

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday in Advent, November 30, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 604, 479:3, 609, 656, 644.

Lessons: Genesis 6:9-22, 1 Peter 1:19-2:9, Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:37-44.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Are you ready?” How often haven’t we heard or even asked that question? Ready to go somewhere, ready to eat, ready to work, ready to play? All those kinds of things can excite us and make us prepare.

I suspect that some of you have also made some kind of emergency preparations. We are encouraged to plan for the kind of things like physical disasters, with food, water, and other supplies in case something happens unexpectedly. Some of you may have even made some preparations for a medical emergency. All those kinds of things can scare us and encourage us to prepare. My point is that we prepare for all sorts of things on earth. We also prepare for future days and months and years.

But to paraphrase the poet, we know that the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray.

Then there are the kinds of preparations that are made that are never needed. When I was a child, there were all sorts of preparations made for a nuclear war. There were fallout shelters stocked with food and water in just about every town to supposedly save you from nuclear radiation. You can still see the signs in some places indicating that location was designated as a fallout shelter. Children were taught in school to “duck and cover”, which, when you think about it now, is kind of ridiculous. In case we saw the flash of an atomic bomb, we were to duck under our desks, and cover our heads with our arms. I can even remember worrying and asking my father how likely it was that our small town would be close to an atomic bomb target. He assured me that much larger cities than Madison, Wisconsin, our nearest city, would be bombed, but even that wasn’t likely to happen. All those preparations were useless, because such a disaster never happened.

Well, I give that narrative to show how it is that mankind has been soooo concerned about some things that never happen and then forget about them or lose preparedness. But today we are talking about something that God says will happen. And so we have the warning from Jesus himself:

KEEP WATCH!

- 1. You do not know when the Lord will come.**
- 2. Jesus will come in judgment *“at an hour when you do not expect him.”***

The Word of God has a great deal to say about judgment day. Although it does not tell us specifically when it will come, it warns us repeatedly to keep watch and be ready at any time.

It is so easy to become complacent about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we surely aren’t complacent and indifferent about the celebration of Jesus’ first coming to earth. We are already making abundant plans and preparations for that celebration, Christmas.

But do we think much about the unknown time when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead? Perhaps we should spend more time thinking about that. As God’s beloved children by faith in Jesus Christ, we look forward to that day with longing, the older we get, desiring Jesus to come quickly.

In the Word of God before us today we see the example from the time of Noah. God was warning the world that judgment would come upon them. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, spent 120 years preparing and warning people of God’s coming judgment in a great flood, warning them to repent before it was too late.

The world was extremely wicked. You heard that ***"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."*** (Genesis 6:5) Because of that, God brought utter destruction through a world-wide flood upon all mankind except for the eight souls saved in the ark, Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives.

"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."

So people obviously ignored Noah and the warnings given by him. They were carrying on with their lives as if nothing bad would ever happen to them. They no doubt expected that they would live nice, long lives, and die of old age unless some disease they acquired because of their wickedness killed them first, and it is not likely they were concerned about that. At any rate, they were content with their lives, and continued to live it up without concern for what would happen after they died.

The kinds of things Jesus speaks of are the kinds of things that people enjoy. Eating, drinking, celebrating, especially, he says, marrying. And I think we know the ways in which many people celebrate. Many cannot celebrate anything without all sorts of immorality, of ignoring and despising God's will and commands, and, of course, there is also the danger of abusing things God has given us. Alcohol has become a great part of celebrating today. It seems that some people think and act like they can't live without alcohol or even other drugs, things which dull our senses, and make us less alert and responsive and responsible.

Then, in the 40 days and nights that torrents of rain came down and the fountains of the deep underground poured out water, they learned, to their sorrow, that Noah was right in his warnings. Warnings were given repeatedly. But God's judgment came upon them suddenly.

If mankind was wicked in Noah's day, how much more wicked must mankind be today? Even in the past few years we've seen mankind grow much more evil. And there is no end in sight of growing wickedness and even boasting of that sinfulness.

Jesus goes on: ***"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 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."*** Just that suddenly. Just that unexpectedly. Not only will their lives end, but they will end with the judgment of Jesus Christ coming upon them immediately. There will be no second chance. Our Gospel lesson made that clear. At the time of God's judgment Scripture says ***"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*** (Matthew 25:46) Each one will be saved eternally or will be condemned to eternal damnation. Despite the fact that many think there will be a second chance after death, that is not true.

There is no time lapse between death and judgment. That is also clear from the scene at Jesus' crucifixion when one of the criminals crucified with Jesus ***"said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:42-43)*** Listen, too, to this warning from Ecclesiastes: ***"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth."*** Why? Because when you die that is the end: ***"the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."*** (Ecclesiastes 12:1 and 7)

Death is inevitable. Judgment day is inevitable. Whichever comes first will end our earthly life. And no man knows when that will happen. Death may come upon us suddenly. You may even have known people to whom that has happened. Judgment day will come upon us suddenly.

Jesus tells us plainly: ***"a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."*** (John 5:28-29)

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus begins to talk about the coming of judgment day as well as the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 A.D., about a generation after his crucifixion and resurrection. God today in our sermon text warns us to be ready for the moment of judgment day. Jesus' coming in judgment will occur at any time. Jesus tells us in the words immediately before our text: ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*** (Matthew 24:36) In his humility, he says he did not know the moment of judgment, speaking even of that ***"hour"***. It will come without further warning. Jesus puts himself in our place because we do not know either. Instead of trying to figure out when it

will happen, Jesus urges us to be ready. We have become so accustomed to warnings of natural disasters that we might think that there will be some warning of the moment of our eternal judgment. I have even heard of those who think that Jesus will appear in Jerusalem on judgment day and the rest of the world can see it on television news live, thus giving them time to repent! Not so, says Jesus. Pay no attention to what men tell you; even people who claim to speak for God, or who claim to know the Bible. You must look only at Jesus' words!

It is typical of God to warn people before he pours out his wrath upon them. It is typical of humans to ignore the warning and be caught by surprise when his judgment descends. God has warned us in the Scriptures. That is why, from our point of view, the Last Day will come like a thief. God is warning us today! ***"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."***

Jesus gives us another picture to shock us into being alert. He uses the picture of a thief breaking in. ***"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."*** Of course! If we know when someone is coming, we will be ready! But we don't know when a thief will break in. In the same way we don't know when Jesus will come.

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Be on guard! Be alert! Don't immerse yourself in the things of this world and thus lose your own soul. Always keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Mark's Gospel ends his report of this narrative with these words: ***"If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*** (Mark 13:36-37)

"You do not know on what day your Lord will come." The day he comes will be a terrible day for all who rejected Jesus, but a happy day of ultimate blessing for believers.

Remember Jesus' words on judgment day to the unbelievers who rejected him: ***"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"*** (Matthew 25:41) That is their eternal damnation.

Yes, we are to keep watch, but it will be a joyous day for all who believe in him when Jesus comes. It may come after much tribulation, but it will come. Jesus, our Savior and King tells us ***"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"*** (Matthew 25:34) The book of Revelation, especially the last chapters, is filled with pictures of the bliss, beauty and glory of heaven which is waiting for all who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin.

Just as for Noah and his family, the great flood had a blessed ending, so will judgment day – or death – bring a blessed ending for all believers. After Noah and his family thanked the Lord God and sacrificed offerings to him, God said ***"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."*** (Genesis 9:11-13)

We find our comfort in knowing and believing that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, obeying God's laws and will perfectly, and then he was punished, crucified, dead, and buried in the place of all sinners. And God gives that righteousness of Jesus to us! We find comfort in these very last words of the Bible: ***"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."*** (Revelation 22:20-21)