

# THE LORD'S RETURN AND THE BELIEVER'S DUTY: WATCH, BE READY, BE FAITHFUL AND WISE MATHEW 24:42–51

## *Introduction*

It is most important to remember that this was Christ's last week on earth. This was His last chance to teach the disciples. All that He said was of critical importance and, out of necessity, must be clear and pointed. He had led the disciples to ask two intriguing questions: "When will the temple [or Jerusalem] be destroyed? and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Mat. 24:3).

These two chapters, Mathew 24 and 25, deal with three great subjects. All three subjects lay out in the future as Christ discussed them.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem (Mat 24:3; see Mat 24:2).
2. The Lord's return (Mat 24:3).
3. The end of the world (Mat 24:3).

A quick glance at the first four verses will show the events that led Jesus to deal with the great prophecies covered by these chapters.

1. The disciples admire the temple's magnificence and draw Jesus' attention to its beauty (Mat 24:1). The temple was magnificent. It sat upon the towering summit of Mount Sion. It was built of white marble plated with gold. The temple was a massive structure that could hold thousands of people (cp. Acts 4:4 where five thousand men were saved among a crowd which probably numbered many thousands more). The temple had several porches such as Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch. Each porch was supported with huge towering pillars, each one so large that it took three to four men reaching arm to arm to reach around it. The temple was a striking sight, one of the building wonders of the world. The disciples apparently stood some place where the temple in all its magnificent beauty struck them with awe, and they wanted Christ to see the beautiful sight.
  2. Jesus uses the occasion to arouse the disciples' interest in coming events. He predicts the temple's utter destruction (Mat 24:2).
  3. The disciples are aroused to ask two questions to the Lord. When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign of His return and of the end of the world (Mat 24:3).
  4. Jesus warns His disciples. They must guard against being deceived (Mat 24:4). This can mean that a person can be easily deceived when dealing with end-time prophecies, or a person can be easily deceived when facing the end-time events.
-

He can be deceived into thinking that certain cataclysmic events are infallible signs that the end is at hand (Mat 24:6, 14). Such too often results...

- in wild guesses about the end time
- in universal predictions
- in the deceiving of others
- in discouragement of one's faith when the end does not come

Christ had just answered the disciples' questions. Now He came to the all important point of application. Since He would be returning to earth and God wanted the hour to be kept secret, what was the believer to do? How was the believer to live? What was the believer's duty? Christ answered these questions in one forceful warning: "Keep watch!" Then He shared three parables to explain what He meant by the strong exhortation, "Keep watch!"

- I. The believer's duty: watch (v. 42).
- II. Parable 1: the owner of the house (a professing believer) (vv. 43-44).
- III. Parable 2: a faithful and wise servant (a genuine believer) (vv. 45-47).
- IV. Parable 3: a wicked servant (vv. 48-51).

### ***I. Mathew 24:42 Keep Watch (Gregoreo)***

To keep awake; to stay alert; to be watchful and sleepless; to be vigilant. It also includes the idea of being motivated, of keeping one's attention (mind) upon a thing. Watching also has the idea of being alert at the *right time*. It is at night that a person really needs to stay awake to watch for the thief (see 1 Th. 5:4-9).

The Lord said, "Keep watch." What does it mean for a believer to *watch*? (Mt. 26:41; Mk. 13:33, 34, 36; 14:38; see 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Th. 5:6; 2 Tim. 4:5; I Pet. 4:7).

1. The believer *watches* and stays *ready* for the Lord's return. He does not know the exact hour of the Lord's return; therefore, he is to watch and stay ready at all times (vv. 42-44). He should be so ready that his eyes are open and watching for the signs of Christ's return.
2. The believer *watches* his ministry and his duty to God. He sees to it that he serves faithfully and wisely (v. 45).
3. The believer *watches* his *attitude and behaviour* (vv. 48-49). He stays his mind upon the Lord's return and walks soberly and godly among others.

***2 Cor 10:3-5*** *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

*Titus 2:12-13* It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

4. The believer *watches* by being ready to die and to meet the Lord through death (Heb. 9:27). Christ does not mention this point, but the truth is ever so clear to the maturing believer.

## II. *Mathew 24:43–44 A Professing Believer*

The first parable Christ shared concerned the owner of a house. He represents the professing believer. Christ shared four things.

1. The owner had a house to look after. He was blessed, for he owned a house, and it was full of possessions. The belongings were valuable enough to attract a thief.
2. The owner lived without watchfulness.
  - a. The owner knew the thief was coming, and he knew he was coming that night. He just did not know what time he was coming.
  - b. The owner began to watch. He had tried to protect his house; he had bolted the doors and closed the windows. He was staying up listening to every noise and was ready to try to protect his house.
  - c. The owner failed to protect his house, and he failed in an area least expected. He simply did not watch *long enough*. As the hours wore on and on, he grew more and more drowsy and nodded more and more. The owner simply failed. ...
    - to stay awake long enough
    - to keep his mind alert long enough
    - to look and listen to the noises (signs) long enough
    - to keep active long enough
    - to stand guard long enough
3. The owner suffered disaster. The thief came while the owner was asleep. The owner ceased watching, and the thief broke into his home, taking his most prized valuables.
4. Christ's point is clear: readiness is essential. By readiness, Christ meant diligence. We are to be diligently living a life of righteousness, looking for His return.

*2 Pet 3:11, 13* Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Christ gave two reasons why we are to be ready:

- a) He is definitely coming, and
- b) He is coming in a hour when the unprepared will not expect Him (vv. 44, 50).

**Luke 12:39** *But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.*

**John 14:2-3** *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

**1 Th 5:2,4** *For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*

**2 Pet 3:10** *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

**Rev 3:3** *Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.*

**Rev 16:5** *Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged."*

**Thought 1.** The Lord's return is imminent. We must stay alert and be diligent in looking for His return — today!

**Thought 2.** The owner's house can represent a man's life. Every man is responsible for taking care of his life. Christ says we keep our house (life) by "watching" and being ready for His return, for He may return at any moment.

### III. **Mathew 24:45–47 A Genuine Believer**

The second parable Christ shared concerned the faithful and wise servant. He represents a genuine believer, a person who not only professes Christ but lives for Christ. The genuine believer may be a minister, a teacher, or a young learner in Christ. The point is not the believer's position but his being faithful and wise. The simplest believer is to be faithful and wise, no matter who he is or what his calling is.

Christ put this parable in the form of a question: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" He does this to stir more thought about the issue at hand and to force a much more personal application. Christ covers three points about the faithful and wise servant.

1. His responsibility is twofold. He is to oversee the Master's household and he is *to feed* the Master's family.

- a. He is to oversee the Master's household. It is the Master who sets him over His household. The servant does not appoint himself, nor is he appointed by other servants (or churches) of the household. The Master alone sets him over His family.

He is given the responsibility to oversee, to look after the household and family of the Master. But he is under his Lord and he is to oversee primarily by example.

*1 Pet 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

*Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

- b. He is to provide food for the Master's family, and he is to do it in due time. His family has to be fed. It is the servant's duty to provide food for them. He gives: it is his duty to give, not to take (see Eze. 34:8; Act. 20:35). He gives food for their nourishment, and He gives the food "at the proper time."

*1 Pet 5:2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care.*

*John 21:15-17 "Feed my lambs....my sheep."*

2. His accountability is clearly stated. The Lord is coming, and when He comes, He will judge what the faithful servant is doing. The servant will be looked at and observed to see if he is managing the household and feeding the family *faithfully and wisely*.

*Mat 24:46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.*

*1 Cor 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

*1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

*1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

*1 Tim 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

3. His reward will be unbelievable. The Master will put the faithful servant in charge over all His goods. The idea is that he will be placed first: looked upon, loved, and considered first, as though he were the only one. He had been managing, looking after only a small portion for the Master. Now he will be given a much greater responsibility to oversee for his Lord.

**Luke 16:10** “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

**Rom 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

**1 Cor 2:9** However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” (see Rev. 2:26; 3:21)

**Thought 1.** Who is faithful and wise? The believer who is found “doing so.” This means he is enduring (v. 13) and watching over the task the Lord has given him (v. 42).

**Thought 2.** This is a precious thought: to picture Christ's renting the skies above and returning, and to know that His first sight of us will be that of our labouring for Him. When He returns, may His first sight be to see us working for Him. Blessed is that servant “whose master finds him doing so.” Note the word “doing” is continuous action.

This is a frightful thought: to picture Christ's appearing and His first sight of us is that of..

- working half-heartedly
- mistreating someone
- arguing
- overeating
- being engaged in an immoral act
- 

#### **IV. Mathew 24:48–51 Unfaithful, Wicked and Untrustworthy Servant**

The third parable Christ shared concerns the evil servant. He represents a professing believer. Some say he is even a professing minister. If so, he is not a genuine believer, despite his profession and ministerial position. He is *unfaithful and untrustworthy* (1 Tim. 1:12). His life is miserable. Christ covers his attitude, his behaviour and his end or judgment.

1. His attitude. The attitude of his *heart* is, “My master is staying away a long time; there is plenty of time.” Several things can cause such an attitude.

⇒ Doubting the Lord's Word, that He is ever coming.

⇒ Misinterpreting the Lord's coming as being only symbolic, instead of accepting it as literal; symbolizing it to mean some spiritual truth such as the Lord's meeting a person when the person dies.

⇒ Ignoring the Lord's coming in order to allow the person to live as he wishes.

⇒ Thinking the Lord's coming is so far away that it has little meaning for today.

2. His behaviour. It is after the evil servant says there is plenty of time that he begins to live as he wishes. *His attitude* (his heart) *determines his behaviour*.

a. He acts unjustly. He begins to “beat his fellow-servants.” He seeks more and more materially, both power and things. He strikes and mistreats anyone who stands in his way. He seeks “money,” and he seeks to *lord it over people* (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

- b. He lives carnally. He begins “to eat and drink with drunkards.” He walks with them, sits with them, lies with them. He is their companion in sin. He is indulgent, living to please the flesh.
3. His end and his judgment are certain. There is no escape.
  - a. The Lord will catch the evil servant unexpectedly. Some deny that the Lord is coming to judge them; others ignore His coming; and still others put the thought out of their minds. But nothing will keep the Lord from coming: “the master of that servant will come.” And He will come when the wicked man is not looking for Him. To the evil person, the Lord's coming will be the most frightful experience of human history (see vv. 21-22; Rev. 6:15-17).

In talking about meeting the Lord, it must be remembered that every man meets the Lord at death: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb. 9:27). The point Christ makes is that the evil man will face eternal doom at the end of the world. As other Scriptures point out, the Great White Throne of judgment is to take place at the end of the age.

- b. The Lord will condemn the wicked servant to death — with the hypocrites. He will be “cut to pieces,” cut off from among the living and from among believers; and most tragic, he will be “cut to pieces” from God's presence. His position and place will be with hypocrites. Where are the hypocrites? Christ says “[Where] there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There will be weeping: grief, loud grief, mourning, groaning, wailing, floods and floods of tears. There will be gnashing of teeth (brugmos): grinding; biting in hostility and bitterness and indignation; spitefully snapping the teeth. It is rage, fury and despair because nothing can be done. A person's state is permanently determined.

*Mat 8:12* “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

*Mat 13:42* “They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

*Mat 24:51* “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

*Mat 25:30* ‘And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

*Psa 112:10* The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

**Thought 1.** Entrance into heaven is based upon one thing and one thing only: faith in Christ. Heritage, godly parents and children, religious profession, baptism and church

membership overeating all are useless without faith. Without faith, man has only the judgment of God to look forward to.

The sin of the wicked servant, of a person who makes a false profession, does several terrible things.

1. He deceives himself and others. He deceives people into thinking that they will not have to face the judgment of the Lord's return, or if they do, it will be minimal.
2. He minimizes the truth of eternity, of heaven, of life with God, and of the judgment which every man must face.
3. He takes away from the message and effectiveness of the gospel.
4. He keeps people from the truth. He keeps them from watching and preparing, from protecting and guarding, from living and walking with their eyes upon the Lord's coming.

***Luke 21:28** When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

***John 14:2-3** In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

**Thought 1.** Christ still speaks of a wicked servant. He may be a minister, a teacher, or a layman. Christ says that he is a wicked servant and spells out what it is that makes him wicked.

**Thought 2.** The worst of all men is the man who professes, and while he professes, he is living in sin. As Christ says, "and assign him a place with the hypocrites" (v. 51). His only hope is to confess his evil and repent, turning back to God, ever trusting His wonderful mercy and grace.

***1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

**Thought 3.** The man who walks ignoring, twisting, misinterpreting, or denying the Lord's return is walking by his *senses* — what he knows about the physical universe. He is walking as he *senses* things to be, not as God has revealed them to be. ■