

Watch and Be Ready

Matt. 24:40-51

So we want to see that Jesus is bringing His sermon home at this point. Bringing your sermon home is an expression that means that you are making a practical application of your point so that it can promote immediate and beneficial change in the lives of those who hear and respond in a positive way. Jesus' 3 indicators of the end start and consummate the time when the prophetic clock is ticking. During that time the fulfillment of these signs will be apparent and obvious to the Biblically literate and spiritually alert. Before the clock starts, no one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, only the Father. So Jesus here returns to describing the unexpectedness of His coming. These are words for believers across the millennia during which we have been waiting. The prophetic clock has not yet started and yet there is an event, a coming of Christ, that needs no trigger. The triggers that start the clock, Jesus implies, must coincide with or follow this unpredictable "coming" in which two are in a field and one is taken and the other left, two are grinding and one is taken and the other left, and in Luke, two are in bed and one is taken and the other left. The lesson that we must learn is to be among those who watch as opposed to those who do not.

A few observations can be offered. Notice that the two in each scenario are engaged in normal and routine activity. Men working in the field, women grinding meal, and a couple in bed at night represent life as we all must live it. Most of life is a kind of routine of daily tasks that all humans share even if the specifics of our tasks may differ. So Jesus did not compare a man at work and a man at prayer and describe one being taken and the other left. He did not describe an act of sin in contrast with an act of devotion with the result that one was taken and the other left. He did not give advantage to either gender in this description of the Lord's coming. Instead, you have people who appear to be alike for they are engaged in shared activities who, it turns out, are not alike at all when it comes to what counts the most for one is taken and the other is left.

Watching then does not require a break from the normal rhythm of life but can be carried out within that rhythm.

Another point of interest is that Luke has men and women working, one taken and the other left but then he adds the couple who are in bed. At the time that Jesus spoke these words His listeners may have wondered why the couple was still in bed when the others were already industriously working. And, the lazy couple still in bed would have seemed to be at a disadvantage in terms of meeting their human responsibilities. But from the perspective of modern experience in the context of the Lord's coming a couple in bed when others are up and working suggests the immediacy of His coming. As Jesus said, "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." It is natural for us now to understand that because of the time zones created by our revolving earth, when we are at work, the people on the opposite side of our planet are asleep in their beds.

The lesson of the couples where one is taken and the other left is that we are to watch, "for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." Jesus then added the illustration of the thief who comes to rob a house. If the owner of the house had known that the thief was coming then he would have been waiting for him so that he could turn him away. "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Jesus then answered the question that we have to be asking at this point, What does it mean to watch for a coming that will occur without warning? and, how are we to go about making sure that we are ready? Jesus answered these questions with a story. It is the story of a wise and faithful servant who is quite different than another servant who is wicked and faithless.

The faithful and wise servant was left in charge of his master's estate while he was away. Even though he did not know the day or hour of his master's return he continued to run the household no differently than he had when his master was home. For him, it would not matter when his master returned because there were not going to be any surprises. The consistent discipline of his life was how

he watched and constant diligence he practiced in the running of the household was how he stayed ready for his master's return.

In contrast, the wicked and faithless servant considered his master's departure to be an opportunity to relax and to enjoy his position over all that belonged to his master. He was certain that his master's journey would take a substantial amount of time and so there was no reason (in his mind) to be uptight about getting all the work done. It could just as easily be taken care of tomorrow. So, he threw parties and if any of the employees complained about how he was running things he had them beaten up to shut them up. But after a period of time there is no doubt that the irresponsibility of this manager would have been obvious to any casual observer. The property would soon have shown the neglect and the abuse that he was putting it through. Employees who had an opportunity to leave and move on would do so and their replacements would adapt quickly to the low expectations and slovenly habits of their manager. If the manager were to ever wake up to the awareness that his master was bound to come home soon then it would have been too late. Once the discipline and accountability had broken down, there would have been nothing he could do to fix it. And, he would never had been in a mind to even try. The wicked servant ultimately would resign himself to his fate. He would party for as long as he was able. He would run the property and estate into the ground. He would ruin everything he touched. He would still be there when his master did return because it would always be easier to stay than leave until it was too late. Then, his tragic demise would serve as a lesson to all who might be tempted to walk in his shoes.

But if you think about the wise and faithful servant, there was more behind his discipline than just an expectation of his master's soon return. For a period of time there was room for some relaxation of the standards kept when the master was present. There logically would have been time to make up for some oversights. But the wise servant never entertained such thoughts. Why not? I suggest that he did not even consider such ideas because he loved the work. He did not think of his master's estate as that which was not his but instead it was his. It was his to run and it was his to make productive and it was his to grow. He loved the challenge. He was thrilled to have the opportunity. He watched for his

master's return by being fully engaged in the work his master left for him to do. He was ready because he applied himself everyday to the tasks that were too many to number. Every day he woke up to a challenge that consumed his mind and imagination. Being ready did not mean the property was in a perfect condition. It did mean that he was fully engaged in doing all that was possible to improve it.

Life is often complicated for us. We have seemingly conflicting obligations at time. If you are a pastor, do you put the church first or do you put your family first? If you are a lay person it can just be even more complicated, what is the priority, career? family? or church? How are we to express our devotion to God in a practical way? Will we have a sense of being divided rather than integrated at times? Jesus will not return to find you perfect. He will return, we hope, to find you doing your best.