

Come and Listen: The Parables of Jesus
Be Ready for His Return
Matthew 24-25, especially 24:36-44

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Dr. Steve Horn

Introduction: This summer we have been studying the Parables of Jesus. We have called our study “Come and Listen” because I sense that this is how Jesus told these parables. In fact, I think it went something like this: Come close and listen.

When we encounter parables in the Gospels, there are a few basic interpretative principles that we must employ in order to get the real meaning of the text.

1. Understand the purpose of all parables. The literal meaning of the word parable is “to throw beside” or “to set beside.” Jesus used parables to throw beside a teaching or an instructive principle. That leads us to the second consideration.
2. We must seek to understand what that principle is. “What is the main point” is the question we should be asking. Most times, if not all times, there is something in the context that reveals precisely what the main point is and the story simply illustrates that main point.
3. Because we are looking for the main point, it is also important to understand that we need not press the details of the story. In other words, parables are not allegories in every case. I suggest that this particular parable is not an allegory—that is let’s not press the issue with every detail of the story, but rather seek to get the main point.

Now today, we actually have several parables before us, but they all relate to the same topic—the return of Christ at the end of the age.

Text: ³⁶“Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone. ³⁷As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. ³⁸For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. ³⁹They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴²Therefore be alert, since you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Message Introduction:

Of all the Gospels, Matthew might be called the Gospel of Jesus’ sermons. In Matthew we find the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), an extended sermon on the meaning of discipleship (10), sermons on the meaning of the Kingdom of God (13), and then the Olivet Discourse as found in our text today (24-25). Certainly we must pay attention to all that Jesus taught and did, but perhaps we ought to pay much closer attention to this—*His final sermon*.

This sermon, or Discourse, as it is most often called comes as the result of a question from the disciples. Jesus had just prophesied to the disciples the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which did happen, by the way, in A.D. 70. This prophecy prompted a question from the disciples about the timing and then bleeds over into a question about the “end of the age.” (v.3)

What follows in chapter 24 and 25 is an extended sermon on these questions. From His sermon, we gain much insight into this particular belief that “Christ is returning.”

I have heard from many that every sermon ought to have a point. Often times, the preacher will have an illustration or a story to help make clear the point of the sermon. Finally, a sermon ought to offer some application for the main point of the sermon. The application is the “so what” of the sermon. Let’s consider Jesus’ final sermon in that kind of way today.

The Thesis of the Sermon

- Jesus will return.
- We better be ready.

Now, understand that libraries of books have been written about the return of Christ. There is a certain fascination with the subject of Christ’s return. Many will be frustrated by my teaching today, because you will want to know more. But, as I see it, here is the main point of what Jesus had to say about His return: “I will return, so be ready.”

This is our belief. I think the theology of Jesus’ return can be compared to the principle of buttoning a shirt. If you button the first button in the wrong place, the rest of the shirt is going to be wrong. Here’s the main point of Jesus’ return: He is coming again. If you go beyond that as the main point to the theology of Christ’s return, every other part of your theology will be wrong.

The Illustrations of the Sermon

After presenting the main point, Jesus presents several illustrations to drive the point home. Each of the stories or parables helps us with a further understanding.

The Parables help us to understand the Timing of Jesus’ Return:

1. Jesus will return at an unknown time. (24:42-44)
2. Jesus will return sooner than some of us expect. (24:45-51)

The story is of a faithful and wise servant. The wise servant is the one who is doing what his master has requested upon the return. The evil servant is the one who thinks he has time for beating his fellow servants and eating and drinking with the drunkards, thinking that he has time to get “his house in order.”

3. Jesus will return later than some of us expect. (25:1-13)

The parable concerns ten engaged brides waiting for the bridegroom. Five were foolish bringing no oil for their lamps thinking that the groom would come before their lamps went dry. Five were wise by bringing oil to replenish their lamps in case of delay.

We know Jesus is coming! We do not know the timing. We need to live like it is soon, but prepare like it is a long way off. To not do both is foolish!

The Parables also help us to understand some Truths of Jesus' Return:

1. When Jesus returns, He expects to find us faithful. (25:14-30)

The parable concerns the giving of talents. The master gave one five talents, another two, and yet another one. The ones given five and two made five and two more. The one receiving one dug a hole in the ground to keep his one.

The point of the parable is that God gives us according to our abilities and expects to find us faithful upon His return.

2. When Jesus returns, His findings will be final. (25:31-46)

The story is of the sheep and goats. The truth is that God knows and is able to separate us into those who have been faithful and those who have not. His findings (His judgments) will be final.

On May 19, 1780, the Connecticut Legislature was meeting. It was an uncertain time. The war had ended. The colonies were trying to figure out how to live as a group as one unified nation. Prices were soaring and taxes were a burden. On this May afternoon, the sky darkened as never before. Some quickly surmised that this must be the end of the world. All were afraid. Many suggested that they adjourn the assembly and "head for the hills" or at least home. A certain man named Colonel Abraham Davenport, a Christian rose to speak. Here is what he said, "I am against adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is not cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore I wish that candles be brought {in} and we proceed with business."

The Application of the Sermon

Be Ready!!!!

I have heard the story of Sir Ernest Shackleton, a famous explorer, in the late 1800's and early 1900's. In an expedition to the Antarctic, Shackleton had to leave over 20 of his men under the command of Frank Wild. It was over 100 days before Shackleton was able to break through the ice to rescue his men. He found them packed and ready. It is reported that Wild woke his men every morning by saying "Pack your things, boys, the boss may return today."

Such should be our attitude as we wait the return of our LORD.