

## INTRODUCTION

I'm really enjoying being a granddad, because I get to act like a kid again. I enjoy playing hide-and-seek with Lizzie and Caroline. Remember how it goes? Whoever is "it" covers their eyes while everyone else hides. If you're "it" you count, "One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi..." until you get to the prearranged number. Then you say, "Ready or not, here I come!" Then you start searching for the people who are hiding. In the real game, if the hiders make it back to home base without being discovered, they win. But when I play it with the girls it just ends with a lot of giggling when someone is found.

In Matthew 24 we've been studying the prophecies about the return of Christ. One day He's coming back. Remember that a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day with the Lord. He's counting down, "One Millennium; Two Millennium; Three Millennium..." and when He gets to God's arranged time He'll say, "Ready or not, here I come!" Are you ready...or not?

If you aren't ready for Jesus to return, you may need to make some changes in your life. That's not always as easy as it sounds. One of my favorite comic strips is Peanuts. If you like it, you're familiar with the ones where Lucy and Charlie Brown are practicing football. Lucy holds the ball for Charlie to kick. But every time Lucy held the football for Charlie, he ran toward the ball and kicked with all his might. But at the last moment, Lucy moved the ball and Charlie Brown flew up into the air and landed painfully on his back.

In one episode the strip opened with Lucy holding the football, but Charlie Brown refused to kick it. Lucy begged him to kick the ball and Charlie Brown said, "Every time I try to kick the ball you remove it and I fall on my back." They go back and forth for a while and Lucy breaks down in tears and says, "Charlie Brown, I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like I have. I have played many cruel tricks on you, but I have seen the error of my ways. I've been wrong, so wrong. Won't you give a poor penitent girl another chance?"

Charlie Brown was moved by her grief and says, "Of course, I'll give you another chance." He backs up and runs at the ball and kicks with all his might. And at the last moment, you guessed it, Lucy moves the ball away and Charlie lands on his back again. In the last picture Lucy looks down at him and says, "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!"

Maybe you realize today that you need to make some changes to be ready to meet Jesus. Recognizing you have a need is the first step, but it isn't the same thing as changing your behavior. But the good news is that if you ask Him, Jesus will make these changes in you!

Over the next few weeks we're going to study three parables about being ready for His return. Today we're looking at the (1) The Parable of the Two Attitudes (24:45-51). Next, we're going to examine (2) The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (25:1-13). Then we come to what is often called the Parable of the Talents, but I'm calling it (3) The Parable of the Three Managers (25:14-30).

Matthew 24:42-51. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 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. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. 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? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 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. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In this message I want to dissect this parable and then share a couple of personal applications about being ready for the Lord's return. Because He says, "Ready or not, Here I come!"

## **I. THE FAITHFUL, WISE WORKER**

As Jesus finishes His teaching about His return He asks a question to introduce this parable. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" Then He goes on to answer His question by contrasting the faithful servant with the wicked servant. Are you faithful? That means you never stop serving. Are you wise? The Bible says if you lack wisdom you can ask God for wisdom. Wisdom and knowledge aren't the same thing. Knowledge can be attained by education, but wisdom comes from God. Someone has said that knowledge is recognizing that a tomato actually is a fruit, and wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad. Knowledge can help you make a living, but wisdom helps you make a life. Notice three things about the attitude of the good servant.

### **A. He obeyed his Master's instructions**

Jesus said, "The master has put (him) in charge of the servants in his household." In the first century it was common for a wealthy landowner to take an extended trip and leave a servant in charge. These were often business trips in which the homeowner would take his entire family, and the servants were left to tend the property. And the servants really didn't know exactly WHEN their master would return. There were no cell phones, email, or even snail mail to communicate when he would return. And the possibility existed that the master would return suddenly and unexpectedly. At a moment's notice, the servant was required to give an account for his activities while the master was away. This good servant followed his master's instructions. Notice what he did.

### **B. He served his Master's food to others**

The only instructions the servant was given was "to give them their food at the proper time." He was the appointed leader, but his job was to take care of his fellow servants by feeding them.

In commenting on this passage Ray Stedman wrote: "The household obviously represents the church, the house of God. The food is obviously the Word of God. The Word of God is intended to feed the people of God. The first essential in watching for the Lord's return is to feed and to be fed by the Word of God."

Feeding on the Word and feeding others is not just the responsibility of the pastors or SMBS leaders. You will starve spiritually if you aren't fed by the milk and meat of the Word of God.

### **C. He received more responsibility**

Jesus said, "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." In other words, he gets a promotion. There is a principle in scripture that if you are faithful in the small tasks, God will give you an opportunity to be faithful in bigger responsibilities. In Luke 16:10 Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."

If you want to be promoted spiritually, be faithful in the small things. How much do you think God can trust you with? You've probably thought, "Well, if I made a million dollars a year, I'd gladly give 10% of it to God." Well, if God can't trust you to tithe your \$30,000 a year, why would He trust you with more than that? It's not about tithing it's about trust.

Now, let's look at the other attitude that people have about being ready for the Lord's return.

## **II. THE FAULTY, WICKED WORKER**

Jesus said, "But suppose THAT servant is wicked." If you think this is another servant, you didn't read it closely. It's important to note Jesus is not talking about two different servants: He is describing two possible attitudes of the same servant, faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

In other words, there might have been a time when you were a faithful servant, and you've gotten lazy. Or if you are a poor servant now, you can change your mind and change your attitude today. Notice three characteristics of this wicked servant.

### **A. He stopped expecting his Master's return**

He said, "My master is staying away a long time." This servant's problem began with faulty thinking. Stinking thinking always leads to bad behavior. He knew in the back of his mind that his master said he would return but he started thinking, "Surely, it won't be TODAY, so I can do whatever I want." He thought he was in charge, the new master.

Sure you believe Jesus will return, someday. But be honest. You don't really think it will be TODAY do you? After all people have been talking about the Lord's return for 2,000 years.

It's like the story of Aesop's fables about the boy who cried, "Wolf, wolf!" when there was no wolf. His false alarms lulled the people into complacency so that when a real wolf appeared, the

people weren't prepared. Even though plenty of prophecy junkies have cried, "Here He comes!" over the years; we must not make the mistake of slipping into complacency.

### **B. He mistreated others and fed himself**

Jesus said, "He then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards." Can you see this downward spiral? He forgot he was a servant himself and abused his position of authority. He ignored the needs of his fellow servants and then began to mistreat them. Then he started living a life of self-indulgence, and we find him hanging out with other drunkards.

He was lazy and selfish. Someone said, "Selfishness is really self-destruction in slow motion." Before Galileo and others used a telescope to look into space, humanity thought the earth was the center of the universe. Since that day we've been learning planet earth is not the center, but only a small part of a larger cosmos. Some people are so self-centered they really think the entire universe revolves around them.

Are you more concerned about your own needs than the needs of others? In the eyes of the world, greatness is determined by how many servants a person has, but in God's economy greatness is defined by how many people we serve.

### **C. He refused to change and he was cut off—literally**

Jesus said, "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. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." His master returned suddenly and caught the wicked servant in the very act of disobedience. His punishment is severe. Jesus breaks the character of the parable and He's no longer talking about a servant/master relationship. He's talking about a God/man relationship. He used the "h" word again: Hypocrite. Remember a hypocrite was an actor who wore a mask. Some people put on a good show of being a servant of the Lord, but by their behavior you realize that they are only actors. And when it comes to the final judgment, they will be cut off from heaven and will spend eternity in a place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus used that phrase six times and in every case it is a reference to hell.

The New Testament Scholar J.C. Ryle writes: "What is described here is both excruciating pain and frenzied anger. It is a place of torment, but the tormented are refusing to be repentant. Gnashing teeth is their wrathful response to punishment... When we construct a faith that is absent of judgment we make grace very unreal. We dis-grace grace when we ignore the reality and finality of God's judgment or pretend God would never be so harsh. If there is real judgment, then God's salvation by grace is all the more real."

That's the parable; so now let me make a couple of personal applications about what this means to us.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION: Watching for the Lord's return isn't waiting—it's working!**

Jesus said, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."  
(Matthew 24:42)

The idea of keeping watch was a military term. A soldier who was a sentry was given the task of paying attention to what was happening. If there were an intruder, he would alert the others. That's the way we should be looking for the return of Jesus. We should be aware of what's happening in the world that might signal the return of Christ.

There is a big difference between waiting and watching. Waiting is a passive term; there's really nothing you do. But watching involves intentional activity. Years ago a Scottish fishing boat was returning to port after being out on the sea for several weeks. The wives didn't know exactly when their husbands would return. As this boat sailed into the harbor, the skipper looked through his scope saw several women on the pier. He said, "Tom, I see your wife, Margaret, on the dock. And Bill, I see Mary there. And James, Anne is there waiting. And I see my wife, Elizabeth." One fisherman was anxious because his wife wasn't there. He left the boat with a heavy heart and walked up the hill to his cottage. As he opened the door, his wife ran to him and said, "I've been waiting for you." He replied, "Yes, you were waiting, but you weren't really watching."

Are you actively watching for the Lord to return, or are you simply waiting? If you're watching, you'll be busy serving Him until He appears. A young pastor was sitting in his study at church and looked out the window and was surprised to see Jesus standing there looking into his study. He really didn't know what to do so he called his bishop and said, "I know you may not believe this, but Jesus is standing outside my window watching me, what should I do?" The Bishop said, "Look busy."

We don't work FOR our salvation, but we work FROM our salvation. One of the best indicators that you are born again is if you have a heart to serve the Lord with gladness. When Jesus comes back are you going to be busy serving Him? If you aren't busy now, chances are you won't be busy then.

### **PERSONAL APPLICATION: Looking for the Lord's return isn't looking up—it's looking around and serving those in need**

In the first chapter of Acts we read that after spending 40 days with His disciples after the Resurrection, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and ascended into heaven. The disciples were watching Jesus slowly rise into the sky when two angels appeared and spoke to them. The Bible says, "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'" (Acts 1:10-11)

Just try to imagine the disciples standing there gazing into the sky trying to get that last glimpse of Jesus before He disappeared from. It was like people watching a Space Shuttle launch, watching it as long as they can. The disciples might have stayed there all day and even built a shrine to worship, but the angels called their attention back to their task. The last thing Jesus said to them before He left was, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) So they returned to Jerusalem, and ten days later the Holy Spirit filled them and they started preaching about Jesus. And they started looking at people in a different way.

In Acts 3 Peter and John are on the way to the temple to pray and they saw a crippled man who sat by the gate. The Bible says he was there every day begging. There is no doubt Peter and John had passed by that man dozens of times before, but on this particular day Peter saw him in a different way. He saw his real need. The Bible says, "Peter looked straight at him, as did John... Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" (Acts 3:4, 6) Then Peter took him by the right hand and helped him up. The Bible says that the man went into the temple courts walking leaping and praising God. It was the same beggar, they just looked at him differently on that day. How many people do you see and ignore who really need a touch and a hand up in Jesus name?

Too many people have their eyes on the sky looking for the return of Jesus. Let me ask you the same question the angels asked the disciples: Why do you stand gazing into heaven? Jesus is coming back, so get busy serving God by serving others.

Harold Camping isn't the only prophecy junky to predict the date of the return of Christ. In the early 1800s there was a farmer turned Baptist preacher in Vermont named William Miller. He calculated that Jesus would return on April 23, 1844. Most newspapers published articles about his prediction and by 1840 it is estimated over a million Americans had been exposed to Miller's teaching at camp meetings and through the distribution of pamphlets. As the day neared many people sold their possessions and quit their jobs. On the fateful morning, many believers put on white robes and climbed hills so they would be closer to the sky when Jesus appeared. A group of socialite women in Philadelphia gathered outside the city because they didn't want to go to heaven with all the common riff-raff of the city.

Of course, Jesus didn't return. Miller said he had miscalculated and then moved the date to October 22, 1844 (sound familiar?). The same behavior happened again in October. When Jesus didn't return, that day became what is known in American Church History as the "Great Disappointment." If you google "Great Disappointment" you can read about it. But that wasn't the end of William Miller's teachings. Although he died in 1849, those who were called Millerites split off and formed the Christian Advent Movement. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has direct ties to the teachings of William Miller.

What's the point? We shouldn't be setting dates and looking up at the sky. We should be doing what Jesus said when He told the disciples in John 4. He was pointing at the woman from Samaria who had brought all her friends to meet the man who told her about living water. Jesus said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)

May God open your eyes to the people around you who need Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

Let me give a modern twist to Jesus' parable about being ready. Once there was an elementary school where many of the students were lazy and as a result the classrooms were messy. The school superintendent was especially concerned with the cleanliness of one classroom. As the superintendent inspected this classroom he saw crumpled papers on the floor, books scattered and dog-eared, and pencil marks on the desks.

So the superintendent stood before the class and said, "Students, we're going to clean our desks today, and I want you to try to keep them clean. To help you stay motivated, I'm going to return to the class one day, and the student with the cleanest desk will be given this \$100 bill. The catch is, I'm not going to tell you what day I'm going to return—it will be a surprise. Not even your teacher or principal will know the day."

The students' eyes lit up with the thought of that \$100 bill, so all of them started cleaning their desks. They filled the trash cans, stacked their books neatly, and lined up their paper and pencils.

Every morning for the next few weeks, this classroom was the neatest in the school. The students were thinking this might be the day when the superintendent returned. But before long, some of the students grew weary of the daily exercise, so they stopped cleaning their desks. After about a month some of the students said, "I don't even think he's coming back. He only offered us the money as a way to trick us to clean our desks." Before long, all the desks had reverted to their messy state, except for one. There was one girl named Susan who continued to inspect her desk and keep it clean. Soon, the other students started teasing her. They said, "You dummy! Don't you know he's not coming back? You are foolish to believe his promise." Susan didn't argue with them, she just kept cleaning her desk every morning and afternoon before she left.

Near the end of the school year, the students looked up and the superintendent was standing in the door of their classroom. There was a mad rush as the students started frantically cleaning up their desks, stuffing books and papers inside. But the superintendent held up his hand for them to stop. He asked all the students to stand by their desks for his inspection.

One after another, he rejected them for being messy. One boy blamed the teacher for not reminding them more often about the offer. Another blamed the superintendent for making them wait so long. Finally the superintendent arrived at Susan's desk. It was in perfect order. He asked her name and she said, "Susan, sir." After inspecting her desk, he called her up to the front of the classroom and handed her the \$100 bill. He turned to the other students and said kindly, "Boys and girls, Susan never stopped believing I would return and give a reward, so she kept her desk clean every day. She didn't have to worry about what day or even what time of day I would arrive because she was always ready. Always ready."

What a great lesson for us! Jesus is coming back. Are you ready? Because ready or not, here He comes!

## OUTLINE

### I. THE FAITHFUL, WISE WORKER

- A. Obedied his Master's instructions
- B. Served his Master's food to others
- C. Received more responsibility

### II. THE FAULTY, WICKED WORKER

- A. Stopped expecting his Master's return
- B. Mistreated others and fed himself
- C. Refused to change and was cut off

## PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

#### 1. Watching for the Lord's return isn't waiting—it's working!

Jesus said, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."  
*Matthew 24:42*

#### 2. Looking for the Lord's return isn't looking up—it's looking around and servicing those in need

"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'" *Acts 1:10-11*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes