

Watch-Be Ready!

[Olivet Discourse](#) Sermon #11 of 14, March 8, 1998

By [David Curtis](#)

[Matthew 24:42-51](#)

As we come to the close of Matthew 24, the Lord gives his disciples a parable to push home the truth of their need to "watch" for His coming. Remember, the Lord is here talking to his disciples, they have asked Him questions concerning; the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, His parousia and the end of the Jewish age. Their question was basically two fold; when will these things happen and what signs will precede them? Jesus has given them several signs; He told them that the gospel would be preached in all the world (vs. 14), He told them that they would see the "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel (vs. 15), He told them that they would see the great tribulation (vs.21), and that they would see the collapse of the heaven and earth of Jerusalem (vs. 29), thus ending the Jewish age and manifesting the parousia of Christ. Jesus told them that all these things would happen in their generation.

Matthew 24:34 (NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

A generation was about 40 years, so they knew that the Lord would return in their life time, but they did not know the "day or the hour," as Jesus told them in:

Matthew 24:36 (NKJV) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Because they did not know the day or hour, they were to always be ready and watching.

Matthew 24:42 (NKJV) "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

In light of His coming in judgment on Jerusalem, Jesus cautions His disciples to "watch." This exhortation to watch is not given to us, twentieth century Christians, but to them, first century Christians. We must understand this or we will never understand what our Lord is saying here.

The word "watch" is the Greek word *gregoreuo*.. It means to keep awake, i.e. watch (lit. or fig.)--be vigilant. It is in the present imperative, meaning "to be constantly on guard." Would it make sense for Jesus to urge His disciples "to be constantly on guard" for something that was not to take place for another 2,000 years or so? Some think so. Cook said, "The use of the second person does not necessarily imply, as Meyer maintains, that our Lord represents His presence in judgment as coming during the lifetime of the disciples. They, like the rest of mankind, are to be kept in ignorance of that day: this very ignorance is to be the ground of their watchfulness: and it is equally their duty, and that of all men, to watch, whether the day is fixed in God's counsels within their own lifetime or not."

I think the second person does imply that he was speaking to the disciples, but we don't need an implication, we have plenty of clear evidence that He was to come during the lifetime of the disciples.

Matthew 16:27-28 (NKJV) "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Their Lord had told them that He would come in their lifetime, but they did not know the day or hour so they (first century Christians) were to always be watching. Since we know the day was fixed in their lifetime, it was that generation and that generation alone that was to be watching. They were to be watching for His coming in judgment upon that wicked city of Jerusalem. Israel's house was to be destroyed. Christians who were watching could escape the judgment on the city by fleeing from it, as their Lord had instructed them.

Matthew 24:15-18 (NKJV) "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 "Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

The lives of those early Christians were dependant upon their watchfulness. They were to be watching for their Lord's coming in judgment upon apostate Israel. Before we go any further, let me ask you a question, "Who was to be watching?" Christians! Isn't that who the Lord was talking to?

Matthew 24:43-44 (NKJV) "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

This comparison of the Lord's coming with that of a thief in the night is found in several places in the New Testament. As we look at these different texts, please take note of who is being addressed.

The apostle exhorts to be always ready for the coming of Christ in judgment, which will be with suddenness and surprise.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 (NKJV) But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

Who is he speaking to? "Brethren" or Christians. How did they know this? Their Lord had told them this in the sermon on mount Olive. The phrase "**day of the Lord**" is an expression taken from the Old Testament, and was used many times as regards to the judgments and destruction of various nations. It usually meant a time when God, Himself, would punish or judge people by the means of armies of other people. The invading armies of other nations brought judgment and destruction upon various nations, and these times were each called "the day of the Lord," when they were proclaimed of the Lord.

While the various references to "the day of the Lord" in the Old Testament referred to various nations, the reference in all such expressions in the New Testament are to that "day of the Lord" in AD 70, when the nation Israel was destroyed. So, the phrase "**The day of the Lord**" refers to Jerusalem's destruction by the Roman armies, and Paul here says that it will come "**as a thief in the night**." We can see by comparing the Thessalonian passage with Matthew 24 that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in AD 70 and the coming of the Lord are synonymous events.

1 Thessalonians 5: 3-4 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. **4** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Notice the difference here between the "you" and the "they." "*They* say," "destruction comes upon *them*," "*they* shall not escape," "but you, brethren." The Lord is a thief in the night only to those who are not watching. Therefore, the Christians are admonished to watch.

1 Thessalonians 5:6 (NKJV) Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

Peter uses this same idea of the Lord coming as a thief in the night:

2 Peter 3:10 (NKJV) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

So, Jesus used it, Paul used it, Peter used it, and John uses it in quoting Jesus:

Revelation 3:3 (NKJV) "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Notice what Jesus says, He comes as a thief if they are not watching.

Revelation 16:15 (NKJV) "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

Again, we see Christ coming as a thief and the blessedness of those watching.

Common in all of these passages is the idea of suddenness and unexpectedness of the coming, and consequently, the danger of unpreparedness on the part of those first century saints who saw the promise of His parousia fulfilled.

The idea of a thief, with us, means one who takes goods without doing violence, secretly, silently. The original word means one who does it by housebreaking, or by highway violence. Jesus had told them he was coming, and they were to be expecting it and prepared for it. If a man knows the approximate time a thief may come to break into his house, he takes precautions and prepares accordingly.

Let me illustrate: When I was in youth work, several of the teens would come by my house in the middle of the night and cover my trees with toilet paper. The precious little darlings would also take the wood from my wood pile and spread it all over my yard. These little visits of theirs would take me some time to clean up. This happened on several occasions. To say the least, I was not too thrilled with their expression of love. One night before a big youth activity, I received an anonymous phone call from someone telling me that the teens were going to TP my house that night. I was thrilled! I waited up all night in the front bedroom ready for their arrival. Every time I heard a car, I would look and see if it was them. I fell asleep a couple of times but I woke up at each sound I heard. I was ready for their coming. But they never came. That morning, as the teens were arriving for the activity and getting on the bus, one of the teens said to me with a big smirk on his face, "Did you get a good nights sleep last night?" I could have killed him. Well, let me say that the Lord is not like those kids. He was not pulling a prank on the first century saints. He told them

to watch because He was going to come in their generation and destroy Jerusalem and the Old covenant system.

In verse 44, the Lord says to His disciples, "Therefore you also be ready, (just like a man who knows a thief is coming is ready) for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. The Greek word for ready is *hetoimos*, from an old noun *heteos* (fitness); adjusted, i.e. ready:--prepared. Luke puts this same warning this way:

Luke 21:34-36 (NKJV) "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

They were to always be watching and praying that they would be able to escape the coming judgment of Jerusalem.

To drive home the need of watchfulness, the Lord gives His disciples a parable to contrast the difference there would be between those who were watching and those who were not.

Matthew 24:45-51 (NKJV) "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? 46 "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 "Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 48 "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' 49 "and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 "the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, 51 "and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This parable intensifies the need to "watch." The contrast is extreme! Those who are faithful servants are blessed and put in charge of all the master's goods. Those who are not faithful are cut in half. That is a strong contrast.

Let me say a word here about parables. A parable is a brief story or narrative drawn from human life or from nature, not relating to some actual event, but true to life and concerning something very familiar to the listeners, given for the purpose of teaching "a" spiritual truth. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The etymological meaning of the word parable is "a placing alongside of" for the purpose of comparison.

The intention of parabolic teaching is given by Christ in [Matthew 13: 11-17](#). First, it is a method of teaching the responsive disciple. The second intent of parabolic teaching was to hide the truth from the unresponsive, and so aid in the hardening of their heart as they continuously rebelled against God.

Bernard Ramm, in his book, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, says, "The golden rule of parabolic interpretation is -- Determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to teach. Practically all writers on the subject mention it with stress." Dodd says, "The typical parable presents one single point of comparison, the details are not intended to have independent significance." Others have put the rule this way: Don't make a parable walk on all fours. So, our objective, as we study this parable, is to find its one central message.

It should be clear that this parable is an amplification of one word which our Lord gave to his disciples, after he had outlined the course of events. He said to them, "**Watch!**" That word is stressed throughout this whole passage. It is the one command Jesus gives to those that are waiting for his coming. This parable tells us what it means to watch. What did our Lord mean when he said, "*Watch?*" Our Lord did not mean that they were to be standing forever gazing up into the heavens, like an air raid sentry on duty. He meant that they were to live a life of faithfulness to His commands. The word "then" indicates the connection with the preceding verses; as if to say, "such readiness implies faithfulness." The ever present anticipation of His return was to keep them faithful in the midst of the apostasy that surrounded them. Lang says, "Watching is here indicated in its concrete form, as fidelity to the calling."

In this parable, we have a household whose master is away and the household is waiting for him to return. The master has appointed certain servants and given them responsibility during the time of his absence. The only activity mentioned is that of feeding the household. These servants have the primary and important task of feeding the household at the proper time. That is the first essential, then, in watching. Watching included feeding and being fed by the Word of God. This is most obvious in the parable, is it not? The household must be fed the Word of God or they will, out of ignorance, turn back to Judaism and would thus be destroyed in its fall. That is basic, fundamental. If they do not eat, they will not survive, they will perish. They can do nothing else until they have established their health and strength by eating. To feed the flock of God, was the primary responsibility of the church's leaders.

John 21:15-17 (NKJV) So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

Acts 20:28 (NKJV) "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 (NKJV) Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

As the early church was taught the truth of the New Covenant, they were being protected from apostasy.

The Word of God is truth. It is the unveiling of reality. It is the revelation of the way things really are. Thus, if you are going to live, you have got to know what life is all about, to know the way things really are. That is why the word of truth is also food. It is referred to as such in many places in Scripture: In his first letter, Peter exhorts us:

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV) as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

There is a certain quality about the Word of God that is like milk to a baby: it feeds and establishes life. In another place, Paul mentions the strong meat of the word:

Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

It touches everything. You never can understand life unless you understand the Word of God. Paul told Timothy that in order to prevent apostasy, he was to continue in doctrine:

1 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

1 Timothy 4:13-16 (NKJV) Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Timothy was to **save** himself and his hearers from **apostasy** by continuing in the Word. The faithful servants are those who were involved in teaching the truth of Scripture.

Notice that the faithful servants are blessed. Because of their faithfulness, they are made rulers over all the master's goods. We see this principle fleshed out in the life of many Old Testament saints. Joseph is just one example of this.

Genesis 39:4 (NKJV) So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.

And not only Joseph, but David, Daniel, and Esther became more than subjects under their respective masters.

This parable was to the first century disciples in view of the coming of the Lord, but it applies to us in that God also calls us to be faithful, and that faithfulness comes through being students of His Word. The truth that God rewards faithful service, still applies to us also. As we spend time in His Word we will be strengthened in our faithfulness, and thus be rewarded by our Lord.

In contrast to the faithful servant, there is the **unfaithful servant**.

Matthew 24:48-51 (NKJV) "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' 49 "and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 "the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, 51 "and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Notice that the evil slave says, "My master is delaying his coming." The evil slave then proceeds to "beat his fellow-slaves and eat and drink with drunkards." But to the surprise of the "evil slave," the master returned when he least suspected. The master did not return to cut the evil slave's distant relatives in pieces; he cut *him* in pieces. The evil slave was alive when the master left, and he was alive when the master returned. In this context, "delaying his coming" must be measured against a person's lifetime. In context, two years could be considered a long time if the master usually returned within six months. It is not hard to imagine that the passage of several decades would lead

some to doubt the reliability of the prophecy, especially as the promised generation was coming to a close. The horrendous events of A.D. 70 silenced those who thought his delay would go on.

This unfaithful servant fails to feed the household of God. The Lord tells us what happens. He begins to beat them. He indulges his own appetite to extremes, eats and drinks with the drunken. When the master returns, he finds the man failing in his primary task, and he is destroyed. He is cut in two.

This is quite a contrast to the blessing received by the faithful servant. The one was ready, watching and faithful. The other was not ready, not watching and unfaithful.

Who is this unfaithful servant?

Many say it represents an unbeliever and their punishment in hell. But does that fit the context? Who is told to watch? Are unbelievers told to watch? No, it is believers who are to watch for His coming. In Matthew 24, we know that the Lord is talking to His disciples. But notice what Luke adds:

Luke 12:39-41 (NKJV) "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 40 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. 41 Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"

The Lord doesn't really answer Peter; He goes on and gives the parable that we are looking at in Matthew. But Mark says:

Mark 13:33-37 (NKJV) "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 "It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; 36 "lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

So we see that Jesus is addressing all believers when he says, "watch." He warns them not to get caught sleeping, but to be watching. The idea of sleeping is not to be taken literally. I think the idea is that of morally sleeping; not being faithful to the Word of God. This idea is seen many places in the New Testament.

Ephesians 5:1-3 (NKJV) Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Here, Paul is exhorting the believers to walk in love. Walk is speaking of their **conduct**. They are to put away sin and walk in holiness.

3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;

They are to do this because they are light and they are to live as children of light.

Ephesians 5:8 (NKJV) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

They are light. That is their **position**, their identity. Because of who they are, they are to walk as children of light. That is to be their **practice**.

Ephesians 5:14-17 (NKJV) Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The Greek word used here for sleep is *katheudo*, to lie down to rest, i.e. (by impl.) to fall asleep (lit. or fig.). This is the same word used in Mark. This is a call for believers to "watch," to awake out of sleep. He is speaking about their conduct. They are to wake up and be careful how they walk, that is speaking of their practical lives. Notice also:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 (KJV) But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Again, he affirms their identity, their position, they are children of light; and because of that they are to stay awake.

1 Thessalonians 5: 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

"Therefore"- because of who we are. The word "sleep" here is *katheudo* and the word "watch" is *gregoreuo*. These are the same words that our Lord used in the parable of the unfaithful servant. It is believers who are not to sleep.

1 Thessalonians 5: 7-9 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

The wrath, here, is not speaking of Hell, but the destruction of Jerusalem that they can escape if they watch. Notice carefully, what he says in the next verse:

1 Thessalonians 5:10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

Who did the Lord die for? His elect! These are the same Greek words; if they wake or sleep, they will still live together with Jesus Christ. The difference is that if they sleep, they will suffer great harm physically.

Revelation 3:3 (KJV) Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

The word "if" is a third class condition - maybe you will and maybe you won't. If those in Sardis did not watch, Christ would come to them as a thief, speaking of judgment. If they watched, His coming would not take them by surprise.

Let's go back to our text and see what happens to the unfaithful servant.

Matthew 24:51 (KJV) And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

He is cut asunder- that is physical punishment. It doesn't say he is a hypocrite, but that he shares in their punishment. Many see the weeping and gnashing of teeth as a reference to hell. I think it is a picture of the pain and torment that was experienced in the Jewish war in AD 70. In Luke's version of the parable of the unfaithful servant, he records Jesus as saying this:

Luke 12:49 (KJV) I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?

The fire the Lord kindled is on earth. He is referring to judgment at the hand of the Romans. Each time this phrase is used it is used in relation to Israel and their punishment for rejecting Christ. Their city was burned, destroyed forever.

Matthew 8:12 (NKJV) "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 22:13 (NKJV) "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 24:51 (NKJV) "and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:30 (NKJV) 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Luke 13:28 (NKJV) "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

In this closing section, Jesus is again stressing the need to watch and be ready for his coming. When they see the signs approaching, they are to flee. He is warning them that if they turn back to the decaying system of the Old Covenant, they will greatly suffer for it: "*Remember Lot's wife*" (Luke 17:32). He would come in their lifetime and bring destruction on Jerusalem. If they were faithful and watched, they could escape.

All of this underscores the importance of feeding on and knowing the word. That is the whole thrust of this parable, it is what our Lord wants to emphasize. What does the Word of God accomplish that makes it so absolutely, fundamentally, necessary?

The Word of God reveals Jesus Christ as the savior of all who will put their trust in Him. And it thus strengthens and refreshes the human spirit. That is its primary purpose. If it does nothing else than that, it has achieved its major task. It is not to give us information, primarily; it is to help us to see a Person, the Lord Jesus. What the Son says to us is the ultimate revelation of life. To see the Son, through the medium of the word, is to find your own heart attracted and drawn to this

marvelous personality, this magnificent One, this spotless, unsullied Son of God, in all the magnificence of his strength and greatness. That is the Bible's primary purpose. When you read it, read it for that. Read it to find Christ, because he is on every page of the Old and the New Testament. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on March 8, 1998.