

STAY AWAKE

Matthew 24:42-51

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42 “Therefore stay awake,
for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”
(**Matthew 24:42, 2022 LSB**)

Sometimes, a biblical passage implies its application. We have to think and meditate on the passage, compare it with the rest of Scripture, consider God’s eternal purposes, and so on.

And sometimes, as we have here, a biblical passage directly commands its application in simple, straightforward terms. In fact, in the Greek text, the application is the first word spoken in Matthew 24:42: *Stay awake*. I don’t usually give you the Greek words, but I will today because the word translated as “stay away” is my own name: *gregoreō*, Gregory. It means to be watchful, alert, or vigilant.

As In The Days Of Noah

The reason for this command is found in the previous passage, where Jesus describes the apathy and willful ignorance of those who died in the flood. That same apathy and willful ignorance will be on display in the last days in spite of the terrible events taking place.

4,500 years ago, Noah alone preached the righteousness of God (Second Peter 2:5).

Noah’s faith in Yahweh didn’t appear out of thin air. He was the tenth generation after Adam. When he was born, Adam and Seth had died, but Adam’s grandson, Enosh, was still alive. In fact, of the nine generations before Noah, six were alive when he was born. There was a clear, unbreakable line of faith that reached back to Adam. By God’s grace and mercy, Noah heard of the creation, the Garden of Eden, the fall of man, and the expulsion from the garden. He knew that God had accepted Abel and his sacrifice but rejected Cain and his sacrifice. He knew what Yahweh would reveal to Moses 1,000 years later:

6 Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God,
compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; **7**

who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” **(Exodus 34:6–7, 2022 LSB)**

By the time of Noah’s life, virtually all mankind had long since drifted into apathy, which became willful ignorance, and that, in turn, led to wickedness and tremendous evil.

5 Then Yahweh saw that the evil of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5, 2022 LSB)

But Noah stayed awake. He knew, believed, and preached both God’s lovingkindness and justice. He stayed awake for his own sake and for the sake of his children. Tragically, his faithful preaching fell on sleep-deafened ears.

Since Pentecost

In the 2,000 years since Pentecost, countless Christians have taken up the cry, preaching the same righteousness as Noah. Some had done so formally as pastors and preachers. But all Christians are ultimately preachers of righteousness.

Today, we share in common with Noah the message of the judgment to come and the need for repentance.

But we have something else Noah could not imagine: the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God the Son took on human flesh, lived a sinless life in this world, died as a substitute for sinners, and rose in victory over sin and death. We can make sinners a promise that Noah couldn’t: turn from your sins and trust in Jesus Christ, and He will forgive your sins, save you from the judgment to come, give you eternal life, and join you with Himself forever.

But our world is no more inclined than Noah’s world to hear or value that message. More often than not, it feels like we are preaching into the wind. That’s tiring and discouraging, and it can become tempting to disregard the reality of the judgment to come in favor of easier, happier, more pleasant words. We can forget that the reason the Good News is so good is that the Bad News is so bad.

I’m not telling you anything new. The church at large is in constant danger of losing the urgency

of the Gospel. When that happens, it becomes easy to take the path of least resistance and drift into a peaceful, happy slumber. Things aren't that bad. The world is a good place. Enjoy life. God is on everyone's side. Many never notice that the narrow road they began to walk has slowly broadened into a superhighway. Neither do they notice that that superhighway is sitting on the crumbling edge of the cliff of apostasy.

It is no exaggeration to say that virtually every major denomination has lost its way to some degree or another.

Stay Awake

2,000 years ago, Jesus set an alarm ringing for us: stay awake! Remain alert! Keep vigilant! Let's examine His words more closely.

THE NEED FOR VIGILANCE

Matthew 24:42-43

42 “Therefore stay awake,
for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.
43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known
at what time of the night the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.
44 For this reason you also must be ready;
for the Son of Man is coming
at an hour when you do not think He will.”
(**Matthew 24:42–44, 2022 LSB**)

For obvious reasons, thieves don't make appointments. The only way to safeguard your home in that time was to be there and be vigilant. There were no police, no private security patrols, and no security cameras. They didn't even have guard dogs since dogs were considered unclean.

Vigilance Because Of Ignorance

We must stay awake because of our ignorance. We do not know which day our Lord is coming. What's more, when He does come, Matthew 24:44 says, it will be when we don't think He will. Jesus

doesn't just say that He will return when we don't expect Him to, but at a time when we think He won't return. Matthew 24:42 cautions us against saying that Jesus *will* return on a particular day, although many have violated that command over the centuries. Matthew 24:44 cautions us against saying that it *can't* be a particular day. Let me put it differently. Someone who says, "Jesus will return on Christmas Day, 2023," is sinning against Matthew 24:42. And someone who says, "Jesus isn't returning on Christmas Day, 2023," is sinning against Matthew 24:44.

We must remain awake because we simply don't know. Jesus could return at any time. He could return today. Nothing stands in His way. He could rapture His church and initiate the final week of Daniel 9 in the blink of an eye. I know, people have been saying that since Pentecost. But it's true. Those who have predicted His return have violated His Word. He commands us never to predict His *coming*. But those who have predicted that He will not return have also violated His Word. He commands us never to predict His *delay*.

Now, what is the point of staying awake? Is it so that we don't miss His Second Coming? That's not possible. No one will miss those dramatic end-time events. Is it so that we don't miss the rapture? Of course not. The Bible never says that the only Christians taken in the rapture are those who are waiting for it at that moment.

In the parable of the two slaves, Jesus tells us both why and how we should stay awake.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SLAVES

Matthew 24:45-51

45 "Who then is the faithful and prudent slave
whom his master put in charge of his household
to give them their food at the proper time?
46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.
47 Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.
48 But if that evil slave says in his heart,
'My master is not coming for a long time,'
49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves
and eat and drink with drunkards;
50 the master of that slave will come on a day
when he does not expect him
and at an hour which he does not know,
51 and will cut him in pieces
and assign him a place with the hypocrites;

in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
(Matthew 24:45–51, 2022 LSB)

In this parable, we see two slaves: one who is *faithful and prudent* (or wise) and one who is *evil*.

The faithful and wise slave *obeyed* his master’s command. He was *faithful* because he submitted himself to his master’s will, even in the master’s absence. He was *wise* because he understood the master’s authority; he knew he would one day answer for how he carried out the master’s will. The master’s will shaped his life, giving him both a positive direction and guarding him against everything that displeased the master.

The evil slave disobeyed his master’s command. He was *evil* because by failing to obey the master, he did the opposite of what the master wished. He looked for reasons to disobey the master’s will and instead please himself. The evil slave not only disobeyed the master by not caring for his fellow slaves, but he also threw himself into a way of living that was utterly contrary to the master’s character. And where the first slave was *wise*, this slave was *foolish*. He thought that the consequences were so far out in the future that they didn’t matter: “My master is not coming for a long time.” He decided that he would deal with the consequences in the future but thought that the future would never come.

But Jesus says that one day, the master will certainly return.

45 “Who then is the faithful and prudent slave
whom his master put in charge of his household
to give them their food at the proper time?

46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

47 Truly I say to you that **he will put him in charge of all his possessions.**”

(Matthew 24:45–47, 2022 LSB)

Blessed – happy, contented – is the slave who is simply doing what the master said. He simply obeyed the master as though the master had been there all along. When his master returns, Jesus says, he will find his faithful and wise slave actively doing his duty, giving the members of the household their food at the proper time. The master might return at supper time and find the slave serving the meal. He might return in midafternoon and find the slave preparing or later in the evening and find the slave cleaning up. He might even return in the middle of the night and find everyone peacefully asleep, no one crying in hunger. The slave is blessed – happy – because the master promotes him from meal service to general manager.

On the other hand,

48 “But if that evil slave says in his heart,
‘My master is not coming for a long time,’
49 and begins to **beat his fellow slaves** and **eat and drink with drunkards;**
50 the master of that slave will come
 on a day when he does not expect him
 and at an hour which he does not know,
51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there
 will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **(Matthew 24:48–51, 2022 LSB)**

This is not a happy, blessed slave but one who is filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth because he was caught in his wickedness and sin. He willfully ignores everything he knows to be true about his master and is utterly shocked when the master returns. Jesus shows that this parable is eternal in scope when he says that the evil slave is cut into pieces and assigned a place with the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

These two slaves are not pictures of Christians but of all mankind. Jesus is not saying that genuine Christians will lose their salvation. On the contrary, it is genuine believers who remain faithful and wise. But the people of the world live wickedly and foolishly. They ignore God’s Word. They deny Him His proper glory. They refuse to worship Him. They treat one another abysmally and indulge in their sinful desires.

BRINGING IT HOME?

What Does It Mean To Stay Awake?

So, what does it mean to stay awake? It means continuing to live faithfully as a Christian because Jesus could return at any time. Very early in the life of the church, the apostles set the pattern of a normal, faithful Christian life:

42 And they were continually devoting themselves to
 the apostles’ teaching [the Scripture]
 and to the fellowship, [the church, the body of Christ]
 to the breaking of bread [regularly remembering the Lord’s table and its meaning]
 and to the prayers. [Personal and corporate prayer in worship]
(Acts 2:42, 2022 LSB)

As we live as Christians, the Holy Spirit is active in our lives. He sanctifies us through the Scriptures. He empowers us to serve one another. He produces the fruit of the Spirit, which is the character of Christ, in us.

Staying awake means living each day in the light of Christ's first and second advents. In His first, He made atonement for sinners and obtained righteousness for our justification. In His second, He will come personally to rule His Kingdom and establish the eternal state.

Staying awake does not mean living some strange sort of monastic lifestyle but living where we have always lived, only doing everything for the glory of God, no matter how basic it seems:

31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31, 2022 LSB)

Staying awake means guarding against temptations to drift into apathy and disinterest. We believe that Jesus Christ is coming back and that when He returns, it will be to settle accounts with all creation.

10 Behold, Lord Yahweh will come with strength,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.
(Isaiah 40:10, 2022 LSB)

The simple question is this: do I look forward to the Lord's return because He will find me doing His will, or do I dread the Lord's return because I have neglected His will?

If you dread the Lord's return, then stop living in dread. Confess your sin and your apathy. Be forgiven and cleansed.

12 Therefore, **STRENGTHEN THE HANDS THAT ARE WEAK
AND THE KNEES THAT ARE FEEBLE,**
13 and make straight paths for your feet,
so that what is lame may not be put out of joint,
but rather be healed.
(Hebrews 12:12–13, 2022 LSB)

That is, get rid of the things that cause you to trip. Get rid of the things that hinder your faithfulness. As Hebrews 12:1 says, lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles you, and run the rest of your race with spiritual endurance.

You have the help of the Word of God. It is a lamp for your feet and a light for your path. You have the constant help of His Spirit. God has, by His divine power, given you everything pertaining to life and godliness through the full knowledge of Jesus Christ. Jesus has called you by His own glory and excellence and, by His glory and excellence, granted you His precious and magnificent promises. Through those promises, by which you escape the corruption of the world, you become a partaker of His divine nature.

All of that is to say that you need nothing more than what He has granted you to live faithfully from this forward. Leave your past, whatever it is, in His hands. Every godly work is safe in His hands. Every ungodly work is under the blood of the cross.