

Ready or Not--Here I Come! Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 24:43-51

Code: 2374

I invite you again, this morning, to open your Bible, if you will, to the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. We are again this week going back to what is becoming for us a familiar text, this great sermon of our Lord Jesus Christ on His own Second Coming that occupies chapter 24 and 25 of Matthew's gospel. We have come now to the section in verse 36 through 51. We began in our last time together to look at these verses and we'll conclude that look this morning.

We sang this morning a hymn that indicated that we were looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of us as Christians so live in anticipation of His coming. One theologian, I believe it was Oscar Cullmann said, "The Christian exists in a tension between what is already and what is not yet." We have already experienced salvation, we have not yet experienced the fullness of salvation, that is the redemption of our bodies. We have already received the power of the Holy Spirit, we have not yet seen the fullness of that power in bringing us to full glory. We have already received life eternal, we have not yet participated in the resurrection.

And so, we are in a sense caught between the already and the not yet and we live in that tension. Looking back to the cross, looking forward to the Second Coming, living already in the last days and not yet in the last of the last days. Every believer, then, lives with a sense of what is already true and what is not yet come to pass. We live with that excitement, that thrill, that joy of looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, the writer of the Hebrews puts it in these words, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation," Hebrews 9:28.

Yes, already He has borne our sins but we look for Him because not yet has He come the second time unto full and glorious salvation. Peter puts it this way: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to the abundant mercy hath already begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." Yes, already have we been begotten again but not yet have we entered fully into our inheritance. And 1 John 3 says, "Beloved, it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Yes, we have received Jesus Christ, yet we are not yet like Christ in all ways.

And so, we live between the already and the not yet. And our hearts are filled with anticipation for the Second Coming. It is not so, frankly, with those who do not know Christ. Those who would look and

hear the message of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and who are not ready for that event should live in fear. Paul says, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." The writer of Hebrews says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. He says our God is a consuming fire. To think of the coming of Jesus Christ is either to think in hope and anticipation of glory, or to think in fear and dread of eternal doom. And so, we look to the coming of Christ. For those of us who know the Savior, we love His appearing. For those who do not, they fear His appearing.

In all of us, there is that question: when is it going to happen? When is Jesus going to come? That isn't a new question. If you'll remember, as we begin...as we began the study of chapter 24, we noted verse 3, "The disciples gathered around Jesus on the Mount of Olives and they said, When shall these things be and what shall be the signs of the end of the age and of Thy coming?" They wanted to know when also. When is it going to happen? When are You going to come in glory and reward the righteous and judge the wicked? When are You going to come and establish Your Kingdom? When is it going to happen? And what are the signs?

Well, in verses 4 through 35, our Lord gave the signs, didn't He? He told them the signs. Now beginning in verse 36, He answers the when question. The what question, He already answered, gave them the signs. Now it's the when question. When shall these things be?, they said. His answer comes in verse 36, look at it. "But of that hour, but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, nor the Son but My Father only."

His answer about the when is nobody knows but God alone, nobody knows. You mean, nobody knows when Jesus is going to come? Yes, that's what He says, but would you notice that He says the day and the hour? In verse 42 He says it again, "You know not what hour." In verse 44 He says it again, "For in such an hour as you think not." In verse 50, at the end, "In an hour that He is not aware of." Yes, it is possible to know the era or the age or the period of time in general. It is possible to know that. We already know that. The time period when our Lord's coming will occur has already been revealed to us in great detail.

We are living in the church age. It comes to an end with the Rapture of the church. And that is the beginning of the end. That is the beginning of the day of the Lord, if you will. The church is taken out. The restrainer, the Holy Spirit, lets loose of the restraint of evil. There's the rise of Antichrist. He looks like the savior of Israel, but half way through a period of seven years, immediately after the Rapture, he desecrates the Holy of Holies, he sets up an idol, calls the whole world to worship himself and that triggers the great Tribulation.

The Scripture's clear about this. The Rapture of the church, the rise of Antichrist, the abomination of desolation, the great Tribulation, it's called so in verse 21 of this chapter. And in that great Tribulation all kinds of terrorizing events take place. They are called in this chapter the birth pains of the Kingdom. They are the rapid fire successive pains that come upon the earth that issue in the birth of

the Kingdom of Christ. They come at the very end, as birth pains come at the end of a pregnancy. And so, there is coming a time when the church is raptured, the rise of Antichrist takes place. Half way through the seven-year period in which he rises to prominence, he sets himself up for the whole world to worship. He then begins to persecute Israel and worldwide slaughter takes place.

The judgment of God falls as described in Revelation 6 through 18. And the end of that time, there is the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. We see in verses 29 to 31. The sky falls. The heavenly bodies fall. Everything in orbit loses its orbit. The powers of the heavens are shaken. And in the blackness that occurs in space, Christ appears and that's the sign of His coming.

So, He has said in this marvelous message, these are the signs. But now He says, "Of the exact day and exact hour, no one knows." The time period we know. It is immediately after, it says in verse 29, the Tribulation. The Tribulation is that period of time in which there's a rise of Antichrist in which there are events described in Revelation 6 to 18 as well as here. That time can be seen clearly. It is a time beginning with the Rapture of the church.

Then appears at the end of the Tribulation, immediately after, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. But how long from that sign of the Son of Man in heaven to the actual establishing of the Kingdom and judgment we don't know. No one knows. And there is an interval there. In the book of Daniel, it's at least a 75 day interval we see, but it might even be more than that. We don't really know because we don't know specifically to what Daniel refers. But there's a time period in there that is undefined. And somewhere in that time period after the Tribulation, Christ is going to come in full final glory and judgment. But the exact moment, the exact day is not known. And so the Lord says no one knows, not men or angels, at that point in His incarnation and humiliation, He Himself did not know because the Father had not revealed that to Him and He in His incarnation humility restricted His omniscience to that which the Father revealed to Him. And so, it is an unknown time.

Now that's very important, people. Jesus Christ's Second Coming will occur at an unknown time. We do not know when it will happen. It could happen in any generation. Before it happens there will be the Rapture of the church, there will be the time of Tribulation, there will be the rise of Antichrist, there will be all the signs, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then sometime following that, Jesus Christ will come.

But remember this. All of those things, from the Rapture of the church to the Second Coming, will happen very rapidly, won't they? The Tribulation itself is seven years and the Second Coming comes immediately after that. So in about a seven-year period, the end of human history will occur. And in the thirty-second to the thirty-fifth verse of this chapter, we read that the generation that is alive when the signs begin will be there when Jesus comes. In other words, it's going to happen so fast that it will happen all in one generation, in fact in one very brief period of time. Once it starts, it will be over very rapidly. It could come on this generation, for if the Rapture of the church were to occur immediately,

and it could, there's nothing that has to precede the Rapture, if it were to occur right now, then this generation would live through all of these signs to the Second Coming of Christ...provided they survived. A third of them will be massacred, a fourth of them will be massacred in another holocaust. Wars and so forth will slaughter others. The Antichrist will massacre all that he can. If a person lives to see the end, it will happen that fast that if they saw the start and survived the events, they'll be around to see the end. So it could come at any time on any generation.

Now what is to be our response to this sudden coming of Christ? What is to be our response to the end of the age? First of all, we saw in our last study alertness. Look at verse 37, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be, for as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

It's almost unbelievable that they knew not, that the people in the time of Noah didn't know it was going to rain because they had had somebody telling them that for 120 years. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. And he preached righteousness and judgment. And he gave them a very large sign of coming judgment by building a massive boat, an ark. Literally the word means "wooden chest." This was the symbol and the sign, a 120 years in building, that God was going to bring a devastation to drown the world. And it says until the flood came and engulfed them, they didn't realize it. They just went on eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage. In other words, they went on with the routines of life, literally ignoring the preaching of judgment, literally ignoring the sign and the symbol of the coming flood. And so it will be in the day of the Second Coming of Christ.

Hard to imagine the world in great measure will ignore the Rapture, they will ignore the abomination of desolation, they will ignore the holocaust of events that occur during the Tribulation time, they will ignore even the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, they will explain it away, they will rationalize it away. They will do something with it other than accept what it intends to purvey, what it intends to communicate, what it intends to say. And when Jesus comes they'll be shocked. Hard to imagine but such is the blindness of the human heart. Such is the darkness of the human mind. Listen, they couldn't even tell when God Himself walked in their midst...why should they be better able in that period to understand than they were when Jesus was here? When the truth is, all hell having broke loose on the earth in that age, sin will be worse than its ever been.

So, they'll not see the truth. Oh, there will be a great salvation. The Jews will be redeemed and there will be a great redemption among the Gentiles, as Revelation 7 says. But there will still be a massive worldwide populace of people who having lived through all of the unbelievable events which we've chronicled in chapter 24 will still find the Second Coming of Jesus Christ occurring to them in an unexpected way. It's unbelievable...in spite of all the signs.

"And then shall two be in the field and one taken and the other left. Two grinding at the mill, and one taken and the other left." The judgment will come and it will divide humanity. Those taken are taken in judgment. Those left are left to go into the Kingdom. The righteous will be left to go into the Kingdom. The wicked will be taken away into outer darkness and eternal judgment.

So, there's coming an event that the world is going to be warned about and warned about and, I mean, the warnings are unbelievable. First the Rapture, the rise of Antichrist, the abomination of desolation clearly defined in verse 15, all those events clearly chronicled for us here and in Revelation, every detail laid out for us. And in spite of all of that and the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, in verses 29, 30 and 31, even in spite of that, and the collecting together of the elect from all the earthy, they still don't see what's happening. They still don't understand. They still don't realize until like the time of Noah, finally, when the water was up to their chin and the door was shut, they began to be believers, but it was too late. There was no getting in.

So, what is the first response to the sudden and unexpectedness of the Second Coming? Verse 42, "Watch therefore." That's present imperative. Be constantly alert, "For you know not what hour your Lord does come." And He says to the generation that is alive at any time, "You don't know when all these things are going to happen, you don't know when the Lord's coming, is going to appear, you had better be watching. You better be analyzing the sign. As we noted last time in Matthew 16, He said to the Jews, "You're great at telling the weather but you haven't got any idea about the spiritual signs." Well, you better get some idea about the spiritual signs, you better be alert.

The first requirement is alertness. The second is readiness. Look at verse 43, and now we'll go on to what we didn't cover. But know this...or, I think this...it could be an imperative, it could be an indicative. I like to think it's an indicative. That is it states a fact. Comparing with verse 42, "You do not know what hour your Lord does come, but you do know this..." I mean, this is obvious. You do know this. "That if...and it's if with a condition in the Greek that is contrary to fact...if and he doesn't, but if he did, if the householder had known in what watch," that is in what three-hour period during the night, the Jews divided the night into four three-hour periods, from six p.m. to six a.m.; six to nine; nine to twelve; twelve to three; three to six. He says, "If a householder knew what hours in the middle of the night the thief would come, he would have watched and allowed his house...not allowed his house to be broken into." Literally the Greek word for breaking in is digging through. They would dig through the mud walls, or dig through the tile roof to get in and steal everything.

So, He says you don't know when the Lord's coming, but you do know this, if a man knew when a thief was coming, if he knew in general, not the minute or even the hour, but if he just knew the general watch, if he knew the general time frame, he sure would be ready for him when he got there, right? He sure would. And that's what He's saying. That you do know. Any fool knows that if a robber's coming and you know he's coming, you're going to be ready for him when he gets there. And

the Lord's coming is often likened to the coming of a thief. And it would be good at this point to say that it is not because it is a criminal coming. The likening of the Lord's coming to a thief which occurs here, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3, Revelation 16:5, Luke 12:35 to 40 which I'll show you in a moment, it also occurs in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and following. And those places where the Lord's coming is likened to a thief, it is not that Christ is like a thief, it is that Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly like a thief comes suddenly and unexpectedly. That's the only analogy. That's the only analogy.

There's one other footnote that I might add to it. When a thief comes, he takes everything you have and so will Christ when He comes and finds a man who's not ready for His coming. Everything that man has, He'll take, won't He? And it will all be burned up. So in that sense, too, we might see Christ like the thief who comes and takes everything that man has...which he puts his faith in, which cannot stand the test of judgment.

So, the Lord is coming unexpectedly. He is coming suddenly in a moment when no one is aware and no one realizes it. Now it's hard to imagine this because when you think about the Rapture and all these other events, everybody's going to be saying, "Boy, when is He going to get here? When's He going to get here? We can see it, it's all very clear, it's going to happen, it's going to happen."

But sin being what it is and so overwhelmingly blinding and the mystery of iniquity having reached its apex, and people explaining everything away the best they can and hostility toward God reaching a fever pitch, people are literally going to explain it away other ways. And even those people who may say, "Well, He might come, boy, this might be it," are going to find themselves sort of settling in to the fact that He's not coming. I don't know what happens...maybe after the sign in heaven things go back to some modicum of normality and everybody says, "Well, whatever it was must have been over," and they sort of settle back down just long enough to be unexpecting Him and that's exactly when He comes, I don't know. But I know they're not going to be ready when it happens...unless they prepared their hearts before the moment.

There are those people, you know, who would just like to watch the signs until the last one appears and then come in under the wire. No, verse 44 says, "Therefore be ye also ready." Not only alert, verse 42, but ready. "For in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man comes." And He says sort of the other side of the issue, "You don't know when He's coming and He's not coming when you think He is."

So, I don't know what happens after the Tribulation and after the sign of the Son of Man. I don't know what's going on in that time period, that little bit of a gap that we don't have much Scripture about. I don't know what happens but I know that somehow the world loses the sense that He's coming immediately. And when they least expect it, He will come in final fury, in final glory.

So, His point in the analogy is simple. If a man knew a thief was coming, he'd be ready. And if you know Jesus is coming, you better be ready. You better be ready. You know He's coming. If a man knew a thief was coming, he'd get ready for the thief. Jesus is telling you, "I'm coming...I'm coming."

I remember a preacher was preaching on the Second Coming. And he was one of those guys who believed that you shouldn't have any notes, you ought to preach strictly off your head. And he forgot his point. All he could remember was, "Behold, I come quickly...behold, I come quickly." And it should have jogged his mind so he said it about five times and nothing happened. The final time he thought, "If I hit the pulpit real hard and say, 'Behold, I come quickly,' maybe something will jar loose and I'll remember." Instead he knocked the pulpit over and fell in the lap of a lady in the first row. And he apologized. She said, "Why are you apologizing? You warned me eight times you were coming." See. She got the point.

And if He says He's coming and says He's coming and says He's coming, then you can believe He's coming. And only a fool who has all that information isn't ready, that's His point. If you knew what period of time He was coming, if you knew what the signs were, you could see that, then you would be ready for that if you weren't a fool.

Look at Luke 12 for just a moment and find the other passage where the Lord gives basically the same warning in a few different terms. And again the Lord very often taught the same lessons, using the same illustrations, or very closely related ones. As any good teacher knows, you repeat good things and you repeat good illustrations in different settings because they're helpful to people. And the Lord here in Luke chapter 12 is also concerned in warning people about His Second Coming. He says, "Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning, and you yourselves like men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks you may open unto him immediately." I mean, be ready so that when he comes back, everything is as it ought to be. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He comes shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, you shall...that He shall gird himself and make them to sit down to eat and will come forth and serve them."

Amazing. When the Lord comes back, if you've been faithful, He'll sit you down to eat and He'll serve you. That's the Kingdom. If you're prepared when He comes, you'll sit down with Him in His Kingdom and He will serve you. And if He should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch and find them so, then blessed are those servants because they're ready whenever He comes. They know He's coming. They don't know when it is but they're ready. "And this know, that if the owner of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not permitted his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also for the Son of Man comes at an hour when you think not."

Now you can go back to Matthew 24. It's the same idea. It's the same basic lesson. It's the same idea that He is given here that when He comes is a devastating judgment. When He comes is an immediate glory for the redeemed. So be ready. And since we don't know when it is, and no one knows when it is, and no one can know when it is, we need to be ready at all times...at all times. So alertness and readiness.

It's one thing to be alert and say, "Boy, I'll recognize the signs." It's something else to be ready and readiness speaks of salvation, of a prepared heart. There's a third thing that's called for. Not only alertness and readiness but faithfulness. Notice verse 45 through 51, faithfulness. And here again is a beautiful analogy, a story, a parable, if you will, which our Lord also uses in Luke 12 in another setting because it illustrates so very very clearly the point that He wants to make. It is a powerful powerful illustration.

Verse 45, "Who then is a faithful and *phronimos*, sensible, wise servant whom his lord has made ruler over his household to give them food in due season." Now what is He talking about? Well, it's a very, very interesting parable. The lord is like God, the servant is like every man and woman in the world. And everyone of us has been given a stewardship, everyone of us has been given a responsibility. It's as if the Lord has said, "All right, here, you manage life and breath and intellect and will and emotion and talent and truth and spiritual sensitivity and opportunity and privilege, all that I give you in creating you in My image, all that I give you in endowing your world with all the good things that I could possibly create, all that I give you in terms of opportunity to serve Me, you're responsible for."

Like a servant who is told to rule over the house, that is to manage all the goods and to make sure that he properly gives food to everybody in the right time and the right place. In other words, every person in the world, not just Christians, every single person in the world has been given a management test by God...life, breath, privilege, all those things are granted to us by God and they are a stewardship for which we are accountable. And hell will be populated not only by the devil and his angels, but by people who...who wasted that privilege, who embezzled God's substance, like the man did in Matthew 18 and was called in to give an account for how it is that he could have embezzled the king's money and stood there bankrupt. And he fell on his face and pleaded for mercy. Every man, woman in the world has been given a stewardship by God and if you embezzle God's goods and privileges and resources and opportunities, then you will be accountable to God for the wastefulness of your stewardship. And as I said, hell is going to be filled with people who used up God's opportunities for themselves, who abused their God-given privilege and who failed and refused to serve God in the way that He commands.

So, every human being on the face of the earth is being tested by God as to the stewardship of what they possess. And so, this householder does that with the servant. Verse 46 says, "Then blessed is the servant whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing." Now when the Lord comes and finds

servants doing what he wanted them to do, they're going to be blessed, aren't they? That indicates that they're believers. That indicates that they are the redeemed, they are obedient. Obedience is always the mark. Doing the will of God is always the mark of true salvation. So when the Lord comes, He'll find the true servant doing what He told them to do...fulfilling His will. Living up their...living out their stewardship to the fullest.

Verse 47, "Verily I say unto you that he shall make him," that is that servant obeying, "ruler over all his goods." That's marvelous. What that says is when the Lord comes back and finds His faithful servants, His trustworthy servants, His obedient servants, He is going to put them over everything He possesses. It's a marvelous thing.

You know what we're going to do in the millennial Kingdom and in eternity? We're going to sit with Christ on His throne, Revelation 3:21 says, as He is sitting with the Father on His throne and we're going to rule over everything He possesses. That's verse 47. Life is a stewardship. What you do with this little slice of time will determine whether or not you will rule in eternity in the throne of Christ or whether or not you will be dominated in hell by the demons and the devils for whom it was prepared.

So, when the Lord comes, He'll check the stewardship. And the one who is proven faithful will be rewarded with eternal ruling.

Verse 48, "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants and eat and drink with the drunkards, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him and in an hour that he is not aware of and shall cut him in half and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hmm, on the other hand, when the Lord comes, He's going to find some who weren't faithful. Some who not being faithful over little can't be made lord over much. Some whose lamps were not trimmed in the terms that we'll see in chapter 25. Some who didn't take their talent and use it but buried it and hoarded it. And they'll be cast into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The evil one, it says there, doesn't it? The evil servant kakos, evil in quality, evil in nature, says in his own heart, "My lord delays his coming, he won't be here for a while, I'm watching the signs."

And you know there's going to be people like that. They say, "Well, look, okay, I've got all this prophetic stuff laid out as I see the signs going along, I'll just wait till the last moment. And in the meantime I'm not going to use what I've got for others, I'm going to feed myself and if the others get in the way and try to take any of what I've got, I'll hit them, I'll smite them. And I'm going to have my fun and I'm going to eat and drink with the drunks. I'm going to be a good-time Charlie, I'm going to party it up. I'm going to grab all the gusto I can get. I'm going to live the worldly life style."

It's not that everybody who's unregenerate lives like that. NOt everybody who's unregenerate beats other people up or abuses other people to the degree that this servant did. Not everybody that's

unregenerate parties with drunkards. But he's an illustration of an unregenerate person. And that's why it says he will be given a portion with the hypocrites, verse 51. It doesn't seem to indicate here that he's much of a hypocrite. I mean, a hypocrite is somebody who pretends to be religious. This guy isn't pretending to be religious, not beating up people and living around...running around with drunks. But he'll go the same place that religious phonies go, which is to say that the category is broader than just this single illustration. It's for all the unregenerate.

By the way, Luke in paralleling this says he will be cut in half and appointed a portion with the unbelievers. So he's only one illustration of a whole lot of kinds of unbelievers, including not only those who live a drunken dissolute life style, but those who are religious hypocrites as well. So, he thinks he's got all kinds of time.

And there will be people who say, maybe some listening to me right now, you'll say, "Well, okay, I see. I want what I want. Okay, I'll watch for the Rapture. If I miss the Rapture, I'm in good shape. I know what's coming. I'll watch for the abomination of desolations, when I see that happen, I'm right on. I'm checking through my thing. And then I'm going to watch the unfolding of Revelation 6 to 18. Then when I see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, since I don't know just exactly what's going to happen after that, I'll try to stay sensitive and just before I think it's going to happen I'll just get in there and I'll just take Christ and I'll just make it. And in the meantime I'll have a great time."

Well, the lord of that servant is going to come in a day, verse 50 says, when you're not looking for him and an hour you're not even aware of. Don't try it. What makes you think if you won't give your heart to Jesus Christ now, you're going to want to do it in the future? Christ isn't going to change. He will be no more wonderful, no more glorious, He'll have no more power to save, no more power to change your life then than He does now. If you don't want it now, why would you want it then? If you don't want Jesus Christ now when sin is to some extent restrained...and it's hard to imagine, but it is...do you think you'll want Him more in a period when sin is unrestrained and your evil can run amuck to the degree that it's never in the history of man run amuck? The world will be worse than its ever been. You think you're gratified by your lusts now, there will be such lustful gratification in the Tribulation that it's indescribable. Why will you want Christ in the midst of that more than you want Him now?

And don't you fool yourself in thinking that you're able to read the signs. The Bible says nobody is able to do that. And Jesus is going to come when you don't think He's going to come...in an hour you're not even aware of. And there may have been a lot of folks in Noah's day who said, "Well, if the water gets up to my knees, I'll bang on the door." Too late...too late...too late.

And verse 51 says, this is a terrible thing, "When the master comes back and finds his unfaithful servant, he cuts him in half." The Greek verb is *dichotomeo*, dichotomize. It is used in Exodus 29:17 in the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament, of the sawing in half of an animal when an animal was offered in sacrifice and cut into two pieces. It's to illustrate the serious

devastating deadliness of the judgment of the Lord. When He comes back and finds this person who thought he could sow his wild oats and live it up and do whatever he wanted and slide in under the wire, it's going to be too late, He's going to come when he doesn't expect it and he's going to pay with a very severe price. The man's going to be cut in half, given a portion with all the rest of the unbelievers and hypocrites and spend the rest of eternity weeping and gnashing his teeth. And by the way, weeping and gnashing of teeth is mentioned five times at least in the book of Matthew, and each time is a way to describe the terrible unrelieved unconsolable pain of eternal hell.

So what is to be the right kind of preparation for an unexpected and sudden coming of Christ? Alertness, readiness, and faithfulness. We need to be watching for the signs. We need to get ready for His coming. And to do that we need to be faithful to His command and His Word and the stewardship He's given us. We're going to see more about this as we go into chapter 25 as we look at the virgins, some of whom were ready and some of whom were not...and as we look at the talents, some of which were wasted and some of which were used. And they will illustrate for us the same issue of being faithful, being ready, being alert in view of the coming of Christ.

Now listen carefully as we conclude. First Thessalonians 5 verse 2, I want to read this to you. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." That is to say suddenly and unexpectedly. It's emphasized again. "For when," verse 3, "they shall see, Peace and safety," just when men think everything is okay, just when they think they're going to make it and they're going to survive, then sudden destruction comes on them like travail on a woman with child. And there are those birth pains again. And they shall not escape.

So, there are going to be those people who say, "O peace and safety, it's all going to work out, everything is going to be fine." And suddenly the devastation and destruction is going to fall upon them. And some of those people who think they can survive the great Tribulation are going to find themselves facing God before Christ comes through death and devastation and disaster that occurs in that time period. And so Paul says, "You, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief, you are sons of light." That day is not going to overtake us. That day is not going to take us captive. We're not people in the darkness.

I don't believe we'll ever go into that Tribulation. I believe we'll be taken out. We're not children of the darkness. We're not sons of the darkness. We're sons of the day. We're children of light. And I believe the Lord takes us before that darkness breaks loose. I don't have any desire to go through that period. It's infinitely worse than any description in the Bible could conjure up in our imagination. There's no sense in having a silly preoccupation with wanting to see the Tribulation. We want to see Jesus Christ. Why would I want to be in an Antichrist rule when I could be in the presence of Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb And I believe that we're not the children of the darkness. The Lord will take us out because our hearts are ready. But for the rest of the world, they're going to say, "Oh, it will all work out, peace and safety." And then sudden destruction when they least expect it. I hope

you're ready.

William Barclay records the interesting story of three apprentice demons who came before Satan. And he sent them to the earth to do their apprenticeship. And the first apprentice demon said, "I will tell people there is no God." And Satan said it won't work, they know better. And the second apprentice demon said, "I will tell people there is no hell." And Satan said it won't work, they know better. And the third demon said, "I will tell people there is no hurry...there is no hurry." And Satan said you will gain many souls.

There is a hurry. There is a hurry. Listen to what Paul said. "Knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Today we're closer to the Second Coming than we have ever been in human history. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light."

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