10-22-23

Matthew 24:36-51

Last week, we considered the war taking place in Israel in conjunction with the first fourteen verses of this chapter. We thought about whether or not this might be the beginning of the end of history and the signal for the return of Jesus. Our conclusion was a resounding “maybe”.

One of our main points was to make sure that we are not deceived; lots of folks will come who will add to or take away from the Bible, claim to have special knowledge or revelation about the end of time, or completely falsify the commands God makes upon we His servants. There will be those who make false claims about being the Christ. When Jesus returns, it will be visible to all and very loud; there will be no mistaking who He is.

Along these lines we also mentioned verse 36; that no one knows the day or the hour of Christ’s return. Jesus was very plain in this statement; God is the only One who knows the end of time and, in His wisdom, He has chosen to not tell us. For us to delve into trying to figure out the timing of Christ’s return is sinful; God has told us that we don’t get to know, so seeking that information is going against God’s direct revelation. And we must not be fooled by anyone who claims to know. Furthermore, it is ridiculous quibbling to say that Jesus said “the day and the hour”, so we can still figure out the month or the year.

But along with the straight forward message for us in verse 36 is another revelation of how glorious our God is. This is another indication of what we call the “humiliation” of Jesus. It is foundational Christian doctrine that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. While we can’t comprehend that concept, we believe it to be true because that’s what the Bible tells us. “Humiliation” here is referring to all the ways in which Jesus laid aside all the glory due Him for being God and becoming a man. For our salvation, He became one of His creation. He endured the ignominy of the cross. And here we see that He did not know something that, as God, He would know.

God the Son, chose to do all these things even before creation. How much more we should praise Him and focus our lives on doing the things that are pleasing to Him.

Up to this point in the dissertation Jesus is giving the disciples about His return, He has mentioned many things that will take place that will make life very difficult. These are the wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, and other forms of tribulation. It makes us think that with all these things going on, that all of life would be completely disrupted. But that is not the case.

Jesus tells us that things will be going on as normal in spite of the hardships and chaos. This is another indication that we won’t know when Jesus will return. In the days of Noah, sin was rampant. You would think that it was a terrible time to live. Yet people were still living their lives; they were getting married, they were having supper, they were doing all the things people do.

And that is what is happening now. In spite of what has just happened in Israel, all of us here have ate and drank, maybe in a restaurant; some have traveled on vacation; probably most of us know someone who is getting married soon or has done so recently. This demonstrates an interesting aspect of the human condition. No matter the chaos, unless it is affecting us directly, we go about our daily lives. This also demonstrates how unknowable the timing of the return of Christ is.

For the Christian, the increasing violence and sin in the world remind us that the return of our Saviour is imminent. The normalness of the actions of people reminds us that we can’t know exactly when He will return. It is easy for us to see that these are like the days of Noah. In Genesis 6:11-12 we are told: *Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.* These are precisely the conditions set for Jesus’ return; and they are precisely the normal conditions for the human race.

When Jesus talks about those who are working when one is taken and the other is left, He is not saying that half the world’s population will be okay and the other half won’t. We know that the majority of the population will follow the wide path that leads to destruction. He is again demonstrating how life will be continuing as usual; people will still be going to work. But His return will be sudden; the consequences of accepting Christ as Saviour or not will take place in an instant.

When Jesus returns, there will be no more chances; those who have rejected Christ will not get a chance to change their mind. That is why it is so important now to make a conscious decision to accept Jesus as your Saviour; and to demonstrate that He is Lord of your life by your obedience to Him. When we stand before Him either upon our death or upon His return, it will be too late.

Jesus has given several signs in this chapter to look for that will indicate the time of His coming is near. For the most part, these things have been happening for a long time. Perhaps it is just the intensity and frequency that are escalating. He lets us know that even in the face of these things, life will be continuing in the world much the same as always. Then He gives an example of working people in order to let us know the suddenness of His return.

In the last verses of this chapter, Jesus gives a couple of parables to drive home the points that we should be watching and working. He repeats, that in spite of the signs and occurrences, we cannot know the time of His return; but we know absolutely that Jesus is coming back. We may not be alive here on earth when He does, but either way, we must live our lives in the same manner.

Anyone here who gained the knowledge that someone was going to break into your house at a specific time would take the steps to be prepared; whatever they may be. Jesus’ main point is that although we don’t know when, we know He is coming so we need to always be ready. But we have here another indication of God’s great wisdom.

If we knew exactly when Jesus was coming back, basic human nature would be to do as we wish until shortly before the time and then straighten up. It would be like staying up all night to do an assignment that you’ve had weeks to prepare the night before it’s due. It would be like lounging around at the office until you know the boss is coming and then getting busy. That might work with other people, but it wouldn’t work with Jesus. He won’t be fooled by our appearances of productivity. He looks at our heart and He’s looking for hearts that are faithful and true to Him.

Well, we don’t know when burglars are going to come, so we have to do what we can to always be ready: We lock our doors, we might install an alarm, we might have camaras, and we might arm ourselves. However we do it, we prepare ourselves because it might happen. Jesus coming back is a certainty; it will happen; we need to be ready. Jesus has gone to great lengths to warn us; we have no excuse for not being prepared to greet our glorious King and Saviour upon His return.

The beginning of verse 42 says something like “*be on the alert*”, or it may be translated simply “*watch*”. That we are to watch is the point of the parable about being ready for the thief; or to be ready for our Lord. The thing is that “watch” is not simply passive “keeping an eye out” for something. If we go forward a couple chapters in Matthew to the account of the Garden of Gethsemane, we see that Jesus took with Him His three closest friends and asked them to watch while He went and prayed.

He was not asking them to watch for someone coming; He was asking for their companionship. He was asking for the comfort of their attentive presence while He was in anguished prayer. We all know they fell asleep, but when Jesus came to them again He then asked them to watch and pray. The prayer was for strength to watch. Keep in mind that often times our spirits are willing but our flesh is weak; that is why we need to pray for strength so our flesh does not win out against our spirit.

Along with watching we are to be working and that is the point of the second parable regarding the faithful and evil slaves.

Let’s come to grip with the word “slave” here. The term “slave” is very distasteful to us and rightly so. It carries all the horrid history of the African slave trade; and today, the no-less horrible reality of human-trafficking. At the time of Christ, there were conditions of slavery that were equally horrible especially if the slave was a prisoner of war or a criminal. But there was at the same time a different class of slavery. These were people who actually had high level positions within their master’s business or household. They didn’t have much in the way of rights but they had a fair amount of freedom. They could do well for themselves and some became quite wealthy. They were almost what we would consider an employee.

While I don’t bring up any of this to justify slavery, it gives an indication of the kind of slavery Jesus was referring to. Notice that the master actually put them in charge of the house temporarily. In the New Testament, the idea often comes up about we as Christians being slaves of Jesus. This is something we choose to do when we accept Jesus as our Saviour. Keep in mind that we call Him Lord; this also means Master. We have chosen to submit our wills to His; our actions should be those that He commands. But as slaves of Christ, we could have no better Master; He will do all things with our best interest in view. And we are slaves because we were purchased. Jesus paid a tremendously high price for those who are His.

Unfortunately, if we are not slaves of Jesus, we are automatically slaves of satan. We may think we are operating of our own free will, but through sin we become slaves of captivity; prisoners of war. I think this is very similar to the account of Jesus telling the Jews in John 8, “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*.” The Jews responded, “*We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?*”

They could not see that at the very moment that they claimed to be free, they were under Roman occupation and control. They were slaves of Rome. It is the same with those who refuse to follow Christ; they claim freedom while unaware of the fact that satan is their master.

We are to be working because Jesus has given us something to do. In Ephesians 2:10 it says, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*” So while the idea of one slave being put in charge of others in the Master’s absence may point to church leadership, it still applies to everybody.

The faithful slave is not running around panicking and going without sleep in fear of his master’s return; he is simply doing the tasks that he is supposed to do. By doing these things, he will naturally be found at work when his master returns. It is the same for us. We are to be faithfully doing the good works God has planned for us each and every day. When He returns, we will be at work and not be ashamed at His coming.

The evil slave thinks his master won’t be back for a long time and then falls into the trap of thinking he won’t come at all. He forgets his assignments are temporary and it goes to his head. This is true human nature; this is the flesh; this is why we need to pray for strength so that the flesh doesn’t overcome the spirit.

Although the evil servant gets by with things for a while, his master will return and justice will be carried out. He will receive a severe beating and be locked up with others like him. The reference is obvious; the servant who is not faithful to his duties to Christ will spend an eternity in hell.

The question becomes “How can a servant of Jesus enter eternal punishment?” The answer is that this is a false servant. This is someone who claims Christianity without ever really accepting Jesus as Saviour with all that entails. Our faithfulness in the tasks Jesus gives us is an evidence of our true acceptance of Jesus. We understand that Jesus paid a tremendous price for us out of an unsurpassed love He has for us. In view of this, we also love Him and seek to do His will. Doing good to others; loving our neighbors; is how we demonstrate our love for Christ.

We don’t strive to get into heaven; Jesus has taken care of that. We strive to be faithful and sensible slaves. We hope to hear those words one day: “*Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master*.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Your word is clear. You are not simply leaving things on earth to run their course. You are involved in this world of Yours, and one day, You will return to claim Your rightful place as King of all. We Your servants look forward to that day and pray for the return of our Lord and Saviour.

In the meantime Lord, grant us strength to keep watch. May we always bear in mind that You are near and that You desire Your people to be faithfully waiting for You. Keep us ready to sing Your praises when You return in glory.

Help us Lord to be faithful to the work You have given us. May it simply be our desire to continually be engaged in loving others and sharing the good news of salvation. Lead us to intercede for others in prayer and guide those prayers for their greatest benefit.

Thank You Lord Jesus,

For it is in Your name we pray.

Amen