

The End Part 3

Matthew 24:29-51

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

Ames, Iowa

November 17, 2024

Last week, the little orange engine light on the dash of Stacy's car came on. I was a little concerned. I've heard people say that even when the light comes on, it's probably nothing. Sometimes it isn't. I used to work on cars in my younger days, and here's what I've learned: when those lights come on and it's beeping, something is usually wrong. It's not your microwave telling you your popcorn is ready. It's telling you something is wrong with your engine. We were very concerned.

So, Stacy took it to the shop to have it checked out. It turned out not to be too serious an issue. However, if we had ignored it, it could have been disastrous.

Some of us here this morning are living life with the check engine light on. You treat your life like your car. You know something is wrong, but you are just ignoring the warning light. A couple of days go by, and the car is still running. So, you pretend everything is okay. Then days turn into weeks, and weeks into months. After a while, the check engine light looks like an accessory on your dash. However, one day, you come out, your car won't start, and you find out it can't be fixed. It is too late. The damage was done because you failed to heed the warning.

We can be like that with the signs of Christ's return. When we hear about them, we acknowledge that "*Christ is coming back; we need to be prepared.*" We feel the prick of our consciences, but then the days turn into weeks, and the weeks turn into months, and after a while, our consciences go silent, and we don't even think about Jesus' return.

In the text we will study this morning, Jesus gives us more pastoral counsel for the end times. In vv. 27-31, He reminds us that He will return, and the whole world will know it. Then, in vv. 36-51, Jesus gives us *five warnings* that He explains with various illustrations so we will take His return seriously. These five warnings are like the check engine light; only He calls us to examine our lives. We must pay attention to them. Bottom line: We are called to live our lives alive and awake to Christ, or in the end, we will be exposed as spiritual frauds. Let's work through our text. I only have two points this morning.

I. Jesus will return in great power and glory to gather His people! (vv. 27-31)

I want to back up a few verses and begin with v. 27 because Jesus tells us that no one will miss His return. It will be obvious to all. Look at what He says:

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

As I said last Sunday, vv. 27-28, tell us that no one will miss Jesus' return. When He returns, He will bring everything to a close and wrap up time and this universe like rolling up a scroll.

Then, in vv. 29-30, Jesus describes the cosmic upheaval that will take place when He returns. Look in v. 29:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days¹, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

While this language is apocalyptic, we should take Jesus' description literally. His description of His return draws upon Old Testament descriptions of judgment. Here's the thing about Old Testament judgment passages: All of these passages on judgment always have a secondary fulfillment in the ultimate judgment at the end of the age when Jesus returns.

¹ The tribulation He is referring to is in vv. 15-26.

Listen to what Isaiah says about the judgment that came on Babylon in Isaiah 13:9-10,
*Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make
 the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of the
 heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at
 its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.*

Friends, all Old Testament judgment prophecies that describe cosmic upheaval find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus' return. Think about it: when Jesus returns, there will be a literal cosmic upheaval because the old will pass away, and the new will come. It will be an unparalleled event in the world's history.

Yet, until that day comes, we live in the pains of childbirth. It sometimes feels like the end, but it is all creation groaning. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:22:

*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of
 childbirth until now.*

Friends, Jesus' return will be a universal, cataclysmic event. All will see that the Sovereign Lord of the universe has returned, and everyone will stand before His judgment seat! Verse 30 says:

*Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of
 the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of
 heaven with power and great glory.*

Here, Jesus reiterates that all people will see His return. It won't be hidden. So, against the backdrop of cosmic commotions:

*Every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the
 earth will mourn over Him.*

Those who rejected Him when they were alive will mourn at His return. They will not be ready because they didn't believe or they mistakenly thought they had more time.

The Apostle John describes the scene in Revelation 1:7. Jesus will appear in the sky, radiant before the darkened sun and moon. His appearance will shock the tribes of the earth because His appearance will be unmistakable. Then, when those who have not worshipped Jesus will weep and cry out in great sorrow, for it will be too late.

Yet, while the wicked weep, the righteous will celebrate and rejoice. Look in v. 31,
*And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his
 elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Remember, the elect are those who Jesus has lovingly and tenderly called to Himself because He gave His life for them on the cross. They are those who have been born again. They will not weep but love His appearance.

Then, Jesus' angels will cover the globe and gather the chosen children of God. Not one will be left behind; all will be brought safely home, where He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and heal every broken place in their hearts and lives. It will be a precious moment for the elect. *The One who suffered in their place will make all of their suffering in life right. The One who suffered unjustly will bring justice and peace to His people.*

The bottom line of this text is that you must be ready for Jesus to return. It's a pointless question to ask if you are elect. The question is, do you love Jesus? Will you repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus? That's the question.

Real quickly, look at vv. 32-34. We covered these verses last Sunday. If you were here, you will remember I told you that vv. 32-34 are primarily talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the last days in vv. 15-26. Yet, secondarily, they also point us to the return of Christ.

Here's what I mean. Think of *the destruction of the temple* and *Christ's return* as *two mountain peaks in time* that you can see on a distant horizon. The first peak is the *temple's destruction*, and the second peak is *Jesus' return*.

Right now, we live between these two peaks. We are traveling through the valley of the last days, and while we can look back and see the mountain peak of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, we really should have our gaze fixed on the mountain peak of Jesus and His return when He will return in power and glory. This leads us to Jesus' second and final point of pastoral counsel for us in the last days.

II. True Christians will be Diligent to Prepare for Jesus' Return (vv. 36-51)

In these verses, Jesus gives us five warnings that operate like the check engine light on your life. They exhort us to check our hearts.

Jesus aims to get your attention with these warnings. They are like a defibrillator that shocks us back to life. They exhort us to examine our lives and live expectantly and faithfully for Him as we await His return. Let's unpack these warnings/exhortations.

Warning #1: We must always be ready for Jesus' return. This verse may not sound like a warning to you, but it is. It is a promise and a warning.

In v. 36, Jesus tells us that no one knows when He will return, not even Himself, so you must always be ready.

Look in v. 36:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Jesus' statement usually raises a question: If God knows everything, and Jesus is God, how could He not know when He would return?

Friends, this is part of the mystery of Jesus' incarnation. This verse is very high Christology, given to us straight from Jesus' lips. He discloses His self-imposed limitations as the Son of God.

Theologian Daniel Dorani wonderfully explains Jesus' self-limitations:

Some are baffled by Jesus' assertion that he does not know the hour of his return. If Jesus is God, how can he not know? Remember that Jesus chose to limit his divine power when he became a man (Philippians 2:6-8). God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Jesus possessed these powers, but chose not to exercise them at most points in his ministry.²

It's like this: When He became a man, He did not cease to be God. Yet, He had to become truly human. To fully identify with humanity, He subjected himself to the same limitations we experience.

In his humanity, Jesus willingly chose to limit his knowledge. He chose to learn and grow, just like all human beings. He chose to limit His knowledge of certain things, such as the exact timing of His return.

Because Jesus limited Himself and became fully human, He was able to die on the cross for us as our truly human and truly divine sacrifice on the cross.

Here's one more application that flows out of this verse. Here it is: We shouldn't set dates for Christ's return, nor should we believe those who do! Throughout history, many people have set times and dates for Christ's return, and they all share one thing. *They were all wrong!*

Of course, they were wrong. Jesus told us in advance that they would be wrong! Only God knows when Christ will return, so we must always be ready.

Warning #2: Many people will not be ready (vv. 37-39). In these verses, Jesus warns us that His return will be similar to the days when Noah lived.

For as were the days of Noah, 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 when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were

² Daniel Dorani, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew*, 381.

unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Just as people in Noah's day mocked Him for obeying God, so this generation mocks those who follow Jesus, believe the Bible, and believe there will be a judgment where afterward you will either spend eternity in Heaven or Hell.

Just as the people in Noah's day were not ready when the flood came, many people in our day will not be ready when Jesus returns. Just as they rejected Noah and his preaching of the coming judgment, many people today reject Christ and His claims. Then judgment will come upon them and catch them by surprise even though they had been told Jesus was coming back.

Jesus' point is that we must prepare for His return, but sadly, many will not be ready. The exhortation is to turn from sin and to Him in faith, to live faithful lives of faith and repentance continually. This is how we can be ready for His return.

Warning #3: Jesus will return on a day like any other day (vv. 40-42). He illustrates this warning with people simply going about their daily lives. Listen to what He says:

Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Jesus is telling us that His return will be an ordinary day. We will be going about our business, and boom, He splits the sky and comes back on the clouds.

It won't be like these dystopian movies and novels, where the main character gets up one morning and notices something will happen that day. You won't get up one morning with your spider senses tingling and think Jesus is coming back today.

Friends, the signs we need to help us prepare for Jesus' return have already been given. Now, we must heed the exhortations and be ready.

Warning #4: Be vigilant and watchful! (vv. 43-44)

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.⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus is calling us to be alert and anticipate His return. In v. 43, He says, "Stay awake," but He doesn't mean we should never sleep.

He illustrates His warning by saying that if you knew when the thief would show up and rob, you would stay awake and stop him. You would set up some home cameras so you could catch him in the act. You would be intentional and make a plan to call the cops as soon as you see him.

But here's the practical question with this exhortation: *How do we stay awake and alert as we anticipate Jesus' return?* The writer of Hebrews gives practical advice to local churches to help us *stay awake* and be *alert* as we wait. He writes in Hebrews 10:23-25,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

So, how do we stay awake and alert? First, we *hold fast* to our confession of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We keep reminding ourselves of the gospel. We preach to ourselves that Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. He is alive and in Heaven at God's right hand, and He will return.

Second, we stay engaged in our gospel community and challenge each other to walk faithfully with Jesus. We don't neglect meeting together as believers.

So, when someone strays from the church and stops attending worship services or our Gospel Life Groups, we go after them. Not because we want to micromanage their lives but because we love them and Jesus has given us a duty to care for one another.

Third, we encourage one another to remain faithful because we expect Jesus to return any day now. We build one another up in love and in the word of God. We remind each other that Jesus is coming soon, and we are closer to Jesus' return today than yesterday.

Warning #5: Live faithfully for Jesus (vv. 45-51). His last warning contrasts the wise and faithful servant with the wicked servant.

Jesus warns in the form of parables. In them, Jesus sets before us a positive example that results in reward and a negative example that results in judgment.

He begins by asking: *Who is the faithful and wise servant in vv. 45-47?* Well, he is the elect from v. 31. Those whom God has chosen are the faithful and wise servants. Look at what Jesus says:

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? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Look closely at the faithful and wise servant. Who is he? As I mentioned, he is the elect child of God from v. 31, whom God has given some responsibility. God has saved him by grace through faith, and now God has given him good works to carry out while he waits for Jesus' return.

The faithful and wise servant loves His Master and serves Him as if He is present with him. In all that he does, he honors his Jesus by obeying His word and the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter when the Master returns because he is always ready. He lives to carry out His Master's will. It is his duty to obey, but it is also his delight.

So, what does the Master do when he returns? He will reward that servant. Jesus says He will put him over all of His possessions. I don't know exactly what this will look like after Jesus returns. We must be careful not to read too much into parables, but what Jesus says here is consistent with other teachings in Scripture, where God's faithful people will be rewarded at the end of the age.

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:3 that God's people will judge angels:

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

In 2 Timothy 4:8, the Apostle Paul talks about receiving a crown of righteousness after faithfully doing all the Lord wanted him to do in His life.

I don't know how all these things will play out or what they will look like in the end, but what I see is that Jesus will reward His faithful servants.

Finally, the faithful servant is set in contrast to the wicked servant in vv. 48-51, whose life ends quite differently.

But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The wicked servant only pretended to follow Jesus, giving lip service to him. His faith was demonic, as the Book of James calls it. His faith didn't produce any good works. The wicked servant's end is to be judged and numbered with the hypocrites.

So, think about it. The Master was *delayed*. The Greek word for “*delay*” means that he was gone a long time. This delay resulted in the wicked servant showing his true colors.

Yet, for the faithful servant, the Master’s delay had the opposite effect. It resulted in continued perseverance and faithfulness, giving him the opportunity to live out his faith in Jesus.

Here’s the deal: Friends, we are justified by faith alone, but genuine faith in Jesus is never alone. Good works always accompany it.

False faith or imitation faith is shallow and only for show. It is like the seed in the soil that received the gospel with joy. It put its roots down quickly but not deeply. Then, when the sun came out and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things pressed on the plant, it choked the plant. It withered and died because it didn’t have a genuine root of faith. It had a pretend faith.

Friends, this is the wicked servant at the end of age. His house is built on sand and not the Rock of Jesus. The wicked servant is never ready for Jesus to return. He would love to know exactly when Jesus would return so he could clean up his life just before then, but that won’t happen. Jesus’ delay has left him exposed as a fraud. He does what he does because he loves what he loves.

As a result, there is no reward for this servant. Ultimately, he is thrown into the outer darkness with the other posers who pretended to love Jesus. In that place, they will be tormented for all eternity.

Friends, Jesus gave us these five warnings or exhortations to wake us up and make us alert and diligent about living faithful and fruitful lives for Christ. He gave us these warnings to cause us to examine our lives to make sure of our election and calling as His children.

Jesus’ pastoral counsel calls us to examine our lives. Jesus says in Revelation 16:15,

“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”

Jesus shows us that there are two ways to live. We can live awake and alive to Christ, or, like the wicked servant, we can be spiritually exposed when we stand before Him.

Do you know what Jesus did so that you may be saved? He exposed Himself by taking on our sins upon Himself and dying our death on the cross. He was exposed before Almighty God, who judged Jesus for our sins. He paid for our sins by His death on the cross, was buried, and rose victoriously from the dead on the third day. By our faith in Him and the repentance of our sin we are made alive to Christ.

Here’s the question: So, are you alive to Jesus? Jesus is calling you to Himself this morning. He doesn’t just give us these warnings and walk away mad as if He is through waiting on us. He is not done waiting. He is delaying His return so that you will come to Him.