KEEP WATCH AND BE PREPARED

Matthew 24:36-25:13

Key Verse: 24:45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper times?”

Last week we studied about *parousia*, the second of coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus will come again on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. The day of Jesus’ second coming is the day of glory and the day of victory for his elect, but it is the day of judgment and the day of tragedy for those who reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord. But no one knows when Jesus will come again. How wonderful and lucky we would be if we knew the hour or the day of his coming! Some people might wish that they could repent of all their sins right before Jesus comes again. They want to be saved at the last minute. But sorry to say, nobody knows when Jesus will come back. In verse 36 Jesus said, “***But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father***.” In today’s passage Jesus teaches us what we must do before he comes again and how we prepare for his second coming. May God bless all of us to be well prepared before he comes again! Amen.

First, Jesus comes again as life goes on. (36-41) Jesus said that he would come again just as the flood came to this world in Noah’s day. Look at verses 37-39. “***As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away***.” Noah was warned about what would happen in the future. God would destroy the world by flood because the earth was corrupt and was full of violence. In holy fear Noah built an ark to save his family. (Heb 11:7) But other people didn’t care about God’s warning or about Noah’s ark, but they ate, drank, married and were given in marriage as usual just before the flood came and swept them away. They knew nothing about what would happen. In the same way Jesus will come again while we are living a normal life by eating, drinking, working, studying, marrying and so on. The signs of the end of the age are horrible and are revealed in the universe, but people’s lives are normal. These days we see the signs of the end of the age, but people don’t care much. They live normal lives by eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage like the people in Noah’s day. They are spiritually dull to God’s warning and His divine judgment. As history proves, God’s judgment will come as life goes on.

Look at verses 40,41. “***Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left***.” These verses teach us that Jesus comes again on a normal day, but our salvation is personal. Jesus talks about ‘rapture’, which means ‘transportation of the believers from the earth to heaven at the day of Jesus’ second coming’. Two men were working in the same field; one was harvesting with a sickle and the other tying up bundles. The first one was lifted up leaving his sickle in the field while the second was watching his ascension. Two women were grinding with a hand mill. One was taken and the other left. Nobody knows who will be lifted up before Jesus comes again. Only God knows who will be lifted up. But I am sure that those whose names are written in the book of life through faith in Jesus Christ will be taken into heaven. Amen! Salvation is personal. The man with a sickle cannot take the man who ties up the bundle to heaven because salvation is personal. The woman cannot bring the other woman to heaven because salvation belongs to God’s sovereignty. This personal and selective rapture could happen in a family, in a church, at school, at working place or any place where people gather. I pray that all of us here may be lifted up together when Jesus comes again. Amen

Second, keep watch (42-51) Look at verses 42-44. “***Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him***.” Because we do not know when Jesus will come again we must keep watch. Jesus will come like a thief. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, “*for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*” Jesus himself said in Revelations 16:15, “*Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.*” A thief never gives us a notice. No thief leaves his text message saying, “I will break into your house around 2 am. So, be ready!” A thief comes when no one expects. Jesus will come when no one expects. Jesus may come while we are studying the Bible. He may come while we are working. He may come while we are watching TV or playing video games. He may come while we are sleeping. He may come while we are secretly sinning. Oops!

In verses 45-51 Jesus teaches us how we keep watch and how we prepare for Jesus’ second coming. Look at verses 45-47. “***Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions***.” Here Jesus teaches us who the faithful and wise servant is in God’s eyes. ‘Keep watching’ does not necessarily mean putting aside everything and just waiting for Jesus’ coming on the mountain top. It means being faithful to what we have to do for God and for others. Keep watching means to be faithful to fulfill our duties and responsibilities as people of God. The faithful and wise servants are not swayed by false prophets or false messiahs. The faithful and wise servants are responsible for their master’s work. They get up early in the morning and take care of their households by feeding them at the proper time. They live normal lives by believing in God’s salvation. They live before God’s eyes, not people’s eyes. Jesus said that it will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Then the servant will be promoted because he was wise and faithful. In the same way Jesus wants us to do what we have to do as God’s servants and God’s people. Jesus wants us to be faithful to our duty and to be responsible for God’s work. It will be good for us to do so when he returns.

Look at verses 48-51. “***But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***” The problem of the wicked servant is his negligence and abuse. He assumes that his master is not coming back soon and that he abuses his freedom and authority for his selfish purpose. When he had no fear of his master, he was violent and drunken. He was not faithful to his duty or responsibility. He is like the one who sins and wants to repent right before Jesus comes again. But the master will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. The master will judge him according to what he has done. The wicked servant will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Do you want to be a wise and faithful servant or a foolish and wicked servant?

Third, the Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13) Through this parable Jesus teaches us how we must prepare for Jesus’ second coming. Look at verses 1-5 “***At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep***.” The ten virgins are ten bridesmaids who support the bride and prepare for the coming of the bridegroom. In a Jewish marriage custom a bridegroom goes to his bride’s house with his best men. But the bride and her maids do not know when the bridegroom and his best men will arrive. So, the bridesmaids must be awake and keep watch in order to welcome the groom and his friends. In Jesus’ day a lamp was a torch. The lamp needs extra oil in order to keep the lamp burning. The five wise virgins took oil in jars along with their lamps, but the five foolish virgins didn’t take any oil with them. The bridegroom did not give notice when he would arrive. The ten virgins waited and waited for the groom, but he didn’t come. They thought that the groom might come the next day. They thought that it would be too late for him to travel. So, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

Look at verse 6. “***At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!***” The bridegroom arrived at midnight when the ten virgins were sleeping. At midnight someone shouted, “Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” Look at verses 7-8. “***Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out***.’” All the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. Trimming was cutting off the charred ends of rags and adding oil. The wise trimmed their lamps, but the foolish didn’t because they didn’t prepare extra oil. So the foolish virgins asked to borrow some oil from the five wise virgins.

What was the response of the five wise virgins? Look at verse 9. “***No’, they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.***’” Here we learn that oil cannot be shared or transferred. Preparing oil and burning lamps is personal preparation. What is oil in this parable? Someone says that oil is the metaphor of our faith in Jesus Christ. Others say that oil represents the Holy Spirit. Indeed, faith in Jesus cannot be shared or transferred to others. The Holy Spirit is also given to those who repent and receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. The main point of this parable is preparedness of Jesus’ second coming. Jesus is compared to our bridegroom. The idea of Messiah as bridegroom springs from the Old Testament (Is 54:4-6; 62:4-5; Ezekiel 16:7-34; Hosea 2:19). Jesus is the bridegroom to those who are waiting for his second coming. We are his pure and beautiful brides. We are waiting for his second coming as the Ten Virgins were waiting for their bridegroom. We don’t know when he comes. We must be awake and be prepared. We must prepare oil in order to welcome Jesus. We must prepare enough oil whether he comes late or his coming is delayed. No one borrows other’s faith or the Holy Spirit. Salvation is personal and our judgment will be done one to one.

What happened to the five foolish virgins? Look at verses 10-12. “***But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.***’” The foolish five virgins went out to buy oil, but it was too late. The door was shut. After the five wise virgins went into the house, the door was shut. No one could come in. The five foolish virgins begged to open the door, but it was too late. We must repent and believe in Jesus before we become too late to repent. In Dante’s *Inferno* from his poem ‘Divine Comedy’ people in hell are not allowed even to die because it was too late to repent. After the door was shut, no one can come in. After the door of the ark of Noah was shut, no one could come in. All peoples in Noah’s day were killed by the flood. There were no survivors on this earth except for Noah’s family and animals in the ark.

In conclusion Jesus warns his people in verse 13. Let us read verse 13 all together. “***Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour***.” Because no one knows when Jesus comes again, we must keep watch. We must keep watch and pray. We must be spiritually awake by reading the word of God and by living by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We also must be faithful to our duty as Christians. We must love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds, and love our neighbor as ourselves. We must be unashamed and blameless before God whether Jesus comes back tonight or tomorrow. May God help all of us here to become wise and faithful servants who serve the Lord as the Lord serves his churches. I pray that God may bless America to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Amen!