

First Sunday in Advent

ON CHRIST'S WATCH

Matthew 24:36-44

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

[Jesus said to the disciples,] 36"About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 42Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

DIAGNOSIS: No One Is Keeping Their Watch for Christ

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Watchless, as in Not Knowing the Time

The Christians were facing desperate times. They were hearing of wars and rumors of wars (v. 6). Nation rose against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (v. 7). There were famines, and earthquakes in various places (v. 8). They were being handed over to be tortured and put to death, all because they were Christian (v. 9). Many Christians were falling away, betraying one another and hating one another (v. 10). Their love for one

another was growing cold (v. 12). Christians had become confused about God's presence in their present and their future.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Watchless, as in Not Having a Watch

To stop the confusion, there were people declaring that they were the Messiah (v. 5, vv. 23-26), the one who could save the Christians from the wars and earthquakes, and from being handed over, tortured, and put to death. The Messiahs were leading people away from trusting the Christ of the cross as their savior, the one who would save them, not only from wars and earthquakes and each other, but from God's own judgment. The Christians hoped Jesus would get them out of their troubles, out of being handed over, tortured and put to death all because other people did not like that they had faith in Jesus. The Christians felt that if they trusted Jesus, that Jesus should get them out of the trouble that Jesus got them into. It was a reasonable hope. But the Christians were confused and were not looking at Jesus as someone who forgave them and made them God's children. Jesus was being looked at as an Emergency Evacuation Plan instead of as the one who forgives by his death on a cross. Forgiveness from Christ is what gets us out of our desperate situation with God, a situation in which God has judged and condemned all for not trusting Jesus. But the situation with God was forgotten when faced with insurgency, earthquakes, and false Messiahs. So the Christians were confused. Was God for sinners or against them?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Watchless, as in Surprised That Time Is Up

With the times so desperate, and the Christians so confused about who Christ was for them, they doubted that Christ could save them. They doubted, not so much that Christ would one day return, but that he would return in time to save them. "My master is delayed" (v. 48). Because of that doubt, they were

afraid. In that fear they mistreated one another, beat one another (v. 49), and ate and drank with drunkards. Thus, God cut them off (v. 51), and put them with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 51).

PROGNOSIS: Christ Keeps Watch on A Cross

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Christ's Watch Is His Cross

Christ himself speaks of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (v. 30). Christ has come to people by his death on a cross. He is with the hypocrites, those who think they are better than he is before God, who mock him, deride him, and yell at him to come down from the cross (27:38-44) and saves them from their present desperate time. They cry to him to save them from their confusion about how God feels about them. Does God condemn them or does God save them from trouble? But Jesus endures to the end and will be saved (v. 13). He is saved, for God raised him from the dead! By his cross Christ has overcome God's sentence of death against all people. Christ has overcome God's judgment spoken through the law and masked by earthquakes, famines, and plagues.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – People Are Given Christ's Watch

Just as Christ has been raised from the dead, he will come again. That promise of coming again is what gives Christians faith and hope and takes away their confusion about God. That promise of his return is what keeps Christians awake and ready (v. 44), one working in the field (v. 40), another grinding meal (v. 41). Christ's promise of forgiveness, fulfilled in his coming again, is Christ's assurance that his promise for the future is greater than anything earthquakes, wars, or famine can do to the future. Christ talks about the future to assure his followers that his forgiveness is their future no matter what

else happens to them. Jesus is encouraging those who trust him to remain in his promise through all that may happen. Jesus is comforting those who follow him that his forgiveness cannot be stopped or overcome by wars or torture or being put to death. Those who trust Christ—who endure to the end—will be saved and given eternal life.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – People with Christ's Watch Keep Time

Christians are no longer confused about how God feels about them in the present or about how God will feel about them in the future. Christ is their present hope in trouble. Christ is their hope for the future. They do not run after those others who claim they know how to get ready for the end of the world. Christ is how they are ready for the end. They do not believe those who say that the way to be saved from the present terrible times is to look at their Messiah who produces great signs and omens (v. 24). Christians have their Messiah of Christ on a cross. They do not go out into the wilderness or some special inner room (v. 26), abandoning the cross as their hope. That promise of Christ motivates Christians to care for their neighbors and families even when situations are difficult, tiring, wearing, and seem like they will go on for years. They endure with Christ to the end. The promise they trust is Christ's, that to endure with him to the end is how they will be with God in heavenly peace.