

Session 5

May 22, 2022

KEEP SERVING FAITHFULLY

Matthew 24:42-51

I often recall the story of a man I knew in South Carolina we called J.T. I had spent a good part of the night driving his son home from Tennessee to attend a funeral and spent the rest of the night in his guest room. In the morning, J.T. was puttering about the yard, working. I poured a cup of coffee and walked out in the morning sun to visit. "It could be today," J.T. said. "Ok," I replied, "What could be today?" He smiled and kept on working. A few minutes later, he said it again. "It could be today." Again, he smiled, and didn't elaborate. A few more minutes passed when he stopped, straightened up, looked up at the sky and said, "You know, it really could be today. Jesus could come back...*today*." Then he looked at me, and asked, "Do you believe that?" In all my years of ministry, I never met anyone more sincerely watching for Christ's return than J.T. Nor have I ever been more directly confronted with the question, "Do you believe that?" In this week's focal passage, Jesus reminded His disciples not only to be *prepared* for His return, but to be *looking for it*. Three key words come to mind.

Vigilance (vv. 42-44). While Jesus has His appearance in mind here, we would do well to remember that we will all one day stand before Him, in either judgement or reward. We could be raptured at His return (see 1 Thess. 4:13ff) or taken to Him in death (see Heb. 9:27). Either way, our meeting is inevitable. It's just a matter of *when*. For this reason, we must always remain *alert*. Jesus is not being compared to a thief in this example (v. 43). Rather, the key idea is the *manner* of His coming: sudden, surprising, unexpected; *like a thief in the night* (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). The admonition is to be more than ready. It's to be *watchful*. For a Christ-follower to be caught off guard (especially after Jesus reviewed so many signs!) would be as bad as a homeowner allowing a thief to enter his home while he slept. For reflection: *How often does your church speak about Christ's return? Do you think there is a sense of urgency or one of complacency? Do you get the impression anyone really cares?*

Diligence (vv. 45-47). Here, Jesus adds yet another obligation to His disciples. Not only should they be prepared for His return, and not only should they be actively watching for it, but they should be busy in service until it occurs. Those who do so are considered both *faithful* (trustworthy; committed) and *sensible* (intelligent; wise) (v. 45). The result? *Reward* (v. 46). While some commentators try to apply this promise to pastors, doing so misses the point. The work of serving Christ should be *everyone's* priority until Christ comes again. For reflection: *How do you think we can balance our "here and now" kingdom obligations with the kind of "forward thinking" vigilance Jesus mentions?*

Indulgence (vv. 48-51). Peter pointed out in his second epistle that "scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, living according to their own desires, saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation'" (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The *wicked slave* (v. 48) is in contrast to the faithful and sensible servants mentioned above. The problem with Christ's delay is not with *Him* (see 2 Pet. 3:9), but with *us*. Marginal believers are quickly bored, easily influenced, and insufficiently

interested in eternal things to maintain their commitment. For them, it is “business as usual.” It was for people like this that Jesus so frequently stressed the cost of discipleship (see Luke 14:25 ff). Keep in mind, verse 51 does *not* suggest that truly born-again believers will lose their salvation and be thrown out of God’s presence (see John 6:37). Rather, those who are unwilling to watch for Him and unwilling to fulfill their commitment to Him will be exposed for what they truly are: *lost*. For reflection: *What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase, “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth?” Why do you think Jesus pronounces such harsh condemnation to those who neglect or ignore the promise of His appearance?*