

How to Be Ready (24:45 - 25:13)

Intro self - Jake married to Lucy for 10 years. 3.5 kids. Been in Columbia for 7 years. (show a photo)

Before we get into the teaching this morning, I have a story to share...

Suppose someone is a part of your church, let's call him Tom. And Tom has been a Christian for a while. He's doing the things that a Christian is supposed to do - read His Bible, be in community, confess sin. But all the while Tom also notices something when he examines his life. He notices this proverbial "gap" in his faith where he knows from a theological level at least that he is fully loved by God - but he notices that his life is a far cry away from this type of life that Jesus has called him to:

- He wakes up the next morning and realizes spending time with Jesus in Scripture and prayer is a constant struggle for his time and attention. He knows he should but the demands for the day just crowd his thoughts
- As he pulls up to work that day, he notices he still compares himself to others and judges people in his mind
- As he talks to his boss, he realizes that he will often twist the truth just a bit to make himself look a little better in front of others
- As he goes home, exhausted and frustrated from a long day, he has this inner pull to shut down around his family and veg out in front of a screen. After a long day at work he finds himself having a hard time connecting with his wife and kids and just wants to be left alone
- He finds himself tempted to look at things he's not supposed to on his phone as a way of escaping the day-in day-out routine
- And as he goes to bed that night, he notices his thought life is going all over the place. Now Tom, as a Christian, is aware of all of this - and it feels as though the gap is wider and wider from this life Jesus has called him to and his actual everyday life.

And maybe you've experienced at some point in your Christian life what Tom has experienced. Where you noticed the gaps in your walk with Jesus that no matter how aware of it you were, no matter how many times you've confessed to God and to your LifeGroup, no matter how many times you've set up plans to stop sinning in one specific way or another, you haven't seen any growth and to be honest with yourself, you've grown weary.

- Maybe you've experienced what author Pete Scazzero calls in the Christian life "the wall." "The Wall" is something, he says, every Christian will one day face - it's this point in your spiritual journey that you just feel stuck. Maybe that sin in your life feels ever-present, maybe you've grown apathetic, or maybe based on your season of life, you're going through so much pain and suffering that God can often feel distant from you. Pete Scazzero goes on to say that as many as 85% of Christians never move past the Wall.

So my question this morning is, what do you do when you're in those moments of what feels like spiritual weariness and sleepiness? What do you do when you hit the inevitable wall? The answer comes in something you may not expect: the second coming of Jesus. WHaaaaTTt?

Turn to **Matt 24:45-25:13**

Recap - my boi Jon Ludavina came into to teach. If you weren't here, he's another pastor from the church I'm at in Columbia. As a recap, he talked about the end times. You know, light breezy stuff.

And as weird as that sounds, this is the age that we find ourselves in, **in this "end times" situation**. Jesus has finally entered into the world. He's died and resurrected from death - and now, before all things are reconciled to Himself once and for all - before death, sin, and Satan are done away with forever, before we

reach the culmination that all of human history has been bending towards - all that's left is for the church to carry out our mission until Jesus' return.

This is what church history all over the globe has affirmed for the last 2,000 years. Jesus' physical return to do away Satan, sin and death forever. But while we all agree on this, the **details are kinda murky**. Which is kinda the point. Jesus gives us some details, but nothing definitive in part, to keep the church always on our toes. To await with hopeful expectation for his return whenever it will be.

The problem with that is, in the course of the last 2,000 years, **Christians tend to err in one of two ways.**

- **1 - Obsessing over Jesus' return too much.** deciphering the symbols and meanings in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation to say exactly when Jesus will return. So let's stop doing what we're doing, and hunker down and watch the sky for Jesus to come back.

And I think a lot of us can see something like that and say "Yea...that's not the most helpful way to think and live." And so we brush that off, and forget about it altogether, but when that happens we actually fall prey to error 2:

- **2 - Not thinking about Jesus' return at all** This attitude says, "Yeah I know Jesus is coming back, but we don't know when, so [shrug emoji]." "Look, it's been 2,000 years and ... nothing's happened yet, so let's not think about it and move on with our lives."

And knowing these two errors, Jesus offers a series of parables to correct either side. And in particular, the first two parables we're looking at have to do with the error #2 - assuming Jesus' return won't happen or if it does it's not happening anytime soon so why bother thinking about it. So let's take a look:

- **The parable of the two servants (24:45-51)**

- Both put in charge of the master's house

- One of them is the good kind of ready. He's faithful and wise and is ready for his master to arrive at any time. He's not obsessing over it, but he is living in the awareness that his master will come back. And this servant is the one who will be rewarded.

- Then there's the wicked servant who assumes the master is never going to come, so what's he do? He starts wreaking havoc on everybody including himself. And what's the result? According to **24:51 He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**

- Yikes. Well that escalated quickly. If that makes you uncomfortable, I think that's the point. Jesus is saying to those who are not aware of Jesus' return and instead pursue destruction, that destruction will come back on them.

- Likewise Paul says something similar to the Galatians:

- **Galatians 6:8**

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life

- Now to be clear - Paul and Jesus are not saying "Do this good Christian and then you'll be saved" A Christian is saved from sin and enters the Kingdom of God when they put faith in Jesus apart from anything they do. Yes and amen. We are saved by grace, AND what a Christian does after that is evidence of whether that person has truly been transformed by the grace of God.

- So if your faith is in Jesus, then the evidence of that is following Jesus, being the faithful servant

- And if you say you're a Christian, but you have no evidence or desire of following Jesus and what He says, then that's a indicator that you might not actually be a Christian
- Then there's **the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13)** - which is similar to parable 1 but with a new cast of characters. So I gotta give you some background here...
 - Don't let the virgin stuff trip you up. This is in the context of Jewish weddings 2,000 years ago. When the parables labels them as "virgins," its not so much talking about their sexual history as it is simply saying a young unmarried people. These ten virgins are basically like the wedding party. And here in Jesus' parable they're waiting for the reception party to start. Typically this party would last up to 7 days, it was a big event in the town. This was something you did not want to miss. They're waiting on the bride and groom outside of their house knowing when they arrive that's when the doors will open, they'll be let into the house and party all night.

And it's here you have the setting of this parable

- 5 of them are prepared, like the servant in the last parable. They're watchful and ready - knowing the bride and groom could arrive any moment. And as a result, the bride and groom open up their home and welcome them in.
- 5 of them are unprepared, sleepy, lazy virgins. The bride and groom entered the house but they weren't prepared. For these 5, with them being virgins and all, you'd think they'd be good at waiting by now... anyway, by the time they realize it it's too late. They're outside of the house.

So with these two parables, I want us to notice some similarities in both of them and what that says about us being ready for Jesus...

1 - how you wait reveals who you're waiting for.

In both parables, each group had a certain perception of their host. And as a result of their view, that prompted their actions.

This is a silly example that is going to make me look bad I know, but, I think about how there have been times when I'm in bed, and its the middle of the night and I hear a noise outside. And I wake up and I try to ignore whatever it was until my wife says, "Are you going to check that?" And I say, "Yea totally." So I get out of bed. And I sleepily walk around the house - but I'm not really looking because I don't really think anyone's outside to burgle us. Now if I thought someone was actually trying to break in - that's a different story. I would get my bat, I might rig the house like Home Alone style. I'd be ready to throw down because I knew who I was waiting for.

My perception of whether someone was arriving influences my response. Likewise...

- The faithful servant, the prepared wedding party - assumed the host would keep their word and arrive at any moment, and as a result they went to work and prepared themselves.
- The wicked servant, the unprepared wedding party - assumed the host would not keep their word, and so they were unprepared for when they arrived

2 - How you wait in this life sets a trajectory for your soul

In both parables, notice how the ones who were faithful were rewarded with joy. Whereas the ones who were unfaithful were met with being cast out.

- Similarly **when it comes to following Jssus, for those who are faithful** there is fullness of life, there is joy, there is peace and love. There is meaning in your soul, purpose in your life, there is an unshakeable

security in that you are fully known and fully loved. That when suffering and pain come your way, you trust Jesus to know that He is doing something about it. That He will wipe away every tear from your eye.

- Jesus says for those who choose this way, to the very end, persevering each step of the way, all the stuff of God's Kingdom we experience in this life is but a foretaste of what's in store in the next life. No more sin. No more death. This world is passing, and for those in Jesus, this life is the closest thing to Hell you and I will ever experience.
- **For those who choose the way of self**, God hands you over to what you want. For those who pursue chasing anything outside of God, God ultimately gives you over to those things. But the catch is, those things will never give you life to the fullest. And God gives us the life we have here on this planet to make our choice. This world is passing, and for those outside of Jesus and who choose unfaithfulness, this life is the closest thing to Heaven you will ever experience.

Now let's pivot to us and what this means...

Zooming out a bit, like we mentioned earlier, Jesus assumes when it comes to the end times, there are one of two errors we could fall into.

- Error 1 is obsessing over it too much
- Error 2 when it comes to Jesus's return: we hardly think about it.

And when that happens, our mindset shifts, and our **the trajectory of our heart is more susceptible** into becoming more like the wicked servant or the sleepy wedding party in Jesus' parables, without even realizing it.

I think this happens for a number of reasons

- **Predisposition to disbelieve the supernatural** - "Yes I'm a Christian but...the stuff of Jesus coming back riding on the clouds, judging the living and the dead...uhhh...whatever. I'm not going to think about that because that's a little embarrassing, and it's 2023 and we're way past thinking that can actually happen."
- **Cultural pressures of maximum autonomy and freedom**. Like the wicked servant, if Jesus isn't coming back, then live life however you want. Pursue whatever makes you happy.
- **Weariness** - Maybe you've been a Christian for a minute. And the truth is, like the wedding party, you're exhausted. Whether it's your season of life, or your sin struggles you see in your life with no hope of getting better. Maybe you're in a season of suffering and Jesus seems distant or non-existent. Maybe it's death by a million paper cuts of "This again?" "Gosh, another marriage crumbling around me, this again?" "Another big moral failure in the Church, this again?" "Another year and it feels like the brokenness just won't let up for a second, this again?" Like the darkness has closed in on you and the idea of Jesus coming to redeem all things sounds to you simply like wishful thinking but not a reality to live into. Like the wedding party you're tempted to think, "I don't know if Jesus is actually coming back."
 - In his book, Sacred Fire, author Ronald Rolheiser, discusses the dilemma at length. He says at a certain point all of us go through this season of life, typically in middle age, called "the death of the honeymoon." And in this stage of life, we start to see reality for what it is - where the story we bought into and lived into is not all it's cracked up to be.
 - Where you've been taught you can be anything you want to be and you can change the world - but reality sets in and you look at your life and it's not what you thought.
 - You realize your spouse isn't as great as they might be, doesn't complete you, but rather, they're broken and sinful like you.
 - You realize you haven't changed the world, you have a normal job.
 - You don't have famous friends in a hip cool city, you have regular friends in a regular city.

- And this is your life. The big dream is over. And often this breeds a new kind of loneliness or disillusionment in us. Like the wedding party or the wicked servant, this can all too quickly distort your view of the Master. Rolheiser says, basically, when the purpose we strive for does not live up to what we thought, this is the death of the honeymoon. “Jesus was a good idea but look at my life, look where that’s gotten me.” And people respond to this in a number of ways:
 - You can choose to have a mid-life crisis.
 - And get a new car or truck, or move to a new city, or get a new job or a new spouse... because the life you chose just doesn’t excite you anymore.
 - Maybe it’s nowhere near that extreme but you find yourself on mental auto-pilot more often than not when it comes to the things God has called you and the people God has called you to do life with.
 - You’ve been married to your spouse for sometime and the intentionality is gone. You’re not prioritizing pursuing one another. You’re functionally roommates raising kids together - living in the blur of it all.
 - You put in the bare minimum at work because this job isn’t as fulfilling as you thought it’d be
 - When it comes to kids, you’ve been in the thick of it for too long, and you’re emotionally frazzled out. When your day starts you’re just counting down the seconds until kids go to bed that night and you can take a breather and catch up with your Netflix or whatever else.
 - And for what it's worth, just so college students don’t feel left out, this is not just a thing people in their 30s and 40s struggle with anymore... there’s now the “quarterlife crisis” where more and more twenty-somethings are finding out that chasing your dreams is a bit more boring than they were told, and it doesn’t match up with what they see in social media and they don’t know what to do about it.
 - Or maybe just more simply, we create little purposes of our own. We create something to fight for, because we need so desperately to live into some story to make sense of our lives.
 - Go to hobbies or work or whatever
 - Some people turn to politics and social causes and even theological debates to garner meaning out of their lives. So they prop up their side and villify the other side and blast people on Twitter because life is so weary and they need a dragon to slay.

Maybe it’s some mix of all of the above. All leaving you into this soul level sleepiness. Is Jesus coming back? Maybe? Maybe not? But idk please let me just do what I want. Let me live how I want to live. Let me find something or do something else to chase after and maybe it won’t bring me this low-level disappointment that I feel.

Again, Jesus’ point in the parables is: **how you wait reveals who you’re waiting for.**

In other words, if you knew who you were waiting for, that would shape how you respond. So for the next few minutes I want to paint the picture for us to better understand who we’re waiting for.

John 10:27-29

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Rom 8:38-39

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Tim 2:13

If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Jesus parables ultimately point us back to Himself - the better Master and a better Groom.

- Who out of His love for you went to the deepest depths of pain and suffering to pay for sin and draw you close to Himself and this means...Jesus is committed to your growth and pursuit of Him. And He will finish the work He started in you to ensure you make it to the very end because He is a Master who serves and He is a groom who is patient with us.

- And it is out of His love, He is working in you to stay faithful to the end. And at the same time, we respond. We do our part and press on in the power of the Spirit, living in community, following the way of Jesus.
 - And look, I don't want to get into all the theological outworkings of it all that end with different types of "isms" my point is simply: God is in control and we have a part to play in our perseverance.

3 - But the hope we see in these parables, for those who view Jesus the true master and the true groom, is that the last day will come. And here's why that's good news, which leads me to my last point, **when you know the last day is coming, it shapes how you view the present.**

We have some concept of this in our lives now. Let me tell you what I mean...

- I have three kids, and one thing kids teach you is that time goes by very quickly. The days are long but the years are so short. Parenting is full of "last days." It feels like you just started, but today was your last day of Kindergarten! Or when your kids get potty trained, and it's like there's a last time for changing their diaper! PTL. But before that, there was a last bottle. There was a last time we had to spoon-feed our children mashed up foods. There are so many of these events, and I can't stop to think about them too long because I'll just start crying and won't be able to finish this sermon. The thing is though, a lot of these last days happen and you don't even know it.
 - Like there will be a time, and I'm experiencing this now with our kids at different ages, where you look back and say, "that was the last day my daughter crawled into my lap to watch a movie.
 - I didn't know it at the time, but it was." "That was the last day my son wasn't embarrassed to be seen with his dad.
 - That was the last day she crawled, and now she's all over the place." "That was the last time my son screamed 'Daddy' and he ran as fast as he could to hug me."
 - And then one day it will be, "That was the last day we had an unscheduled family dinner before he left for college."

- Now I want you to think about the sin struggles that feel so discouraging. Think about hypothetical Tom from the start of the sermon. Think of yourself having to go to God and confess, again. To your spouse, again. To your friend, again. To your LifeGroup, again. Tired of it, ashamed of it, frustrated by it. What I want you to hear is that there will be a last day you will confess that sin. And you won't know it when it happens. It will just feel like the next time, but then one day when you are with Jesus you will realize, "Oh

wow, that was the last day I had to confess that.” So I’d encourage us to keep going. Keep turning to Jesus. Be receptive to the Spirit’s leading in you. A last day is coming.

- When it comes to your season of life, wherever God has you, whether it be in quarter-life or mid-life or late in life, to cultivate thankfulness in your heart with whatever God has set in front of you. There is a last day coming for you and Jesus is holding fast to you, so keep going, stay awake because you don’t know when that last day will be. But it’s coming sooner than you think.
- If you find yourself in a long season of depression and the darkness doesn’t seem to lift, or you’ve hit this proverbial Wall in your walk with Jesus - cling to Him and keep to the practices, because the last day is coming for you when the darkness will fully and finally lift and you will see King Jesus in all of his radiant beauty forever.
- There will be a last day, and you won’t know when it happens. But that last day is coming, so hold on.

God is more committed to your growth than you are. He started the work and he is determined to bring it to completion.