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Matthew 24:37-44
ARE YOU READY YET?

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One thing you can say about the Church year is that it is very predictable, at least at the start. Today begins the Advent season with its four Sundays. The first Sunday always brings us to the Second Coming of Christ and the final Judgment. The Lord's Second Coming is a certainty and people will be caught unawares. The Second Sunday in Advent brings us face to face with a very special man that God would send to prepare the way for his Son, a man whose message is not very welcome but is always needed: John the Baptist. The Third Sunday in Advent focuses on the importance of John's message and the Fourth Sunday focuses on the promise of the Virgin Birth. Then we have Christmas Eve where we focus on the nativity of our Lord and Christmas Day where we focus on the incarnation.

Are you ready yet? You will be asked that question many times in the next few weeks. Christmas is rapidly approaching. It will be here in only four more weeks. There will be plenty of sales encouraging you to buy nice presents for your family and friends. You start thinking of all the things that have to be done or so they tell you. You have to put up the tree, clean the house, buy presents, address and send cards, bake cookies, and do whatever else you do each year for the holidays. It can get exhausting. You have a list and you cross things off, one at a time. No matter what you do, there is always something more to be done. At least that is what the world tells us.

Yes, the world tells us that at this time of the year, we must be going constantly. Don't stop! Don't slow down! There is too much to do. Is that the proper way to prepare ourselves for Christmas? No, it is not! For centuries the Christian Church has observed the season of Advent for good reason. True preparation for Christmas is not found in going, going, going, but rather in taking our time by preparing our hearts.

Advent is a season that people really don't want to observe. It is a time of penitence and reflection upon our sin and our need for a Savior. Most people want to jump immediately to Christmas just as they want to jump immediately to Easter without the Lenten season. They get so caught up preparing for the wrong things. A number of years ago I had the opportunity to go behind the scenes at the Rose Bowl parade in Pasadena. I saw how the float builders worked on the floats. Many of them worked over 24 hours getting them ready. They missed the parade because they were too tired. Isn't it that way for so many at Christmas? They are so busy getting everything else done that they aren't even in Church for the festival of our Lord's Incarnation. There is a problem there.

Our Lord Jesus tells us, "You also must be ready!" Here he is talking about his second coming. You also must be ready. We ask, "ARE YOU READY YET?" Is one of these your answer? "I'm ready enough." "I have plenty of time to get ready." Or "I don't know how to get ready."

Would you say that you are ready enough for Christmas? I know that I can't say that. I have many things to do before then. I have at least eight sermons to write and to preach. I have meetings to attend. I have people that have to be visited. There are invitations to be sent. And that doesn't include all the personal things that need to be done. You probably feel the same way. People will say that they really don't have to do anything special for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. They don't need any special time to worship and pray. They are ready enough.

Can you say that you are ready to meet the Lord when he appears on the Final Day? That day is rapidly approaching. The Apostle Paul reminded us, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here." Time is getting shorter. The calendar year 2016 is almost over.

We certainly aren't ready on our own. We cannot stand before God on our own merits. If we wish to do that, we have to be perfect every second of our lives, always showing perfect love toward God and our fellow man. We have all failed in that. That is why we needed Jesus to come down from heaven and taking our place, putting himself under the very same Law that condemned us and suffering and dying for our sins. His righteousness is credited to our account.

There are those who think that they have plenty of time to get ready. I often find myself running late because I didn't allow enough time. I get caught in traffic or take that phone call that makes me run late. Jesus promised that he would come back. That was 2000 years ago. Well, he hasn't come yet, has he? People feel that they have plenty of time to prepare. They feel no sense of urgency.

It has happened before. Jesus compares the last days before he comes again to the days of Noah. "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. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."

Let's go back to the time of Noah. It was a time of wickedness, violence and corruption. Things were so evil that God determined to destroy the world and its inhabitants. But God would give the people 120 years of grace, a time to repent of their sins and turn to him. He instructed Noah to build an ark, providing food and space for the people and the creatures that would be spared. Righteous Noah did as he was directed. He was a preacher of righteousness. Every day that Noah stood there building the ark was a preaching of judgment on an ungodly people. Every hammer blow was a preaching of the law, warning the people to repent.

Many would mock Noah. Most simply ignored the man they considered to be an old fool. They went on with their everyday lives, completely absorbed in the things of this world. It was a time when "the sons of God married the daughters of men." People did not look for godly spouses. They were much more attracted to trashy women than good Christian women. The Christian girls were attracted to the "bad boys." It wasn't surprising that the people's hearts were turned away from God. It was also a time of great violence. When love for God is absent from the life of a person or nation, love for other people will also be absent. It becomes every man for himself. People will do anything they have to do to get their own way. There is no desire to sacrifice or help others in need. It is only selfishness all the time. Yes, even as Noah and his family entered the ark, the people remained unconcerned. This was not merely an innocent ignorance. They lived in unbelief. They refused to see their sin. They refused to repent. They refused to listen to Noah. And the people perished in the Flood!

It will be the same way at the second coming of Christ! The world will become more and more evil. The majority of people just don't care. They are too absorbed in the things of this world. Do you really want to dispute that this describes our world today to a "t." God's Word is not a priority for most people. They think that they have plenty of time to get ready. Sunday worship is just one of many things they can do each week, but other things are much more important. They can always go to church next week or next month or next year.

There is an old fable about three apprentice devils who would be sent to earth to test their skills. Satan interviewed each one as to their impending strategy. The first one said, "I will tell people that there is no God." Satan rejected that strategy saying, "Everyone knows that there is a God." The second said, "I will tell everyone that there is

no heaven or hell.” Satan also rejected that strategy saying, “Everyone knows that there is a heaven and a hell.” The third devil said, “I will convince everyone that there is no hurry to believe.” Satan smiled and said, “You will win many!” I think there is a lot of truth to that.

Jesus goes on to say, “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.” There are only two classes of people in God’s judgment. There are believers and there are unbelievers. On that day they will be decisively and eternally separated. They may have the same occupation. They may even be members of the same family. To be taken means to be with the Lord in the eternal joys of heaven. To be left is to go to the eternal fires of hell. There is no second chance!

“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.” We do not know when our Lord is coming. We must keep on watching. It might be tonight. It might be tomorrow. It might be next week. Most of the world will continue to go about its business, going to work, playing the stock market, planning parties and everything else. We cannot allow ourselves to get lulled into a sense of complacency. Jesus will come when we least expect it, like a thief in the night when most people are unprepared.

How do we get ready for his Second Coming? Listen to his Word. The people in Noah’s day did not listen to his preaching. Many did not listen to the words of Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah or any of the Old Testament prophets. Many did not listen to the words of John the Baptist. Listen to him when he tells you, “Repent, be baptized, turn from your sin.” Look to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Turn to him and trust in his saving work! Believe that he came to live for you, die for you and rise again for you!

Don’t get impatient. The Lord will come when he is ready after the very last soul has repented and come to faith. He is not slow in keeping his promises. He will come and come at an hour when we least expect him. Be ready! Prepare your hearts! Remember your baptism! Listen to the Word! Come to the great feast of our Lord’s body and blood! Are you ready yet? May God prepare our hearts! AMEN.