

WATCH! JESUS IS COMING VERY SOON!

INTRO: On December 21, my son-in-law and I walked the short trail through the brightly moon-lit forest to the log cabin overlooking the lake. It was a gorgeous evening. It was -27 degrees cold. The trees were loaded with snow and the moonlight was so bright it made the shadows of the trees look dark and the snow like light, as it sparkled in the brightness of moon-light. We lit the lantern in the cabin and stoked the fire in the little pot bellied heater and drank coffee while the little heater glowed red, as it worked frantically to dispel the cold from inside. The windows sparkled with cold. Outside the bright moon lit up the lake. It was about 10:30 in the evening.

Why were we there? That night, for the first time in my life I would see a 'blood moon'. It was the first time in nearly 400 years that a blood moon would happen on the shortest day of the year. Many who were aware of this event wondered what the meaning of this blood moon would be? Would Jesus perhaps come now? But we were not there because the chance of Christ's return was any greater on that night than on any other night. We were there to witness this event.

And shortly after 11:30, precisely as announced, the shadow of earth began to touch the edge of the moon. And when the earth's shadow covered the moon the refracted light of the sun turned the moon to blood. It did remind one of the words of Peter in Acts 2:20, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord."

Just before He was crucified, in His last great discourse, Jesus shared with His disciples what lay ahead for mankind before He returned at the end of the age. The disciples had asked Him three questions. You see, as they walked from the temple mount to the mount of Olives, He told them what was to happen in the time that lay before them. And then when they were up on the Mount of Olives, they asked Him when all these things He had told them about would happen. Then they asked Him what the sign of His appearing would be. And lastly they asked Him what would be the sign of the end of the age. And Jesus, patiently answered all three questions.

Matthew 24-25 took place early during the Passover week, just a few days before He was crucified. And in these two

chapters Jesus opens a large window into the future and says, "Come and look. This is what is to come yet." The verses we are to look at this morning are 24:42-44. So I want to begin by giving us the context of these verses.

I. THE CONTEXT OF THE ILLUSTRATION

In my understanding of these two chapters, Matthew 24-25, Jesus answers the disciples three great questions of 24:3. The disciples had said to Him, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and what will be the sign of the end of the age?" They wanted to know when the things He had spoken of would happen. Then they wanted to know what would be the sign of His coming. And last, they wanted to know what would be the sign of the end of the age.

His return is called, in the Greek language, His 'parousia'. His parousia literally means 'His presence'. It is this word that is used in Matthew 24:3 as 'His coming'. Vine's dictionary says of this word, "When used of the return of Christ, at the Rapture of the Church, it signifies, not merely His momentary coming for His saints but His presence with them from that moment until His revelation and manifestation to the world." It is my understanding of this Olivet discourse, that in verses 42-44 we are in the midst of His discussion of His return for the Church. Now some of you may be aware that other premillennialists, even those who hold to a pre-tribulational return teach that Jesus was not here referring to the rapture but His coming at the end of the tribulation. Let me just say I am aware of the teaching and cannot see it that way.

Here is how I see this discourse. I see Matthew 24:4-8 as speaking of what it will be like in the world before the tribulation. Many will say they are Christ. We have had that for some time already. Furthermore, Jesus said we would hear of wars and rumors of wars, but the end is not yet. Then He prophecies that there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. Certainly we are all aware that we are seeing these things unfold today.

Then, beginning in verse 8, He tells them what it will be like in the tribulation and by verse 15, we are in the middle of the tribulation (read). By verse 29, the tribulation comes to a close and then we have the second coming of Jesus Christ, when He comes down to earth to set up His kingdom (read 29-31). Then in verse 32 He says that when we see all these things we know it is near. Luke tells us it is when we see all these things 'begin' to come to pass. Well, the beginning of these things we find in verses 4-8. It is when many are saying they are Christ, and wars and rumors of wars, and pestilences and famines and earthquakes are happening. We are seeing these things begin to come to pass, and so we know His coming, His presence is near. That presence begins at the rapture, as I understand it.

Then in verses 36-39 it tells us Jesus coming will be like the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until the flood came and took them all away. This is how it will be when He returns. I am familiar with the view that some pre-tribulational teachers hold that this refers to the end of the tribulation. I do not think that is possible. I believe what this means is that when Jesus comes, it will be life as usual. And then, when life is as usual, suddenly, as in the days of Noah when the rain came, Christ comes for His own. Hardly a soul is aware of the momentous event that is about to happen. Life is as usual and suddenly Christ will appear.

So let us read verses 40-41 (read). This is how it will be when Christ comes for His bride. Again, I understand there are various views. I believe this speaks of when Christ comes for His Church. Now all of this gives us the earlier context. It is this that brings us to our text and we want to consider first the command in this text.

II. THE COMMAND IN THE ILLUSTRATION

Now let me draw your attention to the command as found in verse 42. It is simply this, "Watch!" Now note that the word to 'watch' is followed by the word 'therefore'. "Watch therefore..." Why should we watch? Because we do not know precisely when He will

come! Two will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore. Why? You might be left when Christ comes to take His bride! Is that not the message of the ten virgins also? That is why the 'therefore' is there for. He tells us this in the very next words. He said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

Now I ask you, why are we to watch? Is it because if we are not looking into the sky at the moment when He comes, we will be lost? So we have to keep looking up? No, I do not believe that is the reason. I believe it is this. If we fail to watch and to be spiritually active and to be waiting for His return, we might drift away and get caught up with the things of this world, and we could get side tracked and end up being left behind when one is taken!

Now how does a person get side tracked? Turn with me to Matthew 13 (read 3-9). It is my view, though questioned by others, that in Matthew 13, we have the Church age pictured in parables. Here Jesus shows us what it will be like in the age in which we live. This particular parable Jesus interpreted and from His interpretation we understand what He intended to be understood.

You see, the one who received the word on the hard pathway, picturing a hard heart, is the one who hears it; doesn't understand it and does nothing about it and the devil comes and snatches it away. But the one who received it in a stony heart, he hears the word and receives it and is filled with joy. But a little persecution or a few hardships, and he is offended, and he stumbles and goes down for the count. He wants a Christianity that does not cost.

But I want us to look especially at the one who receives the word among the thorns (read 22). In this verse lie the dangers we constantly face. Do you remember what Joshua, the Christian from Ethiopia told us this past fall at our missions conference? He said, "If you can live as a Christian in Canada, you can live as a Christian anywhere."

Here is a Christian, sidetracked by the cares of this world. What are those? Making a living. Work. A

house. A car. Clothing. Food etc... We are not talking about sin as such. We are talking about legitimate things gone awry. We are immersed in this danger. Then our church time is robbed. Our Bible reading is robbed. Our prayer life is robbed. Then we get into non-essentials like sports. Not too many years ago, it was not allowed to do organized sports on Sunday. Now we do not even know such laws existed. We see nothing wrong with it. We let our spiritual life be robbed by such every day things. If we expected Jesus any day, we might change our life-style. What is the danger here? Is it because these things are sin? No. It is because we let these lull us to sleep and soon spiritual things lose their importance. Watch! Watch!

But, the second thing mentioned here is the deceitfulness of riches. Why are riches so deceitful? Because I need just a little more. If I only had so or so much more, then I could give time to the kingdom of God. Just give me a little more time and a little more money and I will have enough. Then I will bear fruit. I would talk to others about Jesus but I will be able to do a lot more as soon as I have a little more. The de-ceit-ful-ness of riches. Oh how deceiving. Always promising much, but producing so very little!

Oh how deceitful riches are. And how are riches so deceptive? The word translated *riches* comes from the word meaning 'to fill'. It speaks of when something is accomplished or filled. I am rich when this or that is full. When I have enough. And when do I have enough? When it is full. Well, when is what full? Oh, when I have accomplished this or that or when I have just a little more. When I have just a little more; it always needs just a little more. Did I need that second job? Oh yes? For what? So I'll have just a little more. Days eat weeks and weeks turn into months and months give way to years, and then I am 40 or 50 and still, I need just a little more. And when I have a little more, I will retire early and then I will do mission work.

And then, when I have a little more, or maybe even before, then I find myself caught by the third hook in this kind of soil. Now I am tired and need some

R&R. Thank You Lord for blessing me, but Lord I am so tired I need some R&R. Jesus said we needed rest. I just want to have some pleasure now. The Gospel of Mark adds that there is yet one more thing that chokes the believer from becoming fruitful. He says, "...and the lusts (or desires) of other things entering in choke the word." Luke spells out a little more clearly what that means. He says it is not only the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches, but it is the pleasures of this life as well, that choke out the Word.

The word translated pleasures, is *hedonee*. We get several English words from this word and you may recognize them. The word *hedonic* means that which pertains to pleasure. The word *hedonism* speaks of a view of life that has pleasure as its main pursuit. The word *hedonism* speaks of one who views pleasure as the chief goal of life. The pleasures of this life can lead us off the path.

Now come with me to the farmer's field of Matthew 13. Do you see that thorn bush over there? Do you see that pale shriveled stock of grain, desperately reaching for some moisture, but the thorn's root is there already. This thorn bush, the thorn of the cares of this life, doesn't look bad. It got almost all the nurture of the wheat stock which could never quite get enough. Then of course there is the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches. Just a little more. And if all of those, after years of toil, have been taken care of, it is time for rest. See that healthy thorn bush, and the skinny, pale, small-headed stock of grain sticking out? And then we take out our hymnbook and sing, "Work for the night is coming..."

What is our constant danger? We may forget to watch. We are to be alert to the possibility of Christ's return at any moment. What is the danger? Just let any one of these things take over, and the end result is an unfruitful life at best, and to be led off the track entirely at worst, so that one is taken, and the other left, and that other one could well be me if I fail to watch.

So, the command given by none other than the Lord Jesus here is that we are to watch. If we fail to be

on guard and begin to live unfaithfully, one will be taken and other left. The warning is very solemn.

I ask you, are you spiritually active? Is the Bible a living word to you? Do you search it and hunger for His Word? Or have the things of earth distracted you? Watch! That is the command here. We are to live in such a way as to expect the Lord at any moment.

III. THE CONTENT OF THE ILLUSTRATION

Well, the command of this passage is to watch. The reason for that command is because when the Lord comes, the one who is ready will be taken, and the one who is not ready will be left. This warning is given because nobody knows when the Lord will come. That is what this passage says. We are to always watch and guard our spiritual lives, because we do not know when Jesus is coming.

Jesus now gives us an illustration regarding the fact that we need to be ready at all times because we do not know when He is coming. He said, "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." Now, maybe you say, "Listen, the Bible teaches that the Lord will come in the middle of the tribulation. I am watching. When I hear of a peace pact made in Israel for seven years, I will know that it is only 3 ½ years until Jesus comes." Or you say, "The Bible teaches Jesus will come at the end of the tribulation. I will not be caught by surprise. When Israel will make a peace pact for seven years, I know it will be seven years and Jesus will come. I will be ready."

I want you to listen again to the illustration Jesus gives. "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." The very warning Jesus gives here is that we cannot know when He is coming. We are not instructed to be on guard some day after this or that happens. We are to be on guard when there are no signs. That is why we were not concerned that Christ might come during the blood moon any more than we

were before or after that. We are to always be on our guard.

A number of people have said to me, "I think it is not so important what view I hold about the end time. What is important is that I am ready." But I ask you, what does Jesus tell us is the thing that keeps us ready? Is it not our watching? And I ask what it was Jesus used to show us that we should be ready at all times? Is it not the fact that He might come at any time? So, if you hold to a view that says Jesus is coming some time after the tribulation begins, I know one thing about you. You do not expect Him today. Nor do you expect Him any time very soon.

And furthermore, Jesus' illustration says that if the master of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have watched. Why is Jesus return likened to a thief? Does it not seem a little incongruous? Why does He use this illustration? Because His coming is like a thief, and any thief that wants to stay in business more than once, knows he must come when he is not expected. The one thing Jesus wants us to know about His 'parousia' is that it will be unexpected. What that means is we must be ready at all times.

Furthermore, we are warned to watch for His coming. It does not warn us to watch for the coming of antichrist. If Christ is to come after the antichrist comes, we need only to wait until the antichrist comes and we then still have quite a bit of time. That is not much of an incentive to be watchful. We are never warned to be watchful because we do not know when antichrist comes. It is Christ's coming that is like a thief.

You see, there are no signs for a thief's coming. How fruitful would the life of a thief be if he pinned up a notice that said, "I will come to break into your house August 4th at 7 p.m."? Well, what if he sent a note and said, "I will break into your house sometime in August"? We would watch all of August, day and night. You see, when a thief comes, he comes unexpectedly. That is the nature of thieves. They do like to stay out of prison. To stay in business they

must not be caught, and to not get caught their move must always be unexpected.

So look at verse 44 (read). "Therefore..." Wherefore? Because a thief comes at an unexpected time, "Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him." So, how are we to live in light of this? We should say, "Well, life is as usual. Things are quite normal. It does not look like Jesus will come just yet for a while. So, because the Bible has said He will come when we do not expect Him, therefore I will prepare myself just in case He comes today. I have been told to be ready because He will come when we do not expect Him. That is now, so I will be ready."

CONCL: So let me close with a little story. It took place at the beginning of World War I. On August 1, 1914, Sir Ernest Shackleton left East India docks from England on an expedition to reach the South Pole. By Christmas day, 1914, they are in heavy ice pack in the Weddell Sea. Six months after leaving home, on January 18, 1915, their ship was frozen in the ice and they were stuck. For 9 long months they remained in the ship, frozen in the ice. Over a year after they left home, they were finally forced to abandon the ship because it was too dangerous to stay in it any longer. Then, in another month the ship broke up from the frost and slipped to the bottom of the Weddell Sea.

They had kept three life boats which they pulled over the ice for some time, as they tried to make for land. Then in April, 1916, almost 2 years after they left home the ice broke up and once more they were afloat, only this time with 27 men in 3 small life boats. After a few days of sailing in the lifeboats in the ice berg infested sea, with huge swells and high winds, they reached Elephant Island. The rock walls were so steep and the winds so strong they had a very difficult time finding a place where they could put ashore.

There they regained some strength eating seals and penguins and on April 24, Sir Ernest Shackleton left Elephant Island in a life boat to sail 750 treacherous miles of open, ice cold, sea water. The odds of reaching King Haakon Bay, their destination, where the Stromsness whaling station was still in operation, were almost insurmountable. But on May

the 21, bedraggled and hardly enough strength to even walk, and no supplies left, they arrived at the whaling station.

The very next day, Shackleton set out to secure a boat to rescue the 21 other men of his team from Elephant Island. Three times Shackleton set out in borrowed ships only to be beat back by the angry ice packs. For the stranded men on Elephant Island the hopes of rescue were dying. They had expected a rescue team could arrive within a month after Shackleton left, which was April. It was now August, 2 years after they left home. On August the 17 one diary reads: The ice has put in reappearance. On August the 18, Greenstreet, one of the waiting men records: Both bays are full of pack ice and heavy pack ice as far as the eye can see. On August the 19 Orde Lees records: There is no good in deceiving ourselves any longer.

Then on August the 25, over 2 years after they left England, after three failed attempts, Shackleton was able to secure another ship, the Yelcho, a Chilean ship. It was made of steel and not good for ice and he promises not to take her into the ice. Five days later, Worsley, who had been their navigator all the way writes, 5.25 A.M. Full speed.. 11:10...base of land faintly visible. Threading our way between lumps of ice, reefs and grounded bergs. 1.10 P.M. Sight the camp to the SW..." On this day, which started nice and clear in the morning but which had now turned ugly, each man has made his way up the hill to see if a ship has come. Of course they did not expect one and were no longer disappointed when they did not see one. At noon, one of the men, Marston, went to do some thumbnail sketches and there, in the bay was Shackleton's borrowed ship!

Back at camp the men were just having lunch and heard Marston coming on the run. They thought it was because he was late for boiled seal backbone, one of their delicacies. Then he opened the flap and said in breathless voice, "Hadh't we better send up some smoke signals?" It took a moment for the men to catch on and when they did, they all caught it at the same time and the literally tore out of their humble makeshift abode, shredding their precious door on the way. The excitement on shore was indescribable as these grown men giggled out of control. Shackleton had returned!

One of the accounts of this story says that Shackleton asked them, "How were you ready so quickly?" These stranded

sailors told him that every morning their leader rolled up his sleeping bag saying, "Get your things ready, boys, the boss may be here today." The return of the Lord is much more sure than Shackleton's return to Elephant Island and the call to be ready to go is of much greater consequence.

You see, for Shackleton's men, stranded on Elephant Island, at such a time as they thought not, Shackleton returned. That is how it will be when Jesus comes. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour Jesus is coming!