Are you Ready?

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[0:00] Are you a crammer? I mean, do you tend to generally leave things to the last minute?! Maybe you're at school and your teacher has told you that there's an exam coming up.

How long do you wait until you start studying for it? You see, the tendency of most of us is, if we're honest, we don't do the things we need to do until we really need to do them, right?
Until that deadline is approaching. And that is, I think, why we secretly like deadlines. Because at least if we have a deadline for something coming up, we know when it's coming and we know how long we can put it off for.
I think most of us have that tendency. We've been studying in Matthew 24 what Jesus says about the end times, about what's coming.
And it's a very controversial topic. There was a lot of discussion after last week's sermon, and you can see online and stuff, a lot of Christians are talking a lot about the end times, and especially the signs to look out for, for the end times.
[1:13] And looking in world events, and looking at the news, and looking at the signs, trying to interpret what's going on. And I suspect one of the reasons that people are actually so frenetically interested in the signs of the end times today is the same reason that we like deadlines.

So that we have time to prepare. So that we can see what's coming, and so that we can get ready for it. But that is why Jesus now teaches His disciples probably one of the most important lessons about His return to this world and the end of history, which is that nobody will see it coming.
That's really the point of what He says in today's passage. And so the only way to be ready for that is to be ready today.
To be ready today. Are you ready for that today? Well, let's find out. So have a look in Matthew 24.
So far in this chapter, Jesus has been telling His disciples the signs that they need to know about, which are going to anticipate the coming destruction of Jerusalem, their capital city, which they really need to know about in order to survive it.
[2:39] And the reason He's been telling them this for 35 verses is because they asked Him. In verse 3, I'll remind you, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately.

Tell us, they said, when will all this happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? So that verse, verse 3 in your Bibles, is quite important to know what the rest of the chapter is about.
It's Jesus answering the disciples' question they ask in verse 3. But what you'll notice, if you look at it carefully, is they ask two questions. Firstly, when will this happen?
The destruction of the temple that He's just predicted. And secondly, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? So they asked it in one question because they assumed all of that was going to happen together.
And so Jesus answers them. But first, and we looked at it last week, He answers the first question about the temple. And He tells them what signs they can know to predict when the temple is going to be destroyed and how to prepare for it.
[3:42] But now, from verse 36 onwards, He starts answering the second question about His return at the end. Have a look from verse 36.

But about that day or hour, no one knows. Not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. So, that's interesting.
Not even Jesus knew about when that's going to happen. So He could hardly tell His disciples what to look out for, if not even He knows. Right? As opposed to the destruction of Jerusalem that He could warn them about, and He has been in the last 35 verses.

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This day will have no warning. No warning. And because Christians typically confuse these two events, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age, and they think that the signs that He's spoken about so far, about the destruction of Jerusalem, are still talking about our future.
Because Christians confuse the events of this chapter, they think that there will still be signs to come in our future that will give us warning of Jesus coming back.
[4:54] Jesus here is saying, there won't be. There won't be. And that is a critical truth to understand. There will not be warning. And that is critical, especially when we consider what will happen on that day and why we need to be ready for it.

You see, because on that day Jesus is talking about, it will be judgment day. Judgment day. Okay? It's not just a Terminator movie.
It's a real thing. It's a real thing. The Bible has been speaking about for, you know, millennia. God has been telling us about it for a long time.
It is going to happen in this world. Judgment day is coming. Because, and you know, this is why judgment day is coming. Because this world has been coming. Because this world has been created by a just God.
Who really upholds justice. Justice matters to the God who made this world. And he does not tolerate any wrong or injustice in this world indefinitely.
[6:06] That is a core characteristic of God that the Bible talks about over and over again. And that is why, for example, Ecclesiastes ends with these words.

You know, Ecclesiastes is a book about a wise man trying to understand the injustice and the unfairness of the world we live in. But after all of his wrestling with all the questions of this frustrating, broken world, he ends up with this very important truth.
For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. That is a truth that we read throughout Scripture.
No matter what is going on in this world, no matter how unfair things are, no matter how unjust things are, no matter how many evil people are getting away with evil things, the Bible assures us time and time and time and time again, there is a day of justice coming.
And that is why Paul, when he was standing in the middle of Athens, talking to the pagan philosophers, could say these words, Acts 17, 31.
[7:16] For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed and he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

So there we know for sure that judgment day is coming because Jesus has been physically, historically risen from the dead. So now we don't only know that it's coming, we even know through whom God is going to judge this world.
It's going to be through his son, Jesus Christ, who was here in the flesh, physically in this world, and is coming back. And he says so. One day Jesus will physically return and walk on this planet again. And he will come with glory as the Son of God. And he will come with one job. And that job will be to hold every human life to account according to the law of God who gave life to us.
Which is only fair, right? The God who gave us life is going to hold us accountable for how we've used that life. And that is coming and it is sure and certain.
[8:29] And no one will be able to avoid it. Not anyone. Even those who have died. Even death is not an escape from this day because God, the Bible says, will raise everyone for this day.

And so no one will be able to escape it and no one will be able to ignore it. You can't hide on that day. Not the skeptic in your office who has got all these good arguments against the existence of God.
Not your squash buddy who has always wanted to avoid talking about Jesus and is not interested in religion. On this day that's coming, they will not be able to avoid Jesus. No one will ignore Jesus on that day.
In fact, he gave a sneak peek of this a few verses before. In verse 27, he said, where am I, Matthew? Matthew 24.
Listen to what he said. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. So that picture of lightning, it lights up the whole sky.
[9:35] And in the same way, when Jesus comes back, all will see it. There will be no place that won't realize and see what's going on. It will be unavoidable for every human being who's ever lived.

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But also, just like lightning, and what Jesus is teaching here, is that it will come without warning. Have you ever tried to take a photograph of lightning?
You can never see it coming, and by the time it comes, it's too late. Unless you have long exposure. But that's what Jesus is stressing here from verse 36 especially, that when he comes and he's pleading with people to tell them, listen, I'm going to come without warning.
You won't know. Not even I at the moment know when it will be. No one will know. And so look how he stresses it from verse 37 onwards. 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 given 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.
[10:47] That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. I don't know if you've seen in the last week some of those images of floods, flash floods that are happening in Asia.

And, you know, those shocking videos of just people going about their ordinary lives, and these waters just come in and completely take them away with no warning.
And that's the image Jesus is using here to talk about when he comes. When he comes, it will be totally unexpected, just like it was in Noah's day when the floods came.
People will be going about their ordinary lives when Jesus comes back, just like they were in Noah's day. They were getting married and given in marriage. They were focused on all these different things of life.
And when they realized what was happening, it was too late. It was kind of like, you know, it's not comfortable to think about, but sometimes I've thought about what it was like for those people.
[11:53] On September 11th, the terrorist attacks in New York when the planes flew into the buildings, and thousands of people in their offices in the World Trade Center, and no warning. They were going about their ordinary day.

It was 8.30 in the morning. They were getting ready for a meeting. They were stressing about the presentation they've got to give to their boss. They were worrying about the accounts, and they looked out the window, and Jumbo Jet comes and flies into the building with no warning, and forever changes the world, their world.
And it's the same. That's the kind of image Jesus is giving here. When he comes, there will be no warning. It will be totally unexpected. There will be no escalation of global events that we can track in the news that warn us of his coming.
There will be no signs in the Middle East that we can see, oh, this is pointing to when Jesus is coming. There will be no chance to prepare. It will be in the middle of an ordinary day that Jesus comes.
And so don't fool yourself into thinking that you'll have time to prepare before that. You won't. You know, often you come across people who have this attitude, and as a pastor I've seen it, where, ah, you know, I'll come to church.
[13:12] I'll sort out my life later on. I'll sort out my relationship with the big guy upstairs later on. Right now, though, I'm just so busy with life. You know, right now it's just I'm concentrated on other things.

I will sort that out later. I will sort out the religious stuff later. Have you come across people like that? Because I'm just too busy now.
People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Everyone's busy.
Everyone's busy with a whole lot of different things in life. But when that day comes, that meeting that you're preparing for with the boss, that presentation that you've got to give, that's not going to matter.
When that day comes, your career that you've been building for decades, that's not going to matter. That course that you're pouring your time and energy into to get that qualification, that's not going to matter.
[14:20] Those house alterations that you've been putting money into and that you've been planning for years, that's not going to matter when Jesus comes back. That investment that you've poured your energy and money and time into, that's not going to matter.

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None of that will matter. In a moment, all of that will become worthless. The only thing that will matter is whether you are ready or not for Jesus to come back.
One day, that is all that's going to matter. That's going to matter. That's going to matter. So don't put this off. If you've been putting this off, if you've been putting off getting right with God, for some reason, you've been putting it off.
Don't put it off any longer. If you're not taking Jesus seriously in your life right now, and I've been a pastor for long enough to know that not everyone in church, not everyone who's sitting in church is taking Jesus seriously in their life.
And if you're not taking Jesus seriously in your life right now, if you just pop into church from time to time, kind of to tick the box, because maybe you like Christian things and you enjoy the upliftment church gives you, but you're not taking Jesus seriously.
[15:33] He is not the authority in your life. You are still concentrating on the things you want to do. Well, then I implore you to start taking Jesus seriously now, because he is the only chance you or anyone will ever have of surviving the day that is coming, because the Bible says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, including you, including me.

And even though if you do regularly come to church, and you do live with Jesus as your Lord, and you trust him, and you're a Christian, that doesn't necessarily mean that you're ready.
You know that? Because notice in this passage, Jesus is warning his own disciples. This is not a public address. This is a private address to his own disciples, who by this point believe that he's the Messiah.
He is warning them that they still need to make sure that they are ready. And he tells them this from verse 42, 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 the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch, and would not have let his house be broken into.
[16:52] So Jesus uses an illustration that I think we're very familiar with in South Africa. A thief coming in to break into a house and steal its possessions.

Now I don't know about your experience, but from what I've experienced, thieves are not in the habit of making appointments. Right? You don't get a message on your phone saying, Just a reminder about your upcoming burglary that will be at 2 in the morning on Thursday night.
No. If you knew when the thief was coming, you'd be able to prepare for that. You'd be able to set your alarm and make sure you were awake and everything was ready so that he wouldn't plunder your house.
But the thief does not give you an appointment. The thief does not make an appointment, and neither does Jesus. That's what he's saying here.
So many times from this point, from when he said this, used this illustration, the later New Testament writers write this phrase, Jesus will come like a thief in the night, because they get it from what he said here.
[18:01] Without appointment. And so the only way to be ready for that is to stay awake the whole night. Right? You can't set your alarm and only get ready when the thief is coming, because he doesn't make an appointment, if you really want to be ready.

And back then, you know, in those days, they had mud brick houses without fences, without armed response, without alarms. So the only way to protect your house was to stay awake the whole night.
And that's what Jesus is saying to us. We've got to be awake. We've got to stay awake. When he says those words, keep watch, literally, it means stay awake.
So how do we do that, though, in our lives? We've got lives to live, you know, we've got things to do. How do we stay awake? What does it mean? What does it look like to constantly be ready for Jesus to come back?
Because that is what he's saying we need to do here. Because it's not going to come with warning, we've got to constantly stay awake. Every day be ready for him to come back. So what does that look like in our lives?
[19:05] Well, Jesus teaches us with a story. Let me read it from verse 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 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.

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But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, my master is staying away for a long time. And then he 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 their bicarbates, where they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
And so here we have the story of a master who assigns, he's going away and he assigns a servant to the task of looking after his household and he gives him a job to do while he's gone.
[20:20] And if he does the job he's given, Jesus says he's a faithful and wise servant and he has no problem when the master returns. In fact, it's good for him. He ends up in a better position when the master returns.

But suppose, Jesus says, suppose he doesn't want to do the work that his master has given him. He's actually not really interested in that.
And his master is delayed. So eventually what that servant does, he stops doing the work because his master doesn't seem he's coming back anytime soon.
So he stops doing the work he's been giving and he starts doing what he wants to do. But then, when the master returns, it's not going to be good for him.
Verse 51, He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
[21:21] That escalated quickly. You know, that's pretty extreme. But Jesus often does this. He often, you'll notice at the end of his parables, suddenly uses very unexpected shock language.

And he does that to indicate that he's actually talking about something much more serious than a story about a house owner. He's talking about him leaving this world and how it's going to be for us when he comes back.
And how it's going to be for us when he comes back will all depend on whether we are living lives that are appropriate for his return. And it'll depend on what we've been busy with while he's been gone.
Because just like this house owner in the parable who has given his servant a job to do while he's been gone, Jesus has given all Christians a job to do until he comes back.
And we've seen it. Last week we were reminded that Jesus is now gathering his elect and the job he's given all Christians to do is to be involved in that one and only important thing in this stage of history which is to gather his elect through the church using our different gifts and talents and secular jobs and resources to support and grow that work which is all that matters in this age.
[22:56] That is the job that Jesus has given to all Christians to be involved in. And Christians not getting on with that Christians just using their using this time on earth for their own things this attitude of oh well I'm safe I'll wait for heaven and in the meantime I'll just get on with my career and my investments and my whatever I want to.

Christians who are doing that and not getting on with the job that Jesus has given us are not going to be ready. They're not going to be ready. They're not going to be found doing their master's work when he returns.
And the warning that he gives to those kind of people couldn't be starker and couldn't be more sobering here. And he says you know verse 51 He will cut them to pieces and assign them a place with the hypocrites.
We've come across that word before in Matthew. Hypocrites it's literally just the Greek word for actor. So Jesus is literally saying here he will assign them a place with the actors.
With those who are only showing you know a surface of Christianity but they always deep down wanted to do their own thing. Well on that day they will be exposed as hypocrites.
[24:19] Like this wicked servant here. But you know this wicked servant made the mistake of thinking that he will have enough warning that he will be able to prepare and get ready for his master when he sees the signs of him coming and I think that is many Christians today.

They're looking so intently for signs of the end times often because they want warning so that they'll have enough time to get their life in order and be ready for when Jesus comes.
I think that is at the sort of subconscious heart motive level of why people are looking for the signs. Why are you so interested in the signs? Why are you so interested in seeing the signs?
So that you know you can get ready and know that you'll be ready in time. But as we learned last week in the first part of Matthew 24 surprising to many people all of those signs that we think are

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about the end times have actually already happened.
The only thing left is the return of Jesus Christ to this world and because that will happen without warning the only way that you will ever be ready for that is to be ready today.
[25:34] Taking Christ seriously in your life today. Coming under his rule properly. Bowing the knee to your Lord and Master and doing the work that he's given you to do.

Are you? Are you ready for your Master to return? Think about this.
If you knew Jesus was coming back next Saturday afternoon at 2.30 I don't know how you knew that but let's just say hypothetically you knew Jesus is coming back next weekend next Saturday 2.30 yes we won't be able to see the third test between SA and New Zealand too bad but imagine Jesus is coming back next Saturday let me ask you if you knew that how would this week look different in your life?
What would you do differently between now and Saturday if you knew Jesus was coming back on Saturday afternoon? Ask yourself well I'm pretty sure you would probably be praying more every day you would probably read your Bible every day you would you might even come to the evening service tonight you would be taking it seriously if we had a prayer meeting on Wednesday I bet you you'd be there if Jesus was coming back on Saturday you would definitely go to growth group you would do everything you could to be ready and I think you'd be really urgent to tell other people the people at the office it doesn't actually matter now what they think of you Jesus is coming back on Saturday so you would phone up that guy and say listen we've been putting off this coffee for ages let's get together this week because I really want to share with you something that's really important that I think you need to hear we would do all those things if we knew Jesus was coming back on Saturday and that is what it means to stay awake that is what it means to stay awake the whole night and Jesus whole point in this passage is that that should be every week for a Christian because he could come at any moment and so as I close I want to challenge you maybe think of just one way that you could be more awake this week one thing that you are not doing that you would do if Jesus was coming back on Saturday and start doing it and then the next week start doing another one and the next week start doing another one because he could come back on Saturday he could come back tomorrow today and so don't delay if you know there are things that you would be doing that you are not doing now if Jesus was coming back imminently start doing them don't delay
[28:40] I want to close by reading to you from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 it says this now brothers and sisters about times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night while people are saying peace and safety destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape but you brothers and sisters are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief you are all children of the light and children of the day we do not belong to the night or to the darkness so then let us not be like others who are asleep but let us be awake and sober for those who sleep sleep at night and those who get drunk get drunk at night but since we belong to the day let us be sober putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet for

God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ let's pray and ask for God's help Lord we thank you for this very important warning Lord Jesus that you gave us we thank you for this chapter that we've read over the last two Sundays that clears up so much confusion and we thank you Lord that you have warned us that we need to be ready today and Lord each of us needs to ask how we are to be ready more ready in our lives and I pray that you would help us to do that today as we go home and think about what you've spoken to us as we go into this week would you help us each to examine our lives soberly and to know how we are not yet ready for your return and help us to put those things into practice in
Jesus name Amen

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