**December 1, 2019 Matthew 24:36-44**

***BORN the KING: The Unexpected Hour***

**Scripture:** Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV *(36)"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (37)For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (38)For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, (39)and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. (40)Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. (41)Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. (42)Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (43)But understand this: if the owner 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. (44)Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*

Matthew 28:19 NRSV “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*,”

**Notes:**

1. It is ***good*** that we don't know exactly when Christ will return.
   1. Heaven is not our only ***goal***; we have work to do here.
   2. Christ's ***second*** coming will be swift and sudden.
   3. Jesus' ***purpose*** is to warn us to be prepared.
2. Our focus is what we must be most ***concerned*** with.
   1. We must ***focus*** on what we are called to.
   2. Many people have a tendency to lose ***Focus***.
      1. Use well what God has ***entrusted*** you.
      2. God gives us resources according to our ***abilities***.
      3. What we do for others ***demonstrates*** what we really think about Jesus' words to us.
   3. Regain a ***Focus*** on what is most important, Jesus.
      1. Be mindful of the ***distractions*** in our life.
      2. Regain our ***focus*** on Christ and his coming.
      3. See where the Holy Spirit is ***already*** at work.
3. The ***anticipation*** of the coming Christ is upon us.
   1. ***Advent*** is the new year in the church.
   2. You are responsible for your own ***spiritual*** ***condition****.*
   3. Are you striving to regain your ***focus*** on Christ?

**Transcript:**

For many of us, Advent was a time of perpetual watchfulness. As children, some had Advent calendars with little windows or pockets; each day the pocket was rushed to and opened with anticipation. When opened the child may obtain the small treats that were inside. Each day was looked at with much scrutiny: “How many more days until Christmas? What if I miss it?” Everyone was monitored closely to see what came in and out of the house. Each night was met with increasing restlessness, not wanting to sleep or even close your eyes because what if you miss it? What if you miss the magic? What if you miss the wonder? What if you miss Santa Claus on the rooftop or sneaking presents under your tree?

You watched closely each and every day with wonder. While this story isn’t relatable for everyone, most of us can relate to a time in our life when we were anticipating something. A wedding day, the birth of a baby, retirement, a long-worked-for raise; whatever it might be, we know what it is like to watch in extreme anticipation, waiting.

Our text today is about this type of waiting and watching, never losing focus on what we should be focusing on the return of Jesus. Many of us read this text with baggage of fear, there’s some validity here; the preceding verses are a bit gloomy, to say the least. There is definitely a sign of caution here to not be distracted, to stay the course, but the message is not one of fear. The message is ultimately one of hope that God keeps his promises, that Christ will return, and that if we stay the course, if we are watchful and ready, we will see this hope fulfilled. Turn in your bibles to Matthew 24:36-44 and stand with me for the reading of God’s word.

*(36)"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (37)For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (38)For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, (39)and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. (40)Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. (41)Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. (42)Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (43)But understand this: if the owner 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. (44)Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV*

It is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return. If we knew the precise date, we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Worse yet, we might plan to keep sinning. Oh I don’t mean the bad sins; I’m talking about the little sins, like lying, cheating, promiscuous sexual encounters, use of mind altering substances like drugs and alcohol or whatever else we do that God would prefer that we didn’t do. Engaging in satisfying worldly pleasures even though we are instructed not to. Doing whatever we want until the day before Christ’s scheduled return and then at the last second; just in a nick of time, we turn to God right at the end.

Heaven is not our only goal; we have work to do here; we must keep on doing it until the day we die or until we see the unmistakable return of our Savior. Those little sins, the sins we do not classify as the bad ones; Well let me tell you they are just as wrong as the big and bad sins. Cheating on a math test is just as bad as robbing the united states treasury, lying and gossiping about somebody is just as bad as murdering them. And those little words you use, the ones you substitute for the really bad ones, the ones that would get your mouth washed out with soap, they are used in a sentence in the same context and they are just a cheap substitute for the real thing. Yes, they are just as bad as the real thing. We have work to do and only this lifetime to complete it. So we must keep working until the day we die or Jesus returns. I don’t believe that when the day comes you will have enough time to ask forgiveness after all it will be in the twinkling of an eye.

Christ's second coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no opportunity for last-minute repentance or bargaining. The choice we have already made will determine our eternal destiny. SO we must prepare now and live according to the teachings to the best of our ability. There is grace for the mistakes we make along the way, but I cannot guarantee grace for those who wait til the last minute to reconcile with God.

Jesus' purpose in telling about his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date but to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? When the role is called up yonder, will you be there? The only safe choice is to obey him *today* (Mat\_24:46). To obey him to the best of our abilities, we must be focused on the teachings of Christ, focused upon His Word and what that says and means to us; on his call in our lives to be saved; His call in our lives to be serving Him, His call for us to do the things he wants us to do, on the things that need to be done for His kingdom.

Our focus is what we must be most concerned with. This text reveals a distractedness that can consume all of us. Instead of staying focused on Christ, instead of focusing on sharing Christ, and focusing on living the life Christ has called us to, other things rush in to distract us.

**We must focus on what we are called to.** The Gospel of Matthew is all about the theme of sharing the gospel with others. This theme is revealed in the Great Commission at the end of the book, Matthew 28:19 NRSV “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*,” Sharing what God has taught us and what we have learned from others. Sharing what we have seen God do with our own eyes; sharing what we know to be true, and demonstrating these things in the way we live our life and the way we speak. We also see this theme illustrated in the parable of the sheep and goats in 25:31–46, where we learn that the call of those following Christ is to a life lived in love and compassion for those around us. We have a call to join the mission of God in the world.

**Many people have a tendency to lose Focus.** The context for this passage reveals several parables. These parables illustrate the distracted nature of humanity. The parable of the ten bridesmaids. In the story of the ten bridesmaids (Mat\_25:1-13), every person is responsible for his or her own spiritual condition. This parable is about a wedding. On the wedding day the bridegroom went to the bride's house for the ceremony; then the bride and groom, along with a great procession, returned to the groom's house, where a feast took place, often lasting a full week. These ten bridesmaids were waiting to join the procession, and they hoped to take part in the marriage feast. But when the groom didn't come at the expected time, five of them were out of lamp oil. By the time they had purchased extra oil, it was too late to join the feast. When Jesus returns to take his people to heaven, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with God must be our own. We will not get to heaven on our parent’s Christian walk.

The parable of the talents. (Mat\_25:14-30) The story shows the necessity of using well what God has entrusted to us. The master divided the money among his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he could handle. If he failed in his assignment, his excuse could not be that he was overwhelmed. Failure would indicate only laziness or hatred toward the master. The bags of silver represent any kind of resource we are given. God gives us time, gifts, and other resources according to our abilities, and he expects us to invest them wisely until he returns. We are responsible to use well what God has given us. The issue is not how much we have but how well we use what we have.

The parable of the sheep and the goats. (Mat\_25:31-46) The parable of the sheep and goats stresses the importance of serving others in need. God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they were Jesus is no easy task. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us; feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers? No parable by itself *completely* describes our preparation. Instead, each paints one part of the whole picture.

We see this distractedness in verses 37–39 of our text today, in the reference to the time of Noah. The issue was not that the people were marrying, eating, and drinking. The issue was that they allowed those things to distract them from their coming destruction and, ultimately, the opportunity for hope and salvation. They were caught off guard because they forgot about God. They were not paying attention to the signs around them; signs that were pointing them toward salvation; instead, they were focused on other things.

We also are a distracted people. While we may know that Christ is coming, we often allow other things to consume our time. We sometimes forget our call to compassion and love because of these distractions. This time of year, we can look at obvious distractions in our lives. Busyness is a problem all year long, but this season can feel particularly busy. Materialism is an issue especially as we near Christmastime; shiny things are alluring, and we can sometimes view both getting and giving as a way to be fulfilled; yet both can serve as distractions. Keeping up appearances, the way we and our homes, look to others, can become a serious distraction in our lives. Family can be a distraction, even though family is really good! Like the people in Noah’s time weren’t wrong for getting married and celebrating, we aren’t wrong for spending time with family, but sometimes even good things like our family can become the focus of the season over Jesus. When our traditions take precedence over Jesus, like when we stay home to cook our Christmas dinner , instead of going to church to worship God. Many things distract us from looking for Christ in our lives and the world around us.

**We must regain our Focus on what is most important, Jesus.** Advent is a season for regaining our focus. While this might feel like an odd text for Advent, it is appropriate. We are reminded to be mindful of the distractions in our life and remember the birth of Christ. Each week we are called to look back to Christ’s birth and remember. At the same time, we are also reminded to look ahead to Christ’s return. Just like the anticipation we had as children, looking forward to Christmas day or another important day, we are reminded to look forward for Christ’s return. What distractions do you need to remove from your life to regain focus on Christ? What do you need to add to your life to regain focus on Christ? What do we need to do in order to regain our focus on Christ and his coming?

Those of us who anticipate the return of Christ are hopeful. We know that the hardships and trials we face now will be made right at Christ’s return. We are confident of the ways the already/not yet kingdom of God is at work. When we anticipate Christ’s return, we look for and see where the Holy Spirit is already at work in the world. We partner with the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, in much the same way Noah partnered with God in building the ark. The fear in the text is never for those who trust in the Lord. It’s always for those who don’t.

The anticipation of the coming Christ is upon us. Each of us anticipate something different; some anticipate the coming Christ child. Some anticipate the Christ’s return, his second coming. No matter what you are anticipating, that is where your focus lies. Advent is the new year in the church. New years are often a time for resolutions and for thinking of ways we want to improve.

Where is your focus to be found? Are you focused upon the things of God? Are you focusing on sharing Christ? Are you focusing on living the life Christ has called us to? Or have you lost your focus? You are responsible for your own spiritual condition; are you ready for Jesus’ return? Are you using what God has entrusted to you with the best of your abilities? Are you using your resources to serve others as you serve Christ and what are the distractions taking your focus away from God? Are you striving to regain your focus on Christ? Remember the birth of Christ; look ahead at the return of Christ. Look for the work of the Holy Spirit in the world around you.

We don’t always think of Advent as a season of reflection and renewal, but what if we shifted our thinking today? What if we found a way to reduce distractions, to simplify things; and focus on remembering the coming of Christ and anticipating his return? How might we be transformed by that, and how might the world be transformed by our faithful witness of watching and waiting with hope?