

## Matthew 24:36-44

<sup>36</sup> “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> 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; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

<sup>42</sup> “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (NIV)

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### ARE YOU PREPARING OR PROCRASTINATING?

If your Credit Card is like mine, the bill normally comes in the mail about three weeks before the due date. And do you know why they do that? It's to allow procrastinators like me three weeks to walk past the bill on the fridge. It's so that we can look at the due date every day and then say to ourselves the procrastinator's pledge: “Ah, plenty of time. I'll do that tomorrow!” There are people who have all of their Christmas shopping done before thanksgiving, and then there's me and 2,000 other procrastinators fighting for the last toys on the shelf at Toy's 'R' Us on December 23. Taxes are due on or around April 15 every year, but the Post Office has a line a mile long on that night, because lots of people like to procrastinate.

Often times a person who is a procrastinator knows it, and sometimes it even becomes a joke with their family or friends. As long as it doesn't hurt other people and as long as you are still able to meet deadlines, I suppose procrastinating can be harmless for many things.

God poses a question before us today. It's a question that is not asked of families or groups, but of individuals. You cannot answer for anyone but yourself. Today as we study God's Word, hear him ask, Are **you Preparing or Procrastinating?** We'll devote our time this morning to studying Jesus' words in Matthew 24 and answering that question.

When you know exactly when an event is taking place it is much easier to prepare for it right? If a friend is coming to Alaska to stay with you for a few days, it's not terribly difficult to prepare for that visit, right? Clean the house; prepare the guest bedroom, a few other odds and ends. It's not the worst thing in the world. But what about if your friend said, “I'm coming to visit and I will be there sometime in 2011”? If you were serious about having the house ready for them, it would take a lot of work, right? You would have to have the house in a state of readiness for the entire year. It would take dedication and constant awareness to achieve that goal. You would need persistence and dedication to the cause of keeping the house clean.

God never promises that it will be easy to be prepared for his Son's return! One of the reasons that preparing for Christ is a challenge is that we don't know when he will come. God tells us who else doesn't know. ***No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*** God doesn't tell us when Christ will be back, but that's OK. What do you think this world would be like if we knew that Jesus wasn't coming back for another 10 years? Satan would have

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a field day with that. “Live for yourself for 9 ½ years, he would say and then shore up your life and live for Jesus,” the he would tell us. And there are a lot of sinful natures out there that would take that advice!

There are a lot of people who are procrastinating and not preparing. There are a lot who are not ready for Christ to return and will be very surprised and deeply disappointed when he does. Jesus uses a Bible history story to make that point. <sup>37</sup> *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.* <sup>38</sup> *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;* <sup>39</sup> *and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.* Did you notice that Jesus didn't mention things that overtly sinful as the caricatures of the people in the days of the flood? Eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage are not sinful things, unless they become the thing that a person is living for. If those things prevent a person from having a relationship with God, then there is a problem. That's what it did for the people of Noah's day. Many of them heard Noah's words of warning, saw him building the ark, but didn't have an ounce of concern, at least until the rain started to fall. Then those same people came and pounded on the door, begging for Noah to let them in, but it was too late. The judgment had arrived.

Sadly, Jesus says that in the last days the world will react like in Noah's day. People may have heard of Christ, but they aren't willing to live for him. Many will know Christians, but not have any interest in being one themselves. Some may have even been a believer at some time, but lost patience in the wait. The world is distracted with its eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. The world is distracted with its self-promotion and greedy gain. The world is so full of itself, that there is no room for things like humility, patience, and self-control. The world's preaching is so full of “me” that there is no room for “him!” Life is too much about “this life” to waste it preparing for the future.

There is a fable told about 3 demons in hell who are applying to be Satan's #1 assistant. They each are running their campaigns on different ideas of how best to destroy humanity. The first suggested that they could destroy the human race if they convinced people that there was no God. The devil rejected that idea, because he knew that too many knew that there is a God. The second ran his campaign with the idea that they spread the rumor that there is no hell. The devil rejected that idea as well, and for the same reason – too many people know that there is a hell. The third had a different idea. He suggested that that they convince the world that there is no hurry! He is the one who got the job.

You've heard that lie, haven't you? There is plenty of time between now and Judgment Day. Not only have you heard it, but you have at least in part bought into it. When God looks at your life, does he see preparing or procrastinating? Does he see a person who is excited to live for him today, or one who is thinking about living for him tomorrow? Does God see one who busies himself with spiritual things and then lives out the earthly in that spiritual light? Or does he see one whose schedule is so full of fluff that there is no room for what truly matters? Does he see one who knows the importance of preparing, but just can't manage to put that knowledge into action?

It's pretty embarrassing when we consider what God sees, isn't it? When the excuses and the rationales are stripped away. God's full body scanner shows more than the TSA's doesn't it? It shows

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our failures and leaves us without excuse. God's law exposes our sins and speaks clear threats of eternal punishment.

During Advent we look forward and back to the arrivals of Jesus Christ. We look forward to his eminent return on Judgment Day. We strive to put procrastination aside and to be always preparing ourselves more and more for his coming, but inevitably we will fail. We will slip in our efforts to prepare, and at just those times we can be thankful for the fact that Advent is about the two arrivals of Jesus. For the times that we consider our lack of preparation for his second coming we can be thankful that our merciful God points us back to his first arrival on earth. We can look back to the baby who was born our Savior. We can rejoice that Christmas means forgiveness and peace. He wipes away our spiritual procrastination, our lack of readiness, along with all our sins. He washes us clean in the blood that he shed. He came to life so that he could give that life for us. And he rose so that we too could rise to live a glorious life with him in heaven forever.

But until the day that he calls us home, he urges us, ***Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*** Even though that is a command that he gives us, he doesn't leave us on our own to carry it out. He equips us to keep watch. He makes us strong enough to be ready for him. We don't have to stop our lives in order to be prepared. We don't have to follow a cult leader and quit our jobs and sell our homes and go live in the desert. But God makes it possible to live our normal lives in a special way. Living a life that is "preparing for Christ to come" means making Christ a priority. It means putting value on Bible study – whether that takes place at church or in the home. It means living with Jesus on your tongue and being willing to put yourself out there to tell others about Jesus' love. It means that prayer is something that you give some real thought to, not just 5 seconds before you eat. It means that Christ is a part of all your decisions – the way that you budget your money, the way that you spend your time, the way that you act towards those who are around you, even the ones that are making you mad.

Preparing for Christ's return is an on-going activity. "Keep on preparing," Jesus says. But as we labor here on earth, as we struggle to prepare for Christ's coming, we can take heart in knowing that Jesus is preparing, too. He is preparing for our coming to be with him. He is preparing for you, a guest in his home for an eternity.

May this Advent season be for you a joyful time! A time to recommit to being ready and watchful. As joyful as our Christmas celebrations always are, we can look forward with the same anticipation to Judgment Day, when we will inherit the best gift of all everlasting life. Since we don't know when that day will be, we pray that God will help us to always be ready. Let's close with that prayer today!!

Lord God, make us faithful, strong, and true. Give us faithful hearts, like you gave Noah, and make us always ready and watchful, eager for you to return. Curb all temptation for us to put our guard down and forgive us for the times that we fail. Prop us up with your forgiveness and grace. Come quickly to take us from this vale of tears to your side in glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.