

Promise Keeper

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31 ESV)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33 ESV)

The Return Of The King

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Matthew 24:44 - 25:46

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 24.

This is our last Sunday in our observance of advent. Advent is the from the Latin word for “coming.” This is a time when we stop to see and celebrate the two comings of our King.

Christmas is the celebration of the *first* advent. As we have seen over the course of this series, Jesus’ first coming was a rescue mission! He came to bind up our enemy, to kick down the doors of our prison and to invite us into everlasting life! As John the Baptist declared:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.
(Mark 1:15 ESV)

If you will repent and believe – if you will turn away from your sin and lay hold of Jesus in faith – then you will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God! The first advent swung the door of repentance and restoration wide open to the world and we are living in that season of grace and opportunity right now! Now is the time to bring this good news to the world!

Because, in the second advent, that door of repentance will once and for all be shut. In the second coming, the child in the manger will return as a Warrior King riding on a battle horse and wearing a robe dipped in blood. Upon his return he will judge the world with perfect, uncompromising justice. This morning, we are going to focus our attention on the promise of the return of the King.

The Promise of the Return of the King

I titled this series “Promise Keeper” because Christmas is a powerful reminder of the reality that our God keeps His word. Everything that took place in Bethlehem 2000 years ago was a fulfilment of promises that stretched back over centuries! The fulfilment didn’t come as quickly as God’s people expected but – as we have observed – not a single promise went unkept. God’s timeline doesn’t submit to our impatience. He is playing the long game.

It's important for us to see that because we are turning our attention this morning away from those promises of old to a promise that God made to *us*. And, just like the former promises, it has been slow in coming to fulfilment.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, he promised that he would come again. In Matthew 24 Jesus provides us with a sobering description of that return. Look with me at verses 29-31:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days 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. ³⁰ 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.** 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. (Matthew 24:29-31 ESV)

This second coming will usher in the final judgement. In Revelation 20:11-15, the Apostle John provides us with terrifying glimpse into what that day will look like. He tells us:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20:11-15 ESV)

On that great and fearful day, the kingdom of the enemy will once and for all be cast down. The devil and his angels will be thrown into the lake of fire. And then the living and the dead will be brought before the throne where books will be opened. Within those books, every sin has been recorded. Those who – by faith – have cast their sin upon Jesus will be listed in the book of life. They will live and not die! But those who rejected Jesus and chose sin instead will be cast into the lake of fire where they will bear the penalty for their rebellion against an infinite God for the rest of time.

The God who kept his promise in Bethlehem has also promised us that *this* day is coming.

Brothers and sisters, I want to stop here to ask a very important question: Do we believe this?

Sure, we *acknowledge* this. We give *intellectual ascent* to this. But, in our heart of hearts, do we *actually believe* that God is going to keep this promise? Do we actually believe that the King is going to return, and that we are going to give an account?

After making this promise, Jesus told us exactly how we ought to *respond* if we believe this to be true. And that brings us to our passage for this morning. Look with me now to Matthew 24:44. This morning, we are going to be reading all the way to the end of chapter 25. We're covering a lot of ground, so we are going to take it in sections, but everything that we are going to be reading is an application of verse 44. Look there now. Jesus tells us – in light of the promise of his return:

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:44 ESV)

If we believe what Jesus promised about his return, then *this* – according to Jesus – is the right response.

Readiness.

If the King really is going to return – and if we do not know the exact moment of his arrival – then we need to make sure that we are always ready! We need to be prepared! That leads us to our question this morning:

How Should We Prepare For The Return Of The King?

From this point onward to the end of chapter 25, Jesus tells four parables to teach us four lessons about what readiness looks like. I'm going to read each of those stories in full which means that my explanation and application is going to need to be short and succinct.

So, how should we prepare for the return of the King? First, we should:

1. Obey the King's orders

Look with me at verse 45. Jesus explains:

“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. ⁴⁸ 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. (Matthew 24:45-51 ESV)

In this story, Jesus sets out a simple contrast of two servants. While the master of the house is gone, one servant carries on with the instructions that he has been given. He feeds those who he was commanded to feed, and he cares for the house as if the master himself was watching his work. This servant is rewarded with even greater responsibilities when the master returns.

But the other servant – emboldened by the delay of the master – decides that he will take a break from his assignments. He mistreats the people that he was meant to care for. He takes the food and drink that he was entrusted with to share and instead he stuffs his face and gets himself drunk. When the master returns, this servant is sent out with the hypocrites – those who merely pretended to love the master. He is cut in pieces and cast into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As we apply this lesson it leads us to one simple question: Are you obeying the King?

Is there something that you are doing that you *know* is wrong, but you just keep doing it anyways?

Are you lulling yourself into a false security with that sin? “No one knows,” you tell yourself. “I *deserve* this! I’m just going to have some fun now, and then I’ll give this up later in life.” The New Testament is clear that there is no such thing as a Christian who makes peace with sin. Pretending that Jesus is your King while celebrating and indulging in the things that he hates is called hypocrisy. And, in this text, we catch a glimpse into Jesus’ *hatred* of hypocrisy.

Elsewhere Jesus asks:

Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

Now, I want to be clear: Every person in this room has sinned this week. I think I can probably say that every person in this room has sinned *this morning*. So, this warning isn’t meant to crush the believer who still stumbles from time to time. That’s all of us. No, this warning is for the person who is *living in sin* but also claiming that Jesus is Lord. If sin is your master, then Jesus is not.

Do you want to be ready for the return of the King? Repent of your sin and turn away from it before it is too late! When Jesus returns, let him find you obeying him and loving it! His way is right and leads to life! He is a wise King with rules that lead to flourishing and joy! Don’t settle for anything less! Obey him.

Second, if you want to be ready for the return of the King:

2. Prepare for the King’s delay

We see this in Matthew 25:1-13:

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those

virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:1-13 ESV)

Weddings in our culture begin and end over the course of a few hours, but this story is rooted in a culture where wedding celebrations could last for an entire week! It was the job of the women in this story to join the bridegroom's processional upon his arrival and to honour him by accompanying him to the feast.

But the bridegroom was delayed. In fact, he was delayed for so long that all ten of the women fell asleep! When he finally arrived, five of the women realized that their lamps had burnt out and that they needed more oil. To their shame, they didn't prepare for the delay, and they failed to fulfil their responsibility of accompanying the bridegroom. By the time they finally made it to the feast, the door was shut, and they were no longer invited in.

As we apply this lesson, I want to ask one simple question: What are you doing now to prepare your faith to endure to the end?

Let me put it bluntly: If you are sustaining your faith with nothing more than Sunday morning emotional highs, then your lamp is going to run out! Emotions are good, but emotions cannot sustain you for the long haul. They fluctuate. They are fickle. They don't last.

If you want to prepare yourself to endure the King's delay, then you need to start storing up fuel that will last until the end. Let me point you to some examples of what that looks like.

You need to start reading the Bible for yourself. No more living off of one meal on a Sunday morning. No more trying to sustain yourself on the breadcrumbs of daily bread. You need to get into the Word of God so that God can apply His truth to your heart and mind.

You need to learn how to persevere in prayer. Discipline yourself to make regular times when you will shut out the world and kneel down at his feet. He will meet you there. He will sustain you there. Maybe this is the year that you need to finally join a prayer group.

And you need to invest in Christian friendship. You need someone in your life who knows you well enough to detect when something is off and who loves you enough to call you on it. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

The King may return tomorrow. But he might also delay for another 500 years. Therefore, we need to prepare for the King's delay.

Third, if you want to be ready for the return of the King:

3. Steward the King's investments

We see this in verses 14-30:

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless

servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
(Matthew 25:14-30 ESV)

The point of the story is simple: Those who stewarded the Master’s investments well were rewarded accordingly but the servant who did nothing with the investment was cast out where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As we consider this story, I want to highlight two key details that help us to understand the point that Jesus is making. First, I want you to notice that each servant is entrusted with the *Master’s money*. It wasn’t theirs to do whatever they felt like doing – it was *his*.

Second, I want you to notice that the Master gave each servant different amounts according to their abilities and that – in the final reckoning – he judged each of the servants *based upon what they had received from him*. We don’t all have the same gifts and means. We will be judged for what we did with what He entrusted to us.

So, by way of application, I want to ask you two simple questions: What has God entrusted to you, and what are you doing with it?

Did He give you the ability to earn great wealth and position you in a country with tremendous earning opportunities? Wonderful! When you stand before Him and give an account for that investment, what will you have to show for it?

Did He give you gifts and abilities that could be a tremendous blessing to those around you? Wonderful! When you stand before Him and give an account for that investment, what will you have to show for it?

Everything that we have has been entrusted to us by Him. Our time. Our talents. Our treasure. All of it. When the King returns, we will all give a reckoning for what we did or did not do with the investments that He entrusted to us.

A man by the name of C.T. Studd was one of seven men who – along with Hudson Taylor – left behind his comfortable life studying at Cambridge to bring the gospel to China. He wrote a powerful poem of which I would like to read a brief excerpt this morning:

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee!*¹

Brothers and sisters, you have what you have for a reason. God has given you an assignment that is unique to you, and He has given you gifts and resources to steward *for that assignment*. Every other voice in the world would tell you that what you have is yours and that you should enjoy it however you want. Every other voice is telling you that you are building *your kingdom*.

I want to make sure that you hear Jesus loud and clear this morning. Everything that you have is *his*. Your talents. Your health. Your opportunities. Your work ethic. Your time. Every single thing that you have is from Him. You are a steward working in *his* kingdom. And when he returns, whether he entrusted you with five talents or one, you will give an account for how you handled it. Remember that and live accordingly.

Fourth and finally, if you want to be ready for the return of the King:

4. Love the King's family

Look with me at verses 31-46:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry

¹ C.T. Studd, *Only What Is Done For Christ Will Last* (Accessed from an article on Robertjnash.com posted on October 20, 2021), <https://www.robertjnash.com/2021/10/only-what-is-done-for-christ-will-last.html>. Accessed on Dec. 20, 2023.

and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (Matthew 25:31-46 ESV)

This story seems straight forward, but it has often been misunderstood. At first glance, it would seem to commend simply caring for those who are in need *generally*, but is that what this passage is about? Look again at verse 40:

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these **my brothers**, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40b ESV)

This is *not* a parable about caring for needy people in general. If you want to hear what Jesus has to say about that, you could turn to his parable about the good Samaritan, but *this* story is not about that. This parable is about how we care for Jesus' *family*. And who are Jesus' family? In Matthew 12, we read:

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For **whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**" (Matthew 12:49-50 ESV)

So, this parable is about how we treat *fellow Christians*. Here, we learn that every time we serve a believer in need, we are actually serving Jesus.

When you host the lonely Christian for dinner, you are hosting Jesus.

When you weep and pray for the persecuted church, you are supporting Jesus.

When you cut back on your church's budget to distribute more resources to under resourced Christians in other parts of the world, you are blessing Jesus.

When you cut back on your personal budget to create space to be generous to those in your congregation who are struggling, you are loving Jesus. As Pastor David Platt notes:

A heart that has truly trusted in Christ and a life that is truly longing for Christ will be consumed with serving men and women who are in Christ.²

And, on the flip side, when you ignore the needs of your brothers and sisters and silo yourself in a castle of ease and comfort, you ignore Jesus. And when you gossip, slander, and resent your fellow believers, you insult Jesus.

I'm not sure that we recognize just how profoundly Jesus identifies with his church.

Think about this: If you were to find out right now that someone had been going around town slandering you, you'd probably be upset. But imagine how upset you would be if you found out that they were slandering *your wife*, or *your children*! Well, the church is Jesus' bride. Your fellow believers are the children of God. Are we serving and loving and honouring one another in the way that we should?

The King is coming, and he is going to receive a perfectly accurate report concerning the way that you cared for his family. Every act of generosity will be reported, but so too will every word of gossip. If you want to be prepared for the return of the King, then make the decision now to love his family.

As we conclude this morning, I want to acknowledge that this sermon likely felt like a kick in the teeth. I felt the kick myself in my study, and I wrestled with a desire to soften off some of the hard edges that we find here. But it is not my job to soften hard passages. And, when the King returns, I am going to answer for the way that I stewarded the King's message. My prayer is that any "kick" you felt today was from the Holy Spirit and not from me.

² David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 336.

I'm going to go ahead and guess that there are some people in this room who need a dramatic wakeup call. You are not ready. Not even close. You are living a selfish, worldly life, and if things do not change then you are going to find yourself thrown out with the hypocrites.

The King is merciful, but his grace was given to lead us to repentance. In fact, that's why he is currently delaying his return. In 2 Peter 3, we read:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish**, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:9-10 ESV)

His delay is grace, but the day of the Lord will come. So, I need to ask: Are you ready? Will your name be found written in that book of life? Or will you be thrown out with the hypocrites?

Are you ready for the return of the King? Where are you lacking in readiness? In what areas has apathy taken hold? As we conclude, I'm going to put these four responses back up on the screen. I want you to take a moment of silence to identify if and where the Spirit is convicting you, and then I'm going to lead us in a prayer of confession.

Obey the King's orders
Prepare for the King's delay
Steward the King's investments
Love the King's family

Let's pray.