

**March 31, 2019**

**Pastor Tim Burchill**

**Matthew 24: All You Need to Know About the End Times and  
Second Coming in One Sermon**

**Scripture: Matthew 24: 13, 42-51**

[13] Those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved.

<sup>43</sup>"So always be ready, because you don't know the day your Lord will come. Remember this: If the owner of the house knew what time of night a thief was coming, the owner would watch and not let the thief break in. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at a time you don't expect him.

"Who is the wise and loyal servant that the master trusts to give the other servants their food at the right time? When the master comes and finds the servant doing his work, the servant will be blessed. I tell you the truth, the master will choose that servant to take care of everything he owns.

"But suppose that evil servant thinks to himself, 'My master will not come back soon,' and he begins to beat the other servants and eat and get drunk with others like him? The master will come when that servant is not ready and is not expecting him. Then the master will cut him in pieces and send him away to be with the hypocrites, where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain."

**Message**

This is one of those passages in which it sounds like Jesus is talking about the end of human history, or at least the end of the current age. You'll hear Christian folks talking about "end times" or the fancy-pants folks talking about this particular chapter as being "the little apocalypse of Jesus". What they mean, though, is "the end of the present age" and/or the second coming of Jesus. You should also be tipped-off that you've wandered into an End Times discussion if you hear vocabulary like Rapture, or Tribulation, or numbers like 666, or people who claim to be pre, post, or non-millennialists.

**I know there are some who really enjoy *End Times Bible Study*.** It is this wonderfully intellectual, supernatural puzzle that just begs to have its pieces sorted out and put together. End Times is also the ultimate conspiracy theory. God, working with prophets like Daniel, with the cryptic words of Jesus, and revelation given to John, have dropped clues all over scripture for those who know where and how to look. I will admit to spending a fair amount of time on the subject when I was a younger Christian. I found it can be both addictive, and maddening at the same time.

But there is a time and a place to go deep and a time and a place to summarize. As a busy pastor, husband, father and semi-professional napper I'm always looking for someone to take the complicated and break it down into easily digested pieces.

That's why I snatched up this book. I was a student of English and American literature and you wave a book in front of me that summarizes 101 classics of world literature and I am already planning on which shelf to put it on. The full title, by the way, is *Abridged Classics: Brief Summaries of books you were supposed to read but probably didn't*. Let me give you a little taste—and you high school English students, close your eyes and ears, because you're supposed to be reading some of these.

**[Share the pictures via projection]**

Just this week I came across the account of a seminary student who was playing basketball at a local school with other pastors-in-training. There was an older janitor who had to sit in the bleachers until the seminarians finished their game. This custodian was almost always reading his Bible. One day the young man went up to the custodian and asked, "What are you reading?"

The man didn't just say, "The Bible." Instead he said, "The Book of Revelation."

Surprised, the student asked, "The Book of Revelation? Do you understand it?"

"Oh yes," the man said confidently. "I understand it."

"You understand the Book of Revelation?" he said. "Finally, someone who's figured it out. So tell me, what does it mean?"

Very quietly that old janitor answered, "**It means that Jesus is gonna win.**"

Brothers and sisters that is probably the best summary I've ever heard of the book of Revelation and the End Times. Most of us get caught up in the rich imagery, the confusing numerology and strange symbolism, but in the end, it is a testimony, much like today's scripture, to the victory of our God and of those who remain faithful.

**Matthew 24 has its own summary.** It's given by Jesus in verse 13: "**The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**" Jesus warns that there are going to be trying and chaotic times ahead, and there are going to be people who try and take advantage of the confusion to sell you a bill of goods, but for those who stay focused on living for God in the moment will share in the final victory of Jesus when he returns in all his glory at the end of the present age.

But in the second half of Jesus' teaching—in the verses you've heard this morning—Jesus does all that he can to answer the question we can't help but ask, "**So how do I live in the meantime? What I am supposed to do while I am waiting for Jesus to return?**"

Jesus tells a simple parable about two servants of a Master who leaves each of them in charge for an extended period of time. One of them does what he is called to do, knowing that the Master will return in his own time and want an accounting. The other ignores what he is called to do, in fact, he does the opposite, because the Master is delayed in his return. It's a little bit of the, *Mice will play while the cat's away* kind of thinking. As it says, the first is richly rewarded and the second severely punished. But the point Jesus is trying to make is relatively simple: **Live as you would live if your Master were right beside you because he may very well be—before you know it.** In other words, **Plan for the long haul, but live each day as if it were your last.**

**In this meantime, it's our job to remember that we are God's servants—not just some menial go-fer servant, but a steward—the one put in charge while the boss is gone.** We are free to make decisions and allocate resources however we see fit, but we do so with the Master's desires first and foremost in our minds. All that we have is on loan to us to use. We just have to be careful that we don't forget to whom it belongs.

**I've come across a number of creative servants over the years and I with you want to share a couple of the every day techniques they've used to not lose sight of who they work for—and who ultimately holds them accountable for how they live day to day.**

**It's not unusual to find servants of the Master who squirrel away a Secret Twenty-dollar bill—the master's money—in their wallet or purse.** The rule is that you can use it in an emergency, but if you do, you must replenish as soon as possible. The cash is there to assist a need that *someone else* may have—a need in the moment that you can't plan for. I suppose a secret Fifty-dollar bill might make a lot more sense in today's world, but being a cheapskate, it's too much pressure for me to carry that much cash.

Since everything I have has come to me one way or another from my Master, then it is ultimately his and I will have to give an accounting of what I've done with it. \$20 or \$50 to use for those emergency moments—for the pressing need that happens in the lives of the people around us—that's a reminder that we can enjoy what we have while at the same time be ready to reach past ourselves to care for the people around us.

**I knew a pastor who always set watch ahead by 25 minutes—trying to be a steward of the master's time.** I asked him why he didn't round down to 15 or round up to 30 and he said because he wanted to make sure he had enough time to visit the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the prison. I

took it to mean that he was building in *a Matthew 25 buffer* into his day. (*More on Matthew 25 next week!*)

As a 'just-in-time' person, this seemed silly to me at first. But think about it. Either I'm going to be 15-20 minutes early or I've got a little extra time to allow the car in that wants to turn in front of me, or engage a chatty stranger in conversation, maybe just bend-over pick up some trash, or pull-over and see if someone needs help.

None of us know how much time we're going to have, but we will also be called into account for how we've used that time, and whether it was spent on 'me and mine' or whether or not we responded when God put a detour in my otherwise over-scheduled day.

**The most important thing to do while we wait for the return of Jesus—as we attempt to live each day fully and faithfully—is to remember who we are and whose we are.** We are servants of the King, stewards of a kind and generous Master, who will want to know what we have done with all that we have been given. We who follow Jesus believe our truest selves begin in the waters of baptism. We die to our old selves and come up out of the water resurrected and new.

**So let me offer one more daily reminder for faithful servants living in the meantime.**

Every time you wash your hands, remember your baptism. And just so we are on the same page. **Here's the recommended situations in which we should be washing our hands.** Now, depending if you have small children in diapers at home, you will be reminded 100 times a day that you are washed clean and reborn in the grace of God.

**Add to that every time you take a drink of water.** Our health and our lives themselves depend upon taking in water in plentiful amounts every day. Just as our spiritual lives depend upon the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ—in plentiful amounts—as well. **If you are a 150-pound person who gets 35 minutes of exercise a day, here's how much water experts say you should be drinking.** Again, that's a lot of reminding. Jesus said 'I am living water and when you drank of me you will never be thirsty'—if we did nothing but thank God for the gift of life in all its fulness every time we took a sip of H<sub>2</sub>O—I can't imagine we'd ever take it for granted.

You can go ahead and fiddle with your calculations of when the end will come and what that is going to look like when it does, just remember the most important part: **Jesus is gonna win** and **“The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”** It's our job—our calling really—here in the meantime, to find creative and faithful ways to stand firm, and to live each day as if we were going

to have to give an accounting tomorrow at *The Welcome Home Party* for our good and gracious Master. Amen.

### **Dismissal with Blessing**

**One of the most creative techniques I've witnessed of living in the moment with the end in mind, is the Ten O'clock Sundae—or experiencing the master's joy by putting a priority on relationships.** We had an older couple in our first church that scheduled ice cream sundaes every single night at 10 p.m. I'm talking hot fudge, whipped cream, nuts, and maraschino cherry on top—served in a bona fide parfait glass with those long spoons. No matter how crazy their day had been or how much time they spent apart from one another they looked forward to a ritual of sitting down—creating picture perfect sundaes—and enjoying them together.

Jesus makes it clear that a big part of what makes the faithless servant faithless is that she or he mistreats their fellow servants. God puts in families, lines up like-minded neighbors and friends, and calls into Christian community for a reason. We don't just watch over the Master's time and money, we watch over the Master's people. We really are His hands and feet, his words of comfort, his caring presence, his gentle challenge to one another. The Church's—that was the older couple I mentioned—they always made sure that they had more fudge sauce and vanilla bean ice cream than they could possibly eat, because they enjoyed sharing that ritual with others—Sue and I can attest to that.