

## Part 43: What's Going On? Part 2

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What if you knew exactly when and how you would die? This was a question the BBC put forward last year as they discussed the hypothetical with social scientists, psychologists and writers.

Their answers had all the fanaticism and horror of a science fiction novel. Instead of answering the question individually, they traced it out across culture. They painted a world where plays culminated not in the pretend death, but in the real death of the actors. Dating apps would have a new feature where you could not only choose potential partners by their likes and dislikes, but also one whose death date would be similar to yours. Funeral homes would no longer have to work with grieving families, but instead would work with the soon, and certain to be deceased themselves.

In darker ways, crime would rise as criminals would be able to rest in the safety of knowing their actions would not result in their death. Parents would be able to see the death date of their children and decide if it would be more convenient to abort them rather to have them die at an early age. One writer said, "I think it would completely undermine our system of life."

Why is it that death seems to have the ability to shape our world so much, and yet our western world is seemingly unshaped by it? While each and every one of us know in the back of our minds that we are going to die, we try to ignore that knowledge or pacify it by finding something else to fill our time.

In many ways death is the most common human experience and yet it is often the most hidden one. In our modern society with hospitals, hospice, funeral homes and morticians, we don't often see death like previous cultures have, and because of that we are more apt to live our lives with the idea of our imminent death hidden away in our thoughts. Because of that the idea of death has very little influence in our daily lives when compared to the rest of human history.

If this universal experience offers so little effect in shaping our lives, how much harder might it be to imagine the second coming of Jesus Christ as a shaping influence in our lives. Despite its hiddenness, we have all seen, and are dubiously aware that death is an ever present reality. But none of us have that same experience with the second coming of Jesus.

We are continuing on in the book of Matthew where Jesus is preparing himself and his disciples for his imminent death and subsequent resurrection. And in this discourse Jesus is beginning to share with his disciples a glimpse into what is to come in the future. Jesus has been promising his disciples that he would come back. That there would be a second coming of Jesus, and on that day he would establish his Kingdom in full.

And look at how he described this day in the text we say last week: **Matthew 24:29-31**. To varying degrees, we've all seen death, but none of us have seen this. What influence does this day, and the certainty of it have in our lives?

Depending upon your background with the church you probably have varying views on what this second coming may look like. How many of you have watched an episode of "Doomsday Preppers" or read the

"Left Behind" book series? Perhaps for some people the idea of Jesus coming back in a final moment of judgment leads you to an obsessive concern for the times and the places where this might happen and a general withdraw from society.

For others, maybe you too have seen such influences, and it has left you finding it all too odd. Even for the Christian. Sure, you will one day die, the Lord will one day come back. But it's easier, safer, less weird, and less controversial to set your mind on other things.

Well today Jesus is going to speak to both camps. He is going to guard us from both obsession and apathy in light of his second coming. As Jesus is sharing these windows into the future with his disciples he is wanting to prepare them for faith and ministry in this age we find ourselves in. The age where Jesus has brought us into his spiritual kingdom, but not yet into his physical one.

Where last week Jesus gave a big picture vision of the characteristics of this age, today Jesus is going to give us some cautions into how we are to wait for this day. And what we are going to see repeatedly in this text is that Jesus wants us to be ready. Jesus wants us to wait well for him. Our big idea today is a simple one: **Are you waiting?** And out three points today are all going to provide a counter question to this idea: Are you waiting or are you adjusting? Are you waiting or are you indulging? Are you waiting or are you assuming?

Let's begin this morning by looking at Jesus' first caution this morning: **Are you adjusting?**

Look with me at **Matthew 24:36-44**.

Now if you remember back to last week you remember the questions the disciples asked which prompted this teaching from Jesus: **Matthew 24:3**. Did you see Jesus' answer to this question: Regarding that day and the hour of it, no one knows, not even the Jesus who shares the same divinity as the Father knows. Only God the Father knows.

There have been and there will forever be Christian and cultic leaders trying to predict the day on which this world will undergo its final judgment. Do not believe them. Do not listen to them. Do not spend money buying their product. Do not let their seeming competence lead you to believe the other false-truths they might be trying to teach you. In contrast to always being anxious about the signs of the times, all three imperatives Jesus gives in this text involve watching your own heart.

No one knows the day or the hour. But then he goes on to say: but it's coming. Did you see that tension: **Matthew 24:42-44**. Jesus says if you did know exactly when your house was going to be broken into, you'd stay awake and be prepared. Even though you don't know when I'm coming back, you do know I'm coming. So be ready.

Have you ever called someone who told you they would call you "right back"? If you have, you know the experience of levels of waiting. For the first five minutes you don't do anything else other than stare at your phone. If at that point they don't call you back, you begin to do whatever it was you were doing, but you have your phone right with you. If they still haven't called back you're sure to maybe have your phone on loud while you're driving home. Maybe you let your spouse know over dinner that so-and-so is going to call you back.

But eventually the imminence of the phone call begins to lessen. You go to bed, but you don't wake up in the middle of the night thinking they might have tried to call. The next morning you probably don't do much beside maybe see if they sent a text or shot you an email. And by lunch the next day you forgot that you were even waiting for something, or perhaps you just assume that they will never call you back. Your life has adjusted to the silence.

This is what Jesus is warning us of here. Do not become so adjusted to the silence that you lose a sense that Jesus will call us back. He uses two examples here to show this: Noah's time and the story of two people working and one being taken.

First, let's look at Noah (vs. 38-39). Noah was an Old Testament character who God saved from judgment by calling Noah to build an ark for him and his family. God saw that the world was increasingly evil, and so he was going to judge the world for its sin by sending a worldwide flood.

But what's interesting about how Jesus is using this example is that he isn't stressing the increasing wickedness of Noah's time, he's stressing the everyday ordinariness of Noah's time. In those days they ate, they drank, they married and were marry right up until the very waters of judgment overtook them.

In other words they had become so adjusted to the ordinary pace of life that they were entirely unaware that judgment might follow. Life was good. Until it was gone.

Do you think that perhaps the largest threat to our ability to wait with anticipation for King Jesus is not so much the wars, famines, persecution and betrayals that Jesus described last week, and instead it is the everyday ordinary conveniences of life?

In the Disney movie Hercules, Hercules is a pagan god who must prove that he is a true hero if he is ever to be accepted back into the realm of the gods at Mt. Olympus. It is his whole goal through the whole movie. But by the end of the movie he finally proves himself a true hero and is able to return back to the realm of the gods, but he opts instead to stay on earth. Why? Because he found a lady friend.

You see for Hercules, if he could find something special down here, heaven wouldn't be so good, and earth wouldn't be so bad. Do you think there are places in your life where you might feel the same?

We live in a world where suffering is on every corner, we get that, but if we can find the right guy, job, or experience, it really won't be that bad. Have you adjusted to this world instead of longing for the next?

C.S. Lewis famously expressed Jesus' caution here when he said: **"If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."** Do not be unaware of this, we were made to be with God for all eternity.

The second example he gives is in verses 40 and 41. Two groups of two, each working hard at ordinary things, but in a moment one is gone, and one is left. This is often one of the main verses people use to establish a theology of the rapture, where God takes his elect home and leaves to face judgement. This could be true, back in verse 31 he talked about gathering his elect from the winds. But Jesus doesn't tell us where these people go: could be to God, could be to judgment. Or it could be that the bigger point is not where these people are going, but that there is something entirely unexpected on the way.

Two ordinary men in a field, one will be taken, one left. A mother and daughter doing the daily task of grinding grain. One taken and one left. This day will disrupt even the most ordinary and common roles and relationships.

Family relations, work places, friendships, there is a day coming where those too will be disrupted by the coming of Jesus Christ. We are far too prone to grow adjusted to our relationships and functions, and Jesus knows that. Which is why he says, be ready. Do not grow weary in waiting for me. You've probably heard before in some nostalgic reference the phrase, "Do not adjust your television screen." The point was that if you tried to adjust to focus on or ration of your TV to fit that one particular show, everything else you watch will be skewed. This is what Jesus is saying in this text: Don't adjust your screen. Do not become accustomed to this static, keep waiting for me to bring everything else into focus.

Second, Jesus now moves on to emphasize a different concern in our waiting: **Are you indulging?**

Now let's remember the immediate context of what is going on in Matthew before we look at this text. Jesus is speaking in private to his disciples. The twelve men who Jesus has hand chosen to help establish his church once he is gone. Also right before Jesus began this conversation with them, he rebuked the official religious leaders of the day (the Pharisees and scribes) calling them hypocrites.

All of this is important to understand when as we look at Jesus' second warning: **Matthew 24:45-51**.

So the disciples just heard Jesus say to the Pharisees that they themselves are destined to eternal punishment, and here Jesus says that there will be those who join them in their punishment, but are in a worse state (cut in two).

In other words there is a danger that can befall God's servants which is greater than the danger the Pharisees themselves were in. What is that danger? That of the indulgent servant who does not exercise his servant duties.

Jesus uses the example of a servant placed over other servants. Does that ring a bell? Remember what Jesus just spoke to the disciples: **Matthew 23:8-11**. Don't you think that maybe the disciples are perceiving that Jesus is talking about them?

And he says, do the work of a faithful servant. A faithful servant will take care of the other servants until the master comes back. He will care for them, he will feed them, and he will do all of this at the proper time. And if the master comes back and finds the servant doing this, he will receive a great reward (we will talk more about that next week).

But there is a contrast here: the wicked servant. And did you notice what he said to himself: "My master is delayed...." Present, active, ongoing. "My master has been delayed, and it doesn't seem this delay will end soon." And he turns to violence and not benevolence. He turns to gluttony and not generosity. Drunkenness and not devotion.

In light of the seeming delay, the orders of the Master are put off till later, and the desire of the flesh is indulged in the seeming safety of the absence.

How much sin in our lives begins with: "My master is delayed," "My roommate is gone," "My spouse is out of town," "They'll never know...."?

Consider Solomon's words in **Ecclesiastes 8:11**. Because Jesus is physically absent from us, many of us, church leaders included, will forget the charge of our savior and indulge in endless self-gratification through means of spiritual neglect and abuse.

But hear this: the work of ministry in this age is to make men hearty for the Master's return. To those who are fellow servants of God, but placed in positions of influence by God: are you providing food in the proper time. Are you feeding others in preparation of this day? Are you strengthening them to endure this absence? Are you loving people into the reality of Jesus' return?

Or are you turning aside and saying, "There is a way more comfortable than this. There is a way which costs me less. There is a way which satisfies me now." But the Master is coming. And if you are unfaithful, he will faithfully treat you with justice. Justice for the wrong done to him, and the wrong done to others.

But Jesus has left you his household. And one day he will give you all of it in full. We have something so much better than vain indulgence in the gospel we have the pantry of the master. Will you trust his rations? Are you waiting for him now? What does that look like? We will talk more about that next week, but right now I want you to really consider how your life is shaped by this eternal reality of Jesus coming back?

J.C. Ryle says it well when he says, "**We may well doubt whether we are true believers in Jesus if we are not ready at any time to have our faith changed into sight.**"

Can you imagine if our culture knew that one day world peace would be a reality, that the perfect government would finally be installed, that we would universally eliminate our carbon footprint? Don't you think that would shape policies, community engagement and consumer habits? But here we know with certainty that Jesus is coming back to turn into solid what we may now see in a shadow. We have a greater hope, and we should have a greater zeal to be ready for it. Therefore be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Lastly Jesus concludes with a final parable. And in this parable we see Jesus' final caution: **Are you Assuming?**

Before we read this parable I want to provide a little background so that we might understand the culture a little better. In Jewish marriage ceremonies at that time there would be a procession from the house of the Father of the bride to the wedding feast.

Typically what would happen is that the groom would go to his soon-to-be father-in-law's house to gather his bride. While this was happening the bridal party, friends and relatives would gather along their route and follow them in a celebratory procession to the wedding feast. Often, as we do now, weddings would be at night. So the people who were in the crowd would bring torches or lamps so as to help light the way.

These lamps also acted as a sort of wedding invitation. Because when you got to the party, it was obviously only the people who knew about it who would have taken the proper preparations to gather their lamp and follow the procession. With that in mind let's examine **Matthew 25:1-13**.

In this story the contrast is relatively clear right? Actually in both parables Jesus has given he not only provides clear contrasts, but adjectives to help us know which is right. There was a faithful and wise servant, and a wicked one. There were wise virgins, and there were foolish ones.

There is an obvious effect Jesus wants this to have with his disciples and so too with us today: Which one are you?

You see there are three dangerous assumptions the foolish virgins made in this text. First they assumed that they had what they needed to wait for the bridegroom. Second they assumed they would be provided enough from others. And third they assumed they would be let into the feast even if they showed up late.

When it comes to thinking about this day when Jesus comes back, how many of us might be prone to the same error? Look at what Jesus has already said twice in the book of Matthew: **10:22, 24:13**. We love hiking in Missoula, but one thing that experienced hikers know is that you must be prepared. The longer the journey, the greater preparedness. Be sure you grab your hat, your shoes, some snacks, your Patagonia apparel, your camera, your fitness tracker, your bear spray, your bear bells, your backpack, your water bottle, and your dog, and only then do you go.

We would never assume being in the woods means we can make it hiking in the same way we would never assume being enrolled in college means we will get a degree. Preparation, especially in light of an extended time, is important.

How are you preparing yourselves for this time of "soon" but "not yet"? Are you drawing near to God in prayer? Are you meeting with other believers and being encouraged by them? Are you continuing to put off sin and put on Christ? Are you reliant upon God's Holy Spirit to finish in you the work that he began in your conversion?

Have you made the adequate plans to endure by God's grace this time of waiting? Because there may be times where even the best of us become groggy. We find routines, we get distracted, we become focused on enjoying life in this wonderful world that God did make us. But if we are those who see Christianity as a novelty, a time filler, a social ladder, or a family badge, there will be a day when the trumpet will sound, the bridegroom will come down, and you will reach down to find your faith long run dry.

And in that day, on that day, no one will be able to share theirs with you. But now, now we can share our faith. Our faith is this: our greatest problem is that we are separated from God by our sin, that all those longings to find joy in this world are glimpses of what God made us to find in him. But our sin has kept us from him. But Jesus being rich in mercy has come to die for our sins so that we might not only be free from the punishment of it, but restored back to an all satisfying hope in God.

One day this world will be judged and those who hope in this beautiful gospel will be saved. Hear this gospel. Believe this gospel. You cannot work your way into this heaven, you must be invited by this groom by grace and you respond with a full trust in everything he has said.

Right now we will spill our lamps for you. But there is a difference between sharing my faith with you, and you having my faith. You must have your own. I cannot believe enough for you. Your parents cannot believe enough for you. Your friend cannot believe enough for you, you must believe.

And if you do not, you run the risk of belief coming too late. There is feast ready for you now, why not make the proper steps to wrap your life around this King? In this gospel, and only this gospel is there light for you in this dark world, and a feast for you in the final days. You do not know the day or the hour, but know that salvation stands here right now. Will you make adequate hope in it?

As strange as it may sound, this day is coming, and just as our Lord said, it is coming soon. Are you waiting for him in the most active of all senses? Are you preparing your heart to find its hope in this day? Are you helping others do the same? Are you resting with full confidence that the faith you have is sufficient to endure through this long night?

You may not be able to wrap the whole of your life around the certainty of your date of death. But the Lord's second coming is even more certain. What will you do with that knowledge?

If an understanding of the day of our death would re-write the entire ecosystem of our lives, then how much more does the certainty of this day re-write our faith even if we only know in part?

Dear church, are you ready for this day? Are you waiting for this King? If so let us be encouraged by the words of John: **1 John 3:1-3**.

This love is ours. This hope is real. This day is certain. Therefore be ready.