

# Are you ready?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 24, 36. So will be the coming of the Son of Man.

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. Therefore stay awake, for you do not know 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. 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 doing so when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, My master is delayed and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with the 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.

[ 1 : 48 ] In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.

But at midnight there was a cry, Here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

But the wise answered, saying, Since there will be not enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves. And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

[ 2 : 59 ] That's the word of the Lord. Well, good morning, everyone. Good morning. Warm welcome to you if you're visiting this morning.

Very welcome. Hope you stick around for a cuppa after the service so we can get to know you better. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Father, we need all of your word to know you properly and to know what you ask of us.

So I pray that you give us hearts that are trusting that we need your word to us this morning. I pray that, as always, you would give us your spirit to understand what you are saying and to believe and to cherish you more and to obey you more.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there's many important things I haven't felt ready for. This sermon's one. Ooh, hello. This sermon is one of them. I didn't feel ready to become a dad. And I was right.

[ 4 : 18 ] But God gives us grace, doesn't he? I never feel ready for those difficult conversations with people.

I'm sure you can empathize. I question my suitability for church work. Am I really ready for that? No doubt you HSC students could do with another week or month to feel ready.

But again, God will give you grace. But I am ready for Christ to come back. Not because of me, but I am ready.

That's the most important thing. And there's so much peace in that. And I pray that you too might be able to confidently, not confident in yourself, but confidently share that same feeling of being ready. Knowing you're ready. Where we're up to is Jesus' private instruction to his disciples, where he's telling them about the end of history.

[ 5 : 30 ] We saw last week that it's going to be characterized by a lot of distress, a lot of hard things. Life is going to be struggle. But we can interpret them like a woman going into labor can interpret them in hope.

Knowing that joy is just around the corner. We saw that Jesus gives us a proper balance when we're expecting his return. Not to be too quick when people say it's so, so close when they're reading political events and things.

But also this pulsating hope that he is at the very gates. He is so near. Because these signs are happening. They have been happening for many generations now.

He could come back in my lifetime. It could progress very quickly. And so we're picking up where Jesus is answering the disciples' questions of when. So verse 36, concerning that day and hour when he comes and no one will have to tell you he's come.

We're all going to see it like lightning in the sky. It'll be obvious. No one knows that day and hour. Not even the angels of heaven, nor the sun, but the Father only.

[ 6 : 47 ] So don't go claiming you've found evidence in scripture that you know. I don't know why Christians do it.

It's claiming you've had a dream or a vision or a prophecy. No angel can tell you that. As one person put it, it's almost blasphemy to claim that.

The sun doesn't even know. Only the Father knows the day or hour.

I don't think that's meant to be encouraging us to work out the week or month or year. The day or hour is emphasizing the suddenness of it.

It could be this hour, this day. It's calling us like Mad-Eye Moody in Harry Potter.

[ 7 : 47 ] Constant vigilance. That's the point of this passage, of knowing this. But notice the Father knows. He's not going to be reactionary.

He does know the time he has set, the moment. He's not going to be rushed. He knows when the sin of the world has reached its full and enough is enough.

He knows when each of the people Christ has died for has come into the fold and that's enough. He knows. There is a time. But how is it that the son doesn't know?

I can't just skip over that, can I? It's the burning question in all of our minds. Isn't he fully God? We need to let scripture help us understand how Jesus being fully divine and fully human works.

And there's obviously much mystery in the incarnation. If we can, one helpful thing I've come across is if we look at Gospel of John.

[ 8 : 59 ] The Gospel of John, out of all the four gospels, emphasizes Jesus' deity. Like, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

But it's the Gospel of John that emphasizes his dependence on the Father. Every single word he speaks is what the Father has given him.

Not one miracle, not one work apart from what the Father tells him to do. So in that one gospel you've got his deity and his dependence on the Father.

Whether he knows now that he has returned to the Father's right hand, I don't think we're told. At least in his earthly ministry, he did not know.

How that works, I'm not claiming that has satisfied your question. All I'm saying is let's let scripture tell us how this works. He's dependent on the Father. He's not bothered by not knowing.

[ 10 : 04 ] He just leans in to what his Father has called him to do. I think his not knowing also means that what he's saying here to his disciples means he's not manipulating us.

He's not saying, I could come at any time. But I actually know it's, I don't know, he knows the precise. He's not. There's an integrity here.

He's preparing us for how to live well. So what does he tell us?

What do we know? Well, he says, he compares the days to Noah. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.

I'm going to give you a sign of Jesus coming back. Okay, I'm going to do what I just said not to do. Next time the toaster pops up and it startles you a bit, that could be a sign Jesus is coming back.

[11:08] Because they were having brekkie when Noah, when the flood came in Noah's time. They're eating and drinking. Life is very ordinary. Apart from that wacko over there who no one took seriously, no one expected the flood.

It was just ordinary. They're selling things. They're buying things. They're going on holidays. They're getting a promotion. They're getting made redundant.

They're having a baby. They're attending a funeral. They're refinancing their house. And then the flood came.

And it was too late. Those who weren't ready were swept away in judgment. So will be the coming of the Son of Man.

One of the things that I find, it's just so hard to believe in Jesus' second coming because life is ordinary. It doesn't feel like it could happen any moment.

[12:14] But he says it'll be like that. Today's jobs feel the same as last week.

Two men are in the field. Maybe a father and a son. Two women are grinding wheat into flour. Just getting on with life.

Two workers are in the office. Two mums are on a play date. Two friends are walking by Lake Macquarie and one taken and the other left.

It's going to be sudden is what he's saying. Very ordinary and very sudden. And so he urges us, stay awake.

You do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Be spiritually alert. Don't let the ordinary just lull you into, I don't know, complacency.

[13:27] Don't let it be all you see. I've got these jobs to do today. We need to be spiritually minded. Do you lock your doors at night when you go to bed?

I do. I go around and check every door. I don't know. Anyone not? Now, why don't we do it on the 12th of every month?

Why do we do it every night? Well, it's pretty obvious, isn't it? We have no idea when someone might want to just walk in. Two doors down, someone tried to steal our neighbour's car.

Got the car keys, but I don't know, something happened and they got thwarted. But my brother had an intruder and the family was asleep. He was in his study and just came out and noticed things weren't quite right.

You just don't know. That's why we lock the doors at night. If you want to be ready for the thief, you've got to always be ready. It's the simple point.

[14:45] It's a simple point. You must always be ready. If you're unsure of where you stand with God, it is really, really unwise to keep saying, one day, one day.

It's very unwise. You don't even do that with your physical belongings. You lock the door every night. Why are you doing that with your soul?

Don't keep pushing it. Down the line. Some people say they're not afraid of death or judgment.

I don't know why. If you're not afraid of God's judgment because you think you're a good person.

I heard this illustration. I'll test it on you. Imagine you had this invisible tape recorder hanging around your neck. And it only turned on when you started a sentence like, people ought to...

[15:53] I don't know. Put their rubbish out. I don't know. People ought to be on time. People... I hate it when someone...

I would never... People should... If the recorder just picked up your moral rules...

And let's say God replayed that tape recorder. Like, he takes it off your neck when you face him in judgment. Oh, I didn't know that was there. It's an invisible tape recorder. And God just plays it back.

Your own moral rules. How would you go? You want...

I'm stuttering here. No one would measure up. I would not measure up to my own rules. Let alone the Ten Commandments. You must be ready.

[16:53] Jesus said. You don't know the day or hour. So the question is, what does it look like to be ready? What does it look like to be following Jesus?

Have a real relationship with Jesus and be ready? We're given four parables until the end of chapter 25. We're just going to cover the first two today.

These parables are spoken to his disciples. And the consequences at the end of each of these is an eternal difference. This is not about different rewards for Christians.

This is eternal. It's pictures of life or death. Jesus seems to be presuming that the visible church in the world, people who profess Christianity, that some prove that they have no spiritual reality, only external appearance.

But he's telling us these things for his people who do have spiritual reality, to know they're ready and how we are to live, waiting for his return.

[ 18 : 09 ] Some show that they don't know Jesus because they fail to be ready. Others are always ready. That's the picture we've got here in these four parables.

It's calling for self-examination. Please don't be sitting here today going, I really wish that person heard this sermon. This is a self-examination section of scripture.

So what does it look like to be ready? Well, the first picture we have is servants to a master. It looks like a faithful servant to their master.

Verses 45 to 51. Now, I think this section especially speaks to elders and those in recognised spiritual leadership.

I think there is... Not everyone should presume to be teachers. There is a greater judgement. So please pray for us. Pray for your elders because we can do the church good or a lot of harm.

[ 19 : 17 ] But I also don't see why the principles here doesn't also speak to all believers when you're given responsibility over other believers.

Even if that responsibility is for a brief time and a brief opportunity. So fathers and mothers, your spiritual oversight of your children. Grace Kids teachers coming into term four next term, next week. A brother or sister who comes to you for counsel. They're opening themselves up to your input in that moment. Leading the church in whatever activity, in small group, in prayer.

So I think it also applies to any responsibility, any task being given from our master to serve our fellow servants.

If we compare the faithful servant to the wicked servant, I think we see four characteristics of the difference. One is being conscious of being a fellow servant.

[ 20 : 29 ] The one put in charge in that moment isn't comparing themselves going, I'm superior.

They're faithful to their master. They're just getting on with the job for his sake. Whereas the wicked servant has forgotten and he starts to beat his fellow servants.

He's forgotten. He is a fellow servant. The second characteristic is conscious of his master's return. The wise servant is conscious he will give an account to his master. The wicked servant presumes his master's absence.

I assume that means they're just focused on the present situation. They're just forgetting the fact that they need to give an account. The third characteristic is this leads to their treatment of fellow servants.

[ 21 : 42 ] One uses each opportunity to care for the fellow servant, are careful with the words and whatever deeds of love and decisions will build up.

I think of the wisdom of a man in church where this younger Christian got up to pray and his theology was shocking.

He was like, thank you, Father, for dying for me and calling the Holy Spirit it. He was just so nervous. He was just fumbling his way through it.

An older saint came up to him and he was pretty nervous at what he was about to say and he just put his hand on his shoulder and said, whatever you do for the Lord, I'm with you 100%.

What a wise serving word to give him in that moment. He didn't come down heavy.

[ 22 : 39 ] He knew what he needed. There's a servant-hearted nature to the wise servant. But then the wicked servant is harsh with those under their authority.

I just wonder what will Jesus say to the church leader who uses the church's programs and their goals and some have even called it like a bus.

We're on this bus as a church and if you don't get on board, we're going to run you over. Like, we're just keeping going. What is Jesus going to say about that?

What of the Father who is modelling coming to church every week but in private at home, he is the law of God. Tremble. What's your master going to say to that?

What? What? Now, obviously, I can add heaps here. The royal commission's into the church and there's harsh treatment among leaders even.

[ 24 : 00 ] The wicked servant forgets he's accountable and starts to be harsh. Now, we all need forgiveness at points. We all need forgiveness.

This seems to characterise the servant over a long period of time. A fourth characteristic is they seem to be motivated by the master's reward and punishment.

The wicked servant is not afraid of the final judgement and Jesus reserves the strongest warnings to those in authority. These are strong words.

He's consigned a place with the hypocrites because that is what he is in the end. He's a visible church leader but inside there's pride.

There's no consciousness of Christ. There's no servant leadership following Christ. It's a sham. Whereas the faithful servant fears his master's opinion more than anyone else's.

[ 25 : 14 ] He wants his master to say, well done, good and faithful servant. His master's praise is so much more weighty than any human being.

The faithful servant is given a motivation of reward here and we need a whole other sermon on the idea of Christian rewards but it's helpful.

I need to keep telling myself and I hope you tell yourself, your reward is not here and now. I always keep connecting my reward with something now and it's not now.

It's coming. It is coming. It's going to be glorious but it's not now. Now what these possessions he's put in charge of are, I'm not sure.

I think the idea of a bigger mansion in heaven is a pretty rubbish idea. Something that does seem to be in the text is it's still his master's possessions.

[ 26 : 20 ] He's put in more responsibility. I think the reward is more serving. There's your reward. If you want to serve Christ, you're going to get more opportunity to serve him.

I think that sounds more like the gospel. So in this parable we've seen, being ready looks like being faithful to the master, conscious of him.

In verses 1 to 13 in chapter 25, we get a second thing of what it looks like to be ready. It's being ready for the long haul. It's not a quick sprint, the Christian race, but a marathon.

Now this one, of the ten virgins and the wedding, we need to understand the customs of weddings back in those days. The groom would walk to the bride's home, they would have some ceremonies there, and then as they're coming back to the groom's home, that's when friends who are invited to the wedding would join in a procession to the groom's home.

And then at the groom's home, that's where you've got the ceremony, the wedding ceremony, and that's when the party begins. And it could go on for a week. So these ten virgins, they're not the bride.

[ 27 : 49 ] Yes, the church is the bride of Christ, but that's not the point here. It's okay to change the metaphor. There's a different point being said. I don't think we're meant to read into the numbers of ten or the percentage, five and five.

I don't think we should get hung up on that. The tension in this parable is the groom is taking his good old time.

He's taking a long time to come. It's getting dark. It's getting late. He's taking so long, they all fall asleep.

Even the wise fall asleep. There's no criticism of them there. They're all woken up, sudden cry, bridegroom's here, come out to meet him.

This is it. Now how were they wise? They were wise because they were prepared for a lengthy delay. They were prepared for the long haul. The wise were prepared.

[ 28 : 55 ] They had oil with them. They joined the procession. They're in. They're in the wedding feast. But then the door is shut. Those not prepared, not with oil, it's too late.

There's no time to get some. The door's shut. They're banging on the door. And they hear words you do not want to hear on the last day. I do not know you.

They seem to be professing Christians. They've got lanterns. They're claiming they want to go to the wedding feast. They're expecting the groom to come.

I wonder what a boss might say to an employee who says they want a promotion. But then she never takes up the professional development opportunities that the boss gives her at the company's cost.

And whenever a work colleague asks for her help and advice, she's like, well, that's your problem. I've got too much to do. The boss might say to her, you claim you want a promotion, but you're not taking any steps to show that you want, you actually want this promotion.

[ 30 : 28 ] You're not taking any steps to show you really do want this. What might a girl say to a guy who says, I want to pursue marriage.

But every weekend, he always chooses his mates over her. And she says, come meet my parents. And he never does. And he's making no effort to get a job.

He's making no effort to further his studies to get ready to provide. She might well say, your words of love are empty.

You're not preparing for a relationship at all. I think the effect of this parable is if you really wanted, if those girls really wanted to be in the wedding feast, they would have taken steps to prepare.

I think it's another sharp warning of this external religion and no internal desire, no internal reality of wanting to be with Christ. No friendship with the Lord.

[ 31 : 42 ] So what does the oil represent? I have no idea. And I think we should be really careful of identifying the oil with something in particular.

I think that might be a dangerous misstep. I don't think there's anything in the text that can tell us what the oil represents. The punch of the parable comes at the end.

Jesus says, watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Those who are ready for his return are preparing for the long haul.

They're making steps to be ready for his return. Like the thief in the night, it's a mistake not to be ready at any time.

But it's also a mistake not to be ready for a long time. Get ready to endure. I'm encouraged going to elderly Christians' funerals and they have a lifetime of endurance that people can testify to.

[ 32 : 59 ] It testifies to the reality of grace day in and day out that they endured so much over so many years.

So can I ask what strategies are you putting in place to endure? What steps are you taking? I don't want to be too prescriptive here.

But are you soaking in God's means of grace each day? Because if you really want to endure, if you really want to be there, it looks like taking steps.

I need to get happy in God every single day. I don't wake up going, I can't wait to serve you again, God. I don't. I need to get happy in God every day. I need his word.

I need prayer. I need small group. I need church. I need friendship. I need someone who I trust and who knows me and can ask the hard questions.

[ 34 : 16 ] maybe we could ask how are we going to endure as a church as well?

We don't want to just be really busy for one week or one month or one year. We need to be soaking in the whole counsel of God's word to become mature.

We need to be thinking about raising up the next generation, training more gospel workers. so being ready for Christ's return, it looks like a servant who's faithful to their master for his sake and it looks like someone preparing for the long haul, taking steps because we don't know to the day or hour.

It could be soon or it could be a long time. So it looks like both and we've got more to learn in the next two parables. Now if it was all on us, this would be a really scary sermon and we'd feel the weight of it.

that when Jesus finishes this teaching, there's something that he does know.

[ 35 : 51 ] He knows about a day. He doesn't know the day he's returning, but he does know another day. He says in the first few verses of chapter 26, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, you know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest whose name was Caiaphas and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

But they said not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people. There was an elders meeting. let's suddenly capture Jesus.

He was ready. Not on the Passover. No, the father chose the Passover so that we would understand why he died.

The father had chosen the day he would give up his son. The fact that he is fully human and doesn't know the day or hour is really good news. It means that he can stand in our place in the judgment of God.

[ 37 : 09 ] He can represent us. He can go to that cross and feel the full weight of hell being shut out from the father. The father saying to the son, I do not know you.

He took that. We know he is returning one day to put an end to all evil. And he chose to go through that day so that he wouldn't have to end you and me when he comes back.

He gets us ready. He's established our relationship with God by grace. He's given us his words to prepare us to stay spiritually awake.

He even gives us his spirit to empower us to be faithful. He gives us his spirit to persevere for the long haul. He gives us one another in the church.

And then he congratulates us for using his grace. He gives us everything. his word to endure. He took the judgment and then he gives us his spirit.

[ 38 : 32 ] He gives us his word to endure. So we can be ready for his return. If his promised return isn't on our minds regularly, I think that can only mean his cross isn't on our mind regularly.

Either that or we turn his cross into he died so that he can give my life now this comfortable existence. His cross and his return, those two days are connected.

He went through the one to give us the other. I think that's how we stay spiritually awake. Having that perspective, not just the present but one eye on the cross and one eye on his return.

It fills us with consciousness that he's here now, that he's my master now, that he's empowering me by his spirit now. He's made us ready for his return.

If he comes back at two o'clock, I'm ready. I really hope you can say the same. Will you pray with me?

[ 40 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, we forgive us for being so prone to just filling our minds with the ordinary in life.

and not interpreting the ordinary with heavenly things, with your cross that has made us ready for your return and that you will return and what a day that will be.

Forgive us for that. Please fill us as a church with an expectation that you'll return. Please give us grace upon grace so that we might be faithful to you, that we might endure.

For your glory and our good, I pray in his name. Amen. holy Thank you.