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Matthew 24:45 - 24:51



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this message, Steve Gregg discusses the last few verses of Matthew 24, where Jesus speaks about his Second Coming. Jesus uses the illustration of a thief in the night to emphasize the importance of being ready and faithful. He warns that no one knows when the Second Coming will occur, so it is important to always be prepared by living a life of faith and obedience to God. Gregg encourages listeners to focus on their daily relationship with God rather than obsessing over signs of the end times. He also highlights the importance of being faithful in our responsibilities and privileges, as we will be held accountable upon Jesus' return.

Transcript

In this session, we're going to take the last few verses of Matthew 24, beginning at verse 45 through verse 51. Jesus said, But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Well, this is an interesting conclusion to this chapter.

You'll recall that Jesus, beginning in verse 35 of this chapter, was talking about events leading up to his second coming. This is in contrast to what he was saying before verse 35 of the chapter. Because in the verses before chapter 35, excuse me, before verse 35, Jesus was talking about the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

But as I pointed out, there are two separate discourses of Jesus that are combined here in Matthew 24. You find them in their separate contexts in Luke 21 and in Luke 17, respectively. And so, one of them is about 70 AD, and one is about the second coming of Christ.

This portion of Matthew 24 parallels more closely chapter 17 of Luke, and therefore seems to talk about the second coming of Christ. Now, Jesus has said about his second coming a number of things. First of all, he said no one knows what day that will be.

He said that in verse 36. Then he compared it with three things. He made three comparisons.

One of those is in the material we just read today. The first comparison is with the days of Noah. And the comparison he made was not with the moral conditions of the days of Noah, but rather with the cluelessness of the days of Noah, that these people were eating and drinking and doing normal things like getting married, and they were doing this all the way up until the day that they died.

They did not listen to Noah. When he warned them that the flood was coming, and they remained, therefore, oblivious and clueless, and they died suddenly without warning. That is the first illustration.

The second illustration he gives is that of a thief in the house. In verse 43, he says, But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. So here's another illustration of an unexpected occurrence.

Now, a man does not know any given day whether a thief will come to his house or not. And he would be wise to be prepared for a thief to come at any time. If a thief does come, he will not give advance warning.

A thief, when he comes, depends on the element of surprise. Because if the owner of the house is waiting for him, sitting with a shotgun across his lap, that thief is going to have a very unsuccessful burglary. And therefore, he counts on the element of surprise.

And what he is saying is that the second coming of Christ will be like, well, like the judgment of the flood. It came when people were unsuspecting. Or like a thief coming to a house.

Likewise, coming at a time when no one is expecting the thief to come. Or, in these verses we just read, verses 45 through 51, like a master who has left his servants in charge of his household, and he has gone away without announcing when he will return. Now, he expects these servants to be faithful in his absence, but the servants do not know when he will return.

And therefore, when he does return, it will catch them by surprise. Now, some of the servants will be faithful. Partly because that is their character, and they honor their master.

Perhaps partly because they know that the master might return at any time and catch them doing whatever it is they are doing. And therefore, they remain faithful and do what they are supposed to do. But some of the servants decide, well, you know, it has been a while since he has been gone.

I bet I can take my chances. I bet he is going to be gone for a while. And begin to misbehave and begin to do things they are not supposed to do.

Well, Jesus said that when he does come back, he will catch servants doing whatever they were going to be doing because they did not know when he was going to be back. Some of them he will find faithful. Some of them he will not.

And he will mete out rewards and punishments accordingly. So, Jesus has given us here, so far, three illustrations of his coming and catching people unprepared. The coming of the flood in the days of Noah caught people unprepared.

The coming of a thief to the house catches the owner, hopefully. I mean, as far as the thief hopes, the thief hopes he will catch the owner unprepared. And then the master who returns to his home after leaving things with his servants, he comes back and catches the servants unprepared.

He does not let them know in advance when he is coming so that he actually comes and finds out what it is they do in his absence. And all of these illustrations are making one point. And that one point is that the second coming of Jesus will be without warning.

It is amazing to me how many people out there think that they are seeing signs of the times, that they are seeing in the political situations and the geopolitics of the world and the moral conditions and so forth. They think they see evidence that Jesus is coming soon. But Jesus said his coming would be without warning.

It is not as if he is going to give a bunch of signs. You see, remember, in the first part of Matthew 24, Jesus gave a great number of signs. But these signs had to do with the coming of the Romans to destroy Jerusalem.

And Jesus told his disciples they would have fair warning about that. He said, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is nigh. And then you who are in Judea flee, run away, get out of there, because he says the Jerusalem destruction is at hand when you see these things.

He said when you see these things begin to come to pass, you know that it is near, even at the doors. And that is a good time for you to go out those doors before the judgment comes in. And therefore, when he was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, he said there would be many signs, many evidences, many warnings.

But now, when it comes to the end of the world, he says of that day and hour, no one knows. There is no know, even Jesus didn't know, even the angels didn't know. Only the Father knows, and he's not telling.

And when he does tell, it'll catch the whole world, including the believers, by surprise. Neither the believers nor the unbelievers will be anticipating his immediate return. Now,

there's a sense in which, of course, believers are always anticipating his return.

And that is the point he's making. If you knew that you were living in a neighborhood of thieves, and you didn't know if the thief would hit your house tonight or tomorrow night or next week or whatever night, you don't know whether he's coming or whether he's going to be at midnight or two in the morning or three in the morning, what would you do? Well, whatever you would do would be sort of a preparation that would be permanent. You would not, for example, say, well, I think the thief is coming tonight, so I'm just going to lose sleep, so I'm just going to sit up with my shotgun across my lap.

Well, you could do that, but what if this isn't the night? You can't sit up and you can't do that every night. You've got to sleep sometime. You would take some kind of permanent precaution.

You would make some kind of, you'd set in place some security system that would serve you whenever the event would occur so that you wouldn't have to lose sleep every night. The idea is, I mean, that's why people put alarm systems on their house and so forth. You don't know if your house is going to be hit by a thief tonight.

If you did, you'd just catch him. You'd just wait up and catch him. But the thief uses the element of surprise, and therefore, if you're going to secure your house against a thief, you do so in a way that is seamless, permanent, you know, around-the-clock preparation, whether that's an alarm system or strong bolts on the doors or whatever it is you use to secure your home against thieves.

You don't do it just one night thinking, well, this is the night. It's going to happen today. And then you make all your preparations for that night, and then when it doesn't happen, you just let your guard down.

No. Jesus said you've got to keep your guard up. You need to be ready at all times.

And what he is saying here is that when it comes to being ready for his second coming, then the only way you'll be ready is if you are doing at that moment what he has commanded you to do. If Jesus has commanded you to do something, you better hope that he'll find you doing it when he comes, because that's the only way you can be ready. Now, a lot of people think, you know, we need to preach about the soon coming of Jesus so that people will get ready.

Well, I don't think that's true. First of all, the Bible doesn't anywhere talk about the soon coming of Jesus. In fact, the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians said, beware if anyone tells you it's happening soon.

He said there's things that have to come sooner. There has to be a great falling away and the rise of the man of sin and so forth, he said. And therefore, Paul did not teach that the coming of the Lord would be necessarily soon, but he did teach, as Jesus did,

that we should always live in the way that whenever he came, he'd find us doing what would not embarrass us to be found doing.

Now, that's the point. See, when I've asked people, you know, sometimes people say, well, you know, we need to be aware of the signs of the times. I say, why? Why? What difference does it make? First of all, I don't believe there are any signs of the times in our age.

I don't believe that Jesus gave any signs of the end times, if we mean by that, the times of the end of the world. He gave signs of the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem for 70 AD, but he did not give any signs of any times later than that, of the end of the world or anything similar to that. So I don't believe in the signs of the times, but what if I did? What reason is there for me to be aware of them? What is the value in it? And when I've asked people that, they say, well, if we know that Jesus is coming soon, then we'll be motivated to live a holy life or we'll be motivated to evangelize or we'll be motivated to get rid of sin in our lives and so forth.

And I think, well, why do we need the signs of the times to motivate us to do that? That's like saying, oh, I think a thief's coming tonight. I guess I'll lose sleep tonight. And you can do that a few nights in a row, and eventually you just give up on it and go back to your old patterns.

Because the thief didn't come for three nights in a row. There is such a thing as the boy who cries wolf. And the church has often said, oh, Jesus is coming soon, Jesus is coming soon, Jesus is coming soon.

Sometimes people get alarmed. Oh, Wisenot gave 88 reasons why the rapture had to be in 1988. Harold Camping gave some reasons why the rapture had to come in, what year was it he said, 1997 or something around there.

He gave all kinds of reasons. People have often set dates, and they've, of course, always been wrong. And because of that, you have the church or people in the church crying wolf when there's no wolf.

And you know what happens in that story, the boy who cries wolf? Someday the wolf really comes, and he says, wolf, wolf, and no one believes it. Why should they? He lied so many times. Why should they believe him when he's telling the truth? When the church cries wolf again and again and again, it guarantees that no one will be paying attention when the wolf really comes, as it were.

When Jesus really is coming, no one will take it seriously because the church has so wrongly cried, here he comes, the bridegroom cometh, when he wasn't really coming. The church has much to be ashamed of in this respect. And frankly, if we say, well, how can the church avoid doing this in the future? Some might say, well, we just need to

study those signs of the times more carefully so we don't mistake them.

No, we need to stop looking for signs of the times and start telling people, you need to live for God every day. Not just when you think Jesus is coming back in the next week or month or year. You need to live for Jesus every day.

Because whenever he comes, you will not be embarrassed if you are living every day for him. If you are doing obediently the thing he wants you always to do, there will be no special preparation for you to make. And that is why I don't believe in looking for signs of the times.

Why should I? How would I live my life differently if I knew Jesus was coming today? Well, if I can answer that question, if there is something I do differently, I better start doing it and do that every day. There is no argument in favor of looking for signs of the times. If you are hoping for signs of the times to tell you whether it's time to get serious for God or not, then I'd say you're looking at the wrong motivations.

After all, the chances are not very great, if we look to probabilities, the chances are not very great that Jesus will come today. He could, and I don't want to make you think he can't, because he could. But the chances are not great that he will come today, tomorrow, or any other particular day.

You know why? Because ever since he left, there's been thousands and thousands and thousands of days, every one of those days he could have come but didn't. And because he didn't, that means that there's one chance in however many thousands of days have transpired since he left, that today might be the day instead of all the days before. And, you know, the chances are not real great that it'll be any particular day.

Of course, someday, against all odds, he will come. But there's not much chance, there's not a high probability that today will be the day as opposed to yesterday or tomorrow or the next day. There's nothing singling this day out as a special day that he might come.

However, there's a much higher chance that today might be the day I would die, because the days of my life are guaranteed to end at some point. You see, there is no guarantee that Jesus will come back in my lifetime. He may not come back in my children's or my grandchildren's lifetime in terms of the second coming, but there is a guarantee that I will die within my lifetime.

In fact, it will be the last thing that occurs in my lifetime. I will die. What's more, there's no guarantee that I'll live to be 70 or 80 or 90 years old, either.

Every day we read in the newspaper of people in their 20s and 30s and 40s who die of various unexpected causes. And, therefore, there's a very good chance that today could be the last day of my life. Now, truly, the chance is not real high, but it's a much greater chance that I will die today, if we consider the probabilities, than that Jesus will come

today.

And as far as my own eternal life is concerned, what's the difference? If I die today, I have to stand before God. If Jesus comes today, I have to stand before God. What's the difference? There's none.

In fact, I can't see why it would matter to me more whether Jesus came back or I died, because in either case, I am ushered into the presence of the judge of the universe, and he will pass judgment on my conduct. And that is what I have to be concerned about. I don't think the church has gained any credibility.

In fact, I think the church has lost credibility by again and again and again saying, look at these signs of the times. Jesus' coming is near. The church should have done what the Bible does.

The Bible nowhere says, hey, look, Jesus' coming is near, so get right with God. But the Bible does say, prepare to meet your God. Today you're going to die, or you're going to die someday.

Certainly, if the church had never said a word about the nearness of the coming of Christ, the church would have lost nothing by that silence, and all we would have lost is the embarrassment of being wrong. But if the church had always said, listen, sometime within your lifetime you will die, and if we preach that to every man, no one could ever say we missed the point on that. We've never missed the mark on that because everyone who's lived so far has died, except those who haven't died yet, and they will too.

We would be always telling the truth if we told people to prepare to die because that is going to happen, and that's guaranteed. It is appointed unto man once to die. And you know what? The fact that I might die today should provide me with the same amount of incentive to live holy for God and obedient and to evangelize and do all those things as if I believed Jesus was coming today.

But I have no reason given to me in Scripture to believe Jesus is coming particularly today. However, I need to live every day in such a way that if I die or if he comes back, I will not be embarrassed. And that's the point he makes in this parable of the servants.

He says, Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household to give them food in due season. That is, God commits his servants to the task of serving his other servants, giving them food or whatever. You see, we are called to be servants to one another.

The church is to be dishing out spiritual food to the world. That is the commission God has given his servants, okay? Now, the master goes away, and it says, Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. That is to say, when the

master comes back, if he finds the servant doing the thing that the master commissioned the servant to do, that servant will be blessed.

Assuredly, I say to you, he will make him ruler over all his goods. That is, if you're faithful in that which is least, you will be given more responsibility and more privilege when Jesus comes. If he finds you faithful.

If he finds you doing what you're supposed to do. But then Jesus gives a contrast. It could go another way for that servant.

Instead of being faithful, he might be unfaithful. He says, But if that evil servant says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat his fellow servants and eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come in a day when he's not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now here's a servant. He is a servant. He's a Christian.

He is one of the servants that Christ has appointed to give food to his fellow servants. That's what we have here. We have only one servant, hypothetically, in this illustration.

There's not two servants. There is, who is the faithful servant? His master has told him to give food in due season to his household. If that servant does it, when his master comes, he'll be blessed and be given authority.

But if that same servant decides to go a different way, and says, My master isn't coming very soon, I can get away with some stuff, and he goes about to get drunk and to be a glutton, and he beats his fellow servants or abuses them rather than blessing them, that servant, if he's doing that when his master comes, is going to be seriously punished, cut in two, Jesus said, and given his portion with the hypocrites. Well, what Jesus is saying is that his servants, Christians, can go either direction on this. They are to be faithful every moment of every day, and therefore they don't have to fear that Jesus will come back and find them unfaithful.

Believe me, Jesus cannot find you unfaithful when he comes if you are never unfaithful. But if you are unfaithful, he may indeed catch you in that. Now, some people think this servant's problem was that he didn't expect his master to come at any moment.

He says, My master delays his coming. Some people actually think that this somehow speaks of the person who suggests that the second coming of Christ is not likely to be today. Well, this person is not punished for questioning whether his master is coming that day or not.

He's punished for his behavior. The faithful servant might also not expect his master

back that day, but he won't be punished. It is not the question of whether he expected his master back that day.

After all, his master gave him no reason to expect him back that day. The problem is not that this servant thought the master might not come right away, but rather he used that assumption as an excuse to do the wrong thing and not to obey his master. He ate and drank with the drunkards, and he baited his fellow servants.

The punishment here is not do him because he said, My master delays his coming. This punishment came to him because of the way he used that assumption and went about to sin. Well, many people listening to my voice right now have been Christians, have been servants of Jesus in the past, but he didn't come as soon as they thought, and they've chosen to go back to the world.

They've chosen to eat and drink with the drunkard. They've chosen to abuse their privilege and have gone back to a life of sin. I'll tell you, if Jesus comes back and catches you like that, Jesus said you'll be given your portion with the hypocrites.

That's not a saved person. You may have been saved before, but Jesus said that servant who defects, if his master catches him, will be treated as if he was never a true Christian at all. He'll be given his portion with the hypocrites.

And you can read Matthew 23 to think of what God thinks about the hypocrites. The point here is like a thief coming or like a master returning to his servants or like the flood coming in the days of Noah, the actual second coming of Christ will be without warning. And we should be prepared for it at any moment.

We should live today the way we would live if we knew he was coming today, even though he might not. But he will come someday, and we will want to be found doing his will at that time. We might as well play it safe and follow Jesus every day.

You take your chances, otherwise.