



Stay Awake and Be Ready

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 24:32-51

June 30, 2013

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Read 15-51 for context.

Intro:

Now remember how we are approaching this text and Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Jesus' heart was pastoral and caring for His disciples. His intent was not to confuse them. His intent was to give them exhortation that would be practical for them and prepare them for what was to come and to encourage them to faithfulness. His intent was not to sit down and hash out all the details of the future.

And here is where we sometimes get lost and confused and miss the point. Because in the details is where we get bogged down. Now I like to talk about the details and study eschatology as much as the next guy but we can't get bogged down there and not get the main point of the end times. What we can't forget is the Christ is coming back and He's coming bodily in power and glory and we better be ready. That's the point and that we are going to see is the emphasis of Jesus' teaching about His return. Staying awake and being ready is an absolute must for the follower of Christ.

So we are not going to get bogged down in the details or read things into the text that may not actually be there but we are going to look at Jesus' words and His answers to the disciples questions and we are going to look at them simply and then see what application we can make to our lives. Because just as His words of exhortation was to prepare His disciples in a practical way for what is to come, they are meant to do the same for us. So let's look at this passage today.

Now, also remember how Pastor Nick laid out this sermon for us last week.

Verses 3-14 is an overview of history

First Couplet

Verses 15-22 is instruction on the destruction of Jerusalem

Verses 23-31 is instruction on the second coming of Christ

Second Couplet

Verses 32-35 is a commentary on Jerusalem

Verses 36-44 is a commentary on His second coming

Verses 45-51 is what we need to do

-So let's look at the first lesson of the second couplet now as we look at...

1 - The Lesson of the Fig Tree---A Commentary on Jerusalem (32-35)

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:32–35, ESV)

-Keep in mind that in the disciple's minds they are asking one question that they think is interrelated in an earthly sense but Jesus is hearing two questions that are interrelated in typology but not simultaneous. The two questions are first, when will the temple be destroyed and second, when are you coming back? And we saw last week the instruction concerning both of the questions. And in verses 32-35, Jesus is giving a commentary on the destruction of Jerusalem.

-And He uses a fig tree once again as an illustration. Remember He used it in chapter 21 and cursed the fig tree for giving the appearance of bearing fruit but not actually doing that in reality. The fig tree had leaves but no fruit but fig trees don't grow leaves until the fruit is there so this fig tree was a hypocrite. And Jesus uses the fig tree leaves here once again to help get His point across. Why the fig tree? The fig tree was well known in Palestine and would be something that His disciples could understand--- Jesus wanted them to understand His answers. Most trees in Palestine were evergreen and would have leaves all the time even during winter but that was not the case with the fig tree. The fig trees shed their leaves and did not have any during winter so they would be very conspicuous compared to the other trees. But when the fig tree would produce leaves and bloom then you would know with certainty that summer is very near. Jesus tells the disciples this in verse 32 and then He makes His point in verse 33 concerning the fig tree analogy.

-He says "So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates." Ok, first things first. We can get very confused here with the English word he. If Jesus is giving commentary on the destruction of Jerusalem then why does He use the word "he" that would make us think that He is talking about Himself which would put us in the context of the second coming which would also make His statement about this generation not passing away before He came very hard to interpret. That was my first thought---how does this make sense. It makes sense by looking at the Greek usage of the word near. The Greek adverb for near is engys and in the Greek it gives no indication of gender and the subject of the verb is not specified. So the translation here could just as easily be the English word "it" instead of "he". And some translations of the Bible use it instead of he. And this would make sense in the context of a commentary on the destruction of Jerusalem---it would read "when you see all these things, you know that it (the destruction of Jerusalem is near), at the very gates. This also makes sense because we are going to see that Jesus' teaching on His second coming is that no one knows and we are not going to have signs that give us a way to

get out our crystal ball and calculate it. That has been done and made people look very foolish. Here, it seems, that Jesus is using the lesson of the fig tree to point to the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem. And He goes on to give us more information concerning the nearness because he states that...

-Truly I say to you, This generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Please see the heart of Jesus here for His disciples. He say "truly I say to you" and in that He is speaking from His heart with weight because He wants them to be prepared and His heart is for them. And in wanting them to be prepared He tells them that this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Now this passage is debated and debated with many, many interpretations and it can get real confusing real fast. And yes, the word generation can mean a race or kind of people and that could make sense. Considering the total destruction of Jerusalem, it could very well be a possibility that some could think that the Jews may not survive the siege. But I don't know if the disciples would have understood the depth of the destruction at this point--- maybe. But if we are in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem then this really becomes very understandable and simple. This generation would actually be the generation that existed at that time. What Jesus would be saying to them is that this generation will not die out before these things take place. A generation is sometimes defined by a span of 40 years and this time frame would fit knowing that the destruction of Jerusalem was 70 AD. And according to the early church's testimony, the apostle John lived past the destruction of 70 AD. So this would make sense.

-But what about all these things taking place. Well, what are all these things? Most commentators think it to be the things mentioned in the previous verses as the disciples could have seen. And think about it. The generation living at that time would have seen the signs before the destruction of Jerusalem. They saw false prophets and false Christs. They saw wars and rumors of wars and nation rise against nation. They experienced famines and earthquakes. They experienced tribulation and witnessed apostasy. So has every generation since then seen these things. So concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, these words make so much sense but they would be hard for the disciples to hear. They loved the temple and what it stood for so hearing of the imminence of its destruction and end would be hard. But what Jesus tells them next would give them the confidence and assurance of His teaching and would again reveal His pastoral heart for His disciples.

-“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Jesus is giving confidence to the disciples to place their faith in Him and His words. Heaven and earth as we know it is passing away waiting for the new creation and to be free from the bondage it is under. But Jesus words are eternal and they will never pass away. Again, this teaching would be hard for the disciples to grasp but it’s coming from Jesus and He wants them to know that they can believe it! Do they trust Christ and His word? Jesus is telling them that they can and He’s telling us that we can too---today. The Word of God is sure and steadfast. It is the ultimate authority and it is certain to be true and come to pass.

-“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” (Isaiah 46:8–11, ESV)

-Jesus words would have been a comfort for the disciples and it should be for us too. We belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken and we belong to a God who is eternal and in control and is faithful. Find comfort in that beloved and believe it!

-So Jesus gives the disciples some time limits as to when the destruction of Jerusalem is going to take place but then He changes His commentary to His second coming and there is no time constraints here---no one knows.

The Commentary on the Second Coming

-No One Knows (36)

- ““But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36, ESV)

-Jesus obviously changes the topic here with the words but concerning and transitions into a commentary on His second coming speaking of that day. And concerning that day, He says that no one knows when that day is. In the verses earlier concerning the destruction of Jerusalem there was some time limitations such as a generation will not pass away until this takes place. But here Jesus tells of the uncertainty of His second coming and we know that His word is divine and eternal so we can believe this. Jesus is not confused here. No one knows, not the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father only.

-Now you will say---wait a minute. Jesus is God and God knows everything so how can Jesus really not know. He is just exaggerating here. Remember our approach. We are going to take Jesus words for what He says and read nothing into the text. What does Jesus say---He doesn't know. Remember in the incarnation Jesus took the form of man and He is one person with 2 natures---100 % God but He is also 100% man. The theological term for this is the Hypostatic Union. Christ is one Person with two natures--a human nature and a Divine nature. The full attributes of deity and the full attributes of humanity were both preserved without mixture or confusion. Christ does not have one nature which is a mixture of divine and human. No, He is fully God and fully man--one Person with two natures. The human nature remains human with all the attributes of humanness and the Divine nature remains divine and possesses and maintains all the attributes of divinity. And we can't fully grasp that with our finite minds but this is the teaching of Scripture. The second person of the Godhead became a man (Ph 2) and in Him the fullness of deity dwells (Col 2:9).

-We sometimes forget that Jesus was human. Jesus learned about the world around Him just as other children would do. Scripture tells us that He grew and became strong (Luke 3:23). There were times when He was thirsty, hungry, and weary. He learned obedience but without sin Heb 5:8). These things show the humanity of Christ rather than His deity because God is never hungry, thirsty or tired. And on the other hand, Jesus was also fully God and as God, He had infinite knowledge but was submissive to the Father.

-So with this verse, I think we see Jesus referring to His human nature. Again we can't fully grasp this. There is a note in the ESV Study Bible that I want to read to you guys. It says, "How Jesus could have limited knowledge and yet know all things is difficult,

and much remains a mystery, for nobody else has ever been both God and man.” The point here in Jesus words is that no one knows. Jesus wants us to take His words to heart. He doesn’t want us to take out some crystal balls and a calendar and try to calculate the date. People have made fools of themselves doing this. Jesus is telling us that no one knows and His is going to illustrate that for us next.

-The Days of Noah (37-39)

-"For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:37–39, ESV)

-Here, Jesus likens His second coming to the days of Noah---what does He mean and what’s the point. Well, think about it. In the days of Noah the people did not heed the warnings given to them by the grace of God and judgment came unexpectedly as it was revealed that they were unaware. They had heard the warnings, laughed at Noah building the ark and went on with life tossing the warnings they had heard to the side.

-They went on eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage while ignoring God and His word. And beloved, it is the same today. There are some here who have consistently heard the gospel and the warnings of Scripture and still reject Christ and go on living life as normal and think nothing of it. Normal life, normal routines and being happy go lucky while suppressing the truth that they have heard and piling condemnation upon condemnation on their head.

-And in the days of Noah, there came a day when the rains started and the door of the ark was closed and it was too late. They were unaware (ignoring the warnings and placing no weight on God’s word) until the flood came and swept them all away and then it was too late. I imagine they were clawing at the door of the ark trying to get in but could not. They had ignored the warnings and they drown in judgment probably with fingernails full of wood.

-This is the way it will be with the coming of the Son of Man. This is the way it will be with some here today unless you heed the gospel warning and repent and believe on Christ to save you from your sin. But if you continue to reject the gospel and you do not know Christ intimately, then when Christ appears suddenly, just like the flood, it will be too late for you and you will be swept away in judgment. We may not know when that day will be but one thing Scripture is certain about---that day is coming and on that day there will be a distinction made between people and there will be separation. We see that next.

-The Distinction and Separation (40-41)

-"Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left." (Matthew 24:40–41, ESV)

-Don't get caught up here trying to figure out which is taken---the wicked or the righteous and whether the one taken is taken to be with the Lord or taken to judgment--that's not the point. The point is that there is a distinction made between people. There is a separation that is going to occur on that day.

-And what we see is that ultimately there are 2 groups or 2 categories of people. Those that will be with the Lord and enjoy His presence and experience His grace and those who will experience His judgment with no mercy. That is the only 2 options on that day and everyone here today is in one of those two groups.

-Points to consider here:

1 – There is no distinction made here in what they were doing. They were working in the field alongside of each other and together. That didn't make a difference. They were working at the grinding mill alongside of each other and together but were still separated. It doesn't make a difference what we do! Our jobs, power, status, deeds etc. will not make a difference on that day. Even church work should be considered here. There will be a separation in the church as two may be about the business of the church---read Matthew 7:21-23.

2 – There is no distinction made here in their association with each other. Just because they knew each other, or worked with one another didn't make a difference in the distinction. And for us, it doesn't matter who we know, or if our spouses are saved or if my parents are saved---that's not going to help you in the day of judgment. There will be no riding coattails into heaven. Your important associations with others will be of no help to you on that day. You must believe in Jesus! You must be ready!

3 – Boil this down and you come to this. No pairs will be judged together on that day but only individuals. On judgment day, each and every one of us will stand before Christ and give an account and we will do that alone and individually. We won't be able to point at someone else and blame them and say it's their fault. It will be us and God and that's it. Are you ready for that? Jesus is emphasizing that we better be. Look at what He tells us next.

-Staying Awake and Being Ready is a Must! (42-44)

-"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:42–44, ESV)

-Ok, we know that the timing of Christ's second coming is unknown to us. We don't know the day. Only the Father knows. But Jesus tells us to stay awake or keep watch and He also tells us that we MUST be ready. He gives us a parable here to help us understand what keeping watch means. It's easy to understand. Scripture likens Jesus' second coming to a thief coming in the night in several places because we can understand that. Think about it. If you knew that someone was going to try and break into your house and you knew at what time someone was going to break into your house, you would be home and you would stay awake and not go to sleep so that you could prevent your house from being broken into. Some of you would probably have an army tank parked out front and have many barrels, and you know what I mean, pointed at the front door loaded for bear. We would not allow it because we would be ready.

-That's Jesus point---we should be awake and ready for His return. If we would watch like this for temporal things that a thief would seek to steal shouldn't we be diligent and even more concerned to watch for eternal things. But here is the reality of watching. If the timing of something is certain then it's not hard to keep watch is it---sometimes it even consumes us.

-Share story of daddy leaving me at home by myself with butcher knife.

-And if the timing of something is uncertain to us, we may start off keeping watch but that watch can wane and be put on the back shelf.

-Tell story of 911 and about the colored terrorism alert system. Right after 911 we may have paid attention to the system because our interest was at peak but the farther we have moved away from 911, our watch has become minimal. How many of you check the system to see if we should be watching today to be on alert for some terrorists activity. How many times, if any, have we changed our plans because of it. When uncertainty exists, time moving on minimizes our watch.

-But Jesus is telling us that with His coming that can't be the case. So what does watching mean---what does staying awake and being ready mean. Let me try to explain with another illustration that falls short but we can get the idea.

-Based on testimony of people that have had loved ones kidnapped or abducted and years have passed have said things like this. For days and weeks or even months they were consumed with watching and waiting for the appearing of their loved one. Then time would pass, years even, and their watchfulness did wane but in the back of their mind and in their heart there was always hope of their loved one's appearing. And life moves on but there is always an awareness and a watch, a look out the window or down the road, hoping and watching for their loved one even in the midst of everyday life.

-This is how it is to be with the followers of Christ and looking for Him to appear. We stay awake, and keep watch and we are ready even in the midst of everyday life. Ok, it's easy for us to say that but what does that really look like in a practical way so that we can do this.

How do we do that?

-Jesus tells us to stay awake, keep watch and be ready. And we have to do this in days that are similar to the days of Noah. Think about the context in which we live. We as Christians, the church, live in normal life with jobs and things to do. Little Johnnie has a ball game, Susie has piano lessons, we have meetings at work, grocery shopping, school activities and on and on. We live in normal day's activities and routines but yet, as Christians, we are called to do this with an awareness of Jesus coming again unlike the people who were unaware in the days of Noah. So how do we do this? Jesus gives us the answer---He tells us what to do and then what not to do. Let's look at what not to do first.

-And we as Christians

What not to do (48-51)

**-“But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
(Matthew 24:48–51, ESV)**

-Jesus says if that wicked servant says to himself---we should stop right here and take note of this. If left to ourselves, we can talk ourselves into a frenzy, panic or we can justify just about anything we want so that we feel ok about it. Don't listen to yourselves! Preach to yourselves! But this servant told himself that his master was delayed and gave himself a false sense of security and had no urgency. He probably thought to himself, I will take care of that religious duty at the eleventh hour but right now I'm going to have fun. A lot of people do this. Think about the foolishness of this. We don't know when Christ is coming back and yet we can tell ourselves that it's not time soon so have fun---enjoy life. And many of the people who say they are going to put this off until the 11th hour---they die at 10:30 and it's too late---it's too late!

-Jesus says that the wicked servant begins to beat his fellow servants. He begins to mistreat others, take advantage of them, exploit them. And we would say that we would never do that but does that stop us from talking about someone, wishing harm upon them, regretting the blessings they receive, hope the worst for them, giving them the cold shoulder or acting in pride and putting yourself above them. There are many ways to mistreat someone and justify yourself in doing it.

-Jesus says that the wicked servant eats and drinks with drunkards. This is pretty understandable. This speaks of carousing or loose living. It's ok, my master is delayed, no one will ever know. It's just this one time. Let's just eat drink and be merry.

-What's the result of this kind of living which is unaware of the urgency of the coming of Christ? Jesus says He will come back and cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. This servant will be no better off than the hypocritical Pharisees that Jesus just pronounced woes on in Chapter 23. His deeds of service or appearance will not matter nor will it make up for his negligence to stay awake and be ready or make up for his lack of intimate knowledge of Christ. He will hear the words, "Depart from me you worker of lawlessness---I do not know you!" Remember, there are only 2 categories of people. How many here today are in this group? How about you personally? Are you in this group?

-But Jesus also tells us what to do.

What to do (45-47)

-“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.” (Matthew 24:45–47, ESV)

-Remember the extremes of watching that we looked at. We can be paralyzed or consumed by it. This is not where we are to sit quietly and do nothing but look through our telescope while we twiddle our thumbs. It's also not where we just go about life with no hope for his appearing. So how do we watch and stay awake and be ready for Jesus's return?

-We just live a faithful, obedient life in the midst of everyday activities and routines. We live a normal life of obedience to Christ trusting in His promises of which His coming is one of them. And we eagerly await His glorious appearing while we do it. Why do I say just live a faithful obedient life is the way to do it. Look at what the master sees as faithful and wise!

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?” (Matthew 24:45, ESV)

-The master has given the servant a command and he is faithful and wise to do it. What was it? To go and do some amazing thing that is public and become famous? No. What is it? It is simply to provide a meal at the right time. The master was pleased with obedience even in the smallest thing as providing a meal. So you mean we can faithfully stay awake and be ready by just being faithful in my daily life and roles and by doing everything as unto the Lord. YES!! Be a faithful husband or wife, be a faithful parent, be a faithful employee or employer and serve the Lord and live an obedient life that is worthy of the gospel that He has called you too. Make wise

decisions that are molded and shaped by the principles of His word. Trust in His promises knowing that He is faithful and powerful and that they will come true. Honor Him in everything that you do and love and abide in Him so that your desire to see Him face to face will grow. And when we love Him and desire to be with Him and see Him face to face, we will stay awake and we will be ready for that day with no reason to shrink back at His appearing. Jesus doesn't want us to try and calculate His return but He simply wants us to live a holy life (Heb 12:14). Holiness is the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ.

-Trust me, no one will want to write a book about you as a Christian because you live a normal Christian life. No one is going to want to do a movie about us for living unto the Lord in normal practical ways. But when Christ appears and we stand before Him to give account, He will care about it and the basis of His judgment will be what we did with Him and His word while living in the midst of the days of Noah. And the way to live a life for the future is to live a faithful, holy life in the present here and now while hoping in and eagerly waiting for Jesus' return.

-Hebrews 9:27 says this:

-"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:27–28, ESV)

-And what's the result for the faithful and wise servant who Jesus finds in his faithfulness? Blessing---the face of God shining upon you. Sweet communion with our Lord and to hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master." And the reward is that we get Christ Himself to behold His glory forever. We get Christ! Be encouraged beloved!

Questions to Consider: same as last week.

1 – Are you eagerly awaiting the blessed, glorious appearing of Christ? That's who He is coming for.

2 – Which group are you in---there's only 2. Those who will be with the Lord forever and those who will be cast out of His presence. Are you faithful or just playing a game?

3 - What words will you hear? Well done good and faithful servant?

Depart from me cause I never knew you?

4 – Are you ready? What if it were today?

Pray

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