind of thinking does not come from a new creation in Christ. It does not sound like a redeemed heart. You had better fear the wrath of a righteous God. You had better think about the next verses.⁵⁰ *The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.*

A burglar broke into a house and heard a voice that said, "Jesus is watching you!" He felt convicted about what he was doing until he saw the voice came from a parrot. As he started to go about bagging the valuables, the parrot said, "Sick 'em Jesus!" A huge Rotwieller named Jesus chased him out of the house.

When I was a little boy I used to sing that convicting song, "Be careful little hands what you do, Be careful little hands what you do. There is a Father up above Looking down with tender love, So be careful little hands what you do. And the song went on to cover feet and eyes and ears. A father who loves his children will discipline his children. Knowing that God loves us enough to discipline us should deter us from sin. There has been a movement away from physical discipline. Most of us are old enough to remember what a deterrent the principal's paddle was. Some of us are more familiar with that instrument than others. Amen? A principal would be fired for using one of those today. But reasonable physical discipline is often a measure of justice and a great deterrent. (Proverbs 14:27)

God does not hesitate to use physical discipline because He is just and knows all the circumstances, even what is in our heart. Listen to the discipline toward the unrepentant sinner in the closing verse. ⁵¹ *He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* "Oh Jesus, You shouldn't say such harsh things. People will be turned off by it." It is true that the goodness of God leads us to repentance, (Romans 2:4) but when we will not receive His goodness, we will face the justice of His wrath. If you do not like that,

Commented [notes18]: 3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.
4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

2 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 3 He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber;
Psalms 121:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.
1 John 4:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
Hebrews 13:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."
Luke 9:62 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.
Proverbs 14:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?
Romans 2:4 (NIV)

then it must have been okay with you when this evil servant with-held food and beat his fellow servants. Do you think maybe he just needed some psychological counseling? Ha! He needs the fear of God!

Here is the problem that our society is ignoring. The heart of man is desperately evil. (Jeremiah 17:9) Our educational system today has tried to say that we are merely a product of our environment, and it is not our fault. So your daddy beat you. You have two choices, and honest students of human character are now telling us that this is true. You will come to a point when you give in to the same nature you saw your father express, or you choose to do whatever it takes not to. The decision is made in the heart. It is the heart that must be made new.

You can live as morally righteous as anyone in the world can, but God looks right past your exterior, beyond your nice clothes, through the makeup, past all the excuses and right down into your very heart. (Hebrews 4:13) What does He see when He looks there this morning? What is His verdict about your innermost thoughts? Does he see a servant that is living for selfish pleasure, or one who is watching for His return, ready to meet Him, and faithfully fulfilling your calling?

In this analogy, Jesus is talking about two kinds of servants. One is watching, ready, and faithful. The other is only concerned about self, completely abusing the trust of the master. The Bible so often portrays things in black and white. You are the faithful one, or you are the self-centered one. Your life is about the Master, or it is about you. (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus promised He and the Father would come and take up residence in us. Have they? Don't you think you would have evidence of it if they did? The Apostle Paul described it like this. If anyone is in Christ He is a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) The old has gone and the new has come. Ezekiel said God was going to take out our heart of stone and give us one of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19) Is your heart changed? You must be born again, Jesus said. (John 3:7) We use the expression so much we miss the powerful imagery that new birth signifies. Is your life made new, or is your old life just slightly altered?

Hear Jesus say to you, "You must be born again!" It takes the new birth to be enabled to be a faithful servant. When God looks through it all and sees your heart, is it one that has been made new in Christ? If not, come forward and ask for a new heart. Let go of any rights you are clinging to and surrender to the Master. He is coming again in a time we least expect. We never know when our time will be up. Jesus has exhorted us in this passage to be alert. He has told us to live ready. Finally He said to remain faithful. All of those require a new heart that comes from Him alone. If you are holding back this morning, realize how senseless that is, and give it all to Jesus. Live all out for Him, the only One worth living for!

Commented [notes25]: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 11:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' John 3:7 (NIV)