

1. Daniel 11:1-12:4
2. Matthew 24-25

## I. Introduction

### A. This morning we are going to look at the fifth teaching section of the book of Matthew

1. Remember that Matthew is organized in five sections of alternating action and teaching
2. For the last four weeks we've been covering the fifth action section, which revolved around the concept of judgment
  - i. It started out with judgments made by Jesus about various situations, like the rich young ruler or the children coming to Jesus - these were similar to the judgments given to Israel after the 10 commandments
  - ii. And then Jesus goes head to head with the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees - acting out their judgment at the temple, speaking their judgment in parables and displaying their judgment in defeating their questions
  - iii. And in chapter 23, Jesus makes a final judgment of the scribes and Pharisees and the Israel that they represent - they had failed to be God's people and woe to them
3. Like always, the teaching section is closely related to the action section and continues the theme of judgment
  - i. In fact, the discourse starts with Jesus predicting the complete destruction of the temple, the ultimate symbol of His judgment of ungodly Israel
  - ii. But in the teaching section, the horizon of judgment is going to expand much farther - if God had visited His people and brought judgment down on their heads, what does that mean for the new people of God in Christ?
  - iii. In the discourse of Matthew 24-25, Jesus is going to lead His disciples to the answer to this question, primarily about warning them about wrong responses to judgment and then developing the right response

### B. Now, Matthew 24 and 25 are, arguably, the hardest chapters of Matthew to understand and to teach

1. No matter how you slice the question, Matthew 24 and 25 are confusing chapters, especially Matthew 24
2. They are confusing enough that some would argue that Jesus contradicts Himself, others would argue that Jesus doesn't know the answers and gets some of them wrong, still others would use these chapters to question the truthfulness and the inspiration of the Bible
3. For those of us who refuse to entertain these arguments, there is still much confusion - how do we understand everything that Jesus says is true when so much of it is so hard to understand and simple understandings sometime appear false?
4. I say this to explain how I'm going to teach this passage - this is a confusing passage and people will disagree with how I teach it, because there is no one accepted interpretation of this passage - but I have tried to interpret this passage according to my core beliefs about Scripture:
  - a. First, everything Jesus says is true - He is the Son of God and the maker of truth, nothing He says could possibly be false
  - b. Second, everything Jesus says is applicable to all generations of the church - these things were written for the church and were written down by Matthew to be taught to all of Jesus' disciples
  - c. Third, everything Jesus says is consistent with the gospel and the rest of Scripture - Scripture is a unified testimony to Christ and we must interpret these things in light of all of Scripture
  - d. Fourth, everything Jesus says is understandable - this might be an interesting statement after having just said these are confusing passages, but we should try to work through the confusion because there must be purpose to these words, a purpose beyond merely predicting the future for a final generation
5. So, I have wrestled with this passage significantly for several months, maybe years depending on how you look at it, and I am going to teach this passage in a certain way that I believe is true to what Jesus says and true to my convictions about the passage and Scripture in general
  - a. Are there other ways of looking at this passage? Yes. Would I categorically state that other positions are wrong? No. But, after much prayer, reading, and meditation, this is how I can best understand the passage and can best point you to Christ with it.
  - b. Consider that my caveat for this message

### C. So, this morning, I'm going to try to go through Matthew 24-25 step by step, and we'll do it by looking at four themes

1. First, we'll look at chapter 24 and see that there are Three Questions about the end
2. Then we'll look at chapter 24 again and see that there are Two Warnings about the end
3. Then we'll finish chapter 24 and move into chapter 25 and see that there is One Exhortation about the end
4. And we'll close this morning by looking at Jesus' conclusion - The Final Judgment

### D. Proposition: Jesus wants disciples to understand the final judgment without knowing the time of the final judgment because we need to live all of life in light of the final judgment

## II. Three Questions - When Is the End? (Matthew 24:1-42)

### A. After much study of Matthew 24-25, I am convinced that much of our confusion about Matthew 24-25 comes from not carefully listening to the passage, it is easy to come to Matthew 24 and 25 with preconceived ideas about what Jesus is going to talk about

1. An important key to understanding Matthew 24 is to listen to the disciples' questions in verses 1-3 - *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"*
2. There disciples ask three questions - now I'm not sure if the disciples meant to ask three questions - but they did ask three questions and Jesus answers each of them
3. The first question: when will these things be? - i.e., when will the walls of the temple be thrown down?
4. The second question: what will be the sign of your coming? - i.e., how will we know when you are taking your throne?
5. The third question: what will be the sign of the close of the age? - i.e., when will the new kingdom be consummated?
6. So, we'll look at Matthew 24 in light of the disciples questions

### B. Jesus answers the last question first: what will be the sign of the close of the age? (Matthew 24:3-14)

1. The disciples had asked about the end of God's plan for the world, the close of the age, and Jesus gives a long answer that concludes at the end of Matthew 24:14 with the statement - *and then the end will come.*
2. So, Matthew 24:3-14 is an answer to this third question - what will be the sign of the close of the age? Verses 3-14 will be the sign of the close of the age - when everything in these verses has taken place, then the age will end.
3. But, as we look at verses 3-14, there aren't many clear cut signs for us to see - mostly Jesus talks about vague, recurring events
  - a. Many false prophets and false Christs will come, but the end is not yet
  - b. There will be wars and rumors of wars, but the end is not yet
  - c. There will be disasters, both man-made and natural, but the end is not yet
  - d. The world will persecute Christians, but the end is not yet
  - e. Many will fall away from the faith, but the end is not yet
4. All these things must happen before the end comes, but none of these things is referring to a specific event, rather to a pattern that will continue until the end
  - a. Jesus' answer is, in some ways, a non-answer - all of these things will happen and keep happening, so predicting the end will be virtually impossible
  - b. There has always been wars and famines and disasters and persecution and faithlessness - these things will continue and should remind us that the end is coming, but they don't necessarily mark the end
5. But Jesus does give one concrete event that will mark the end of the age in verse 14
  - a. Matthew 24:14 - *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*
  - b. The gospel will be proclaimed to all nations and the whole world before the end of the world happens
  - c. Now, this still is partially a continuing event - the gospel will be being proclaimed even to the ends of the world before the end of the world happens - we can't put a date marker on when the gospel has been proclaimed enough
  - d. But, it does give us an idea of what the end is waiting for - God will not bring this world to a close until everyone that He designs to be reach by the gospel of Christ is reached by the gospel of Christ
  - e. When everyone who is supposed to hear the gospel has heard the gospel, then the end will come - now this doesn't help us put a date on it, because we don't know who is the last one who must hear the gospel
  - f. But it gives us hope that God has a purpose for delaying, He has a design - the world continues through all of this trouble and disaster so that every chosen member of Christ will hear the gospel
  - g. As Peter says in II Peter 3:9-10 - *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*
6. When will the end be? When the gospel of Christ has fulfilled its purpose in this world and not before.
  - a. This gives us hope - God has a reason for the delay - and this gives us purpose - we should use God's delay to keep preaching the gospel, to fulfill the great commission at the end of Matthew

**C. After finishing the last question, Jesus answers the first question: when will these things be? (Matthew 24:15-35)**

1. It's this set of verses that gives so much trouble for interpretation - what events is Jesus talking about? Why do all of these things take place before this generation passes away? Why should we be able to predict these things?
  - a. But, again, I think some of the confusion goes away if we remember that the disciples asked several questions
  - b. One of the questions the disciples asked was specifically about the temple - when will these things be?
  - c. And Jesus' second answer starts with reference to the temple - *when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place*
  - d. But another thing that will help us in understanding is to see that many of the fantastical things that Jesus mentions here are not meant to be literal events but references to prophecy and history - the section from verses 15-35 is rich with prophetic reference, and understanding the references will help us understand the passage
2. The main prophetic reference of this passage is Daniel 10-12 and Daniel's prophecy about the future of Israel
  - a. Daniel is mourning for his people, mourning about the exile of the people of God and their apparent failure to rebuild the temple after returning to the land, and while he is fasting and mourning, a man or angel speaks to Daniel and says that he has come in response to Daniel's prayers for His people
  - b. Then, in Daniel 11, the man from the vision lays out, with incredible detail, the future of Israel - the kings of Persia, then Alexander and the Greek kings, and then the Seleucid kings and ends with the fall of Antiochus Epiphanes
  - c. Antiochus Epiphanes was a tyrant, he tried to conquer Egypt but was turned back by the Romans, enraged he returned to Jerusalem, outlawed the worship of YHWH, set up an idol of Zeus in the temple and sacrificed pigs these actions prompted the Maccabean revolt, which established the brief Hasmonean dynasty ruling Judea until the Romans took control - the prophecy of Daniel 11 brings us to the edge of Roman occupation of Judea
  - d. Daniel 12, then, opens with the statement - *At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.*
  - e. There would be a deliverance coming, but it would wait until all of these troubles had passed - but the deliverance would happen in the midst of a period of turmoil and trouble - a great tribulation for the nation of Israel
  - f. Although some might see it differently, Daniel's prophecy seems to bring us right to the feet of Christ, ending at the edge of Roman occupation and then promising a great deliverance, a time of great tribulation, and a resurrection from the dead
3. Jesus' answer to the disciples borrows heavily from Daniel 11 and 12, using specific phrases to answer the question
  - a. The period of great tribulation for the nation of Israel was about to take place - Daniel said that, after the fall of the Seleucid rulers, there would be a great tribulation - and now that tribulation is soon to take place
  - b. And the markers of this tribulation would be similar to the prophecy of Daniel - there will be another abomination that makes desolate, the burnt offerings would be ceased again as they were under Antiochus Epiphanes
  - c. Once the burnt offerings cease, then there will be a great destruction - the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven - but this isn't as confusing as it sounds, these are actually prophetic references
  - d. For example, Isaiah 13:4-11 - *The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.*
  - e. God would come with a great army to destroy His people and to make their land desolate - the destruction of the sun, moon, and stars portrays a massive change in the world order, an overturning of that which is
  - f. And then the Son of Man would come on the clouds of heaven - a reference to Jeremiah 4:13-16, which predicts a destroyer coming from the north, - *Behold, he comes up like clouds; his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles--- woe to us, for we are ruined! O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved. How long shall your wicked thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims trouble from Mount Ephraim. Warn the nations that he is coming; announce to Jerusalem, "Besiegers come from a distant land; they shout against the cities of Judah.*
  - g. And all the tribes of the land shall mourn (literal translation of verse 30) - a reference to Zechariah 12:10-12 - *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself...*

4. Putting all of the prophetic references together with the passage in light of history, I think the passage becomes clear
  - a. Jesus says that what had happened in Daniel 11 was about to happen again, the burnt offerings would cease, and then destruction of the temple would be imminent - a destruction that would purify a way for a new temple
  - b. And, looking at history, the burnt offerings did likely come to an end right before the destruction of Jerusalem when the Zealots ceased the temple mount and used it as a base of operations against the Romans and against the Sadducees and the rest of the city of Jerusalem
  - c. A great tribulation happened and the land was made completely desolate - in fact, the outcome of the Judea-Roman wars was the complete abolition of the state of Israel, and the record of atrocities that happened during this war is terrible - men crucified for sport, hundreds at a time, food stocks intentionally burned to cause starvation, and mass slaughter of the inhabitants of Israel
  - d. Jesus came with the clouds of heaven to destroy those who opposed Him, as He promised
5. And this helps explain some of the confusing things about this passage
  - a. Why should this be predicatable? Because it is not the final end, merely the destruction of the temple - and looking at church history, the church was able to predict it and church history records that the church fled to Pella before the destruction of Jerusalem
  - b. Why are all these things going to happen before this generation passes away? Because these things would happen in about 40 years, some of the disciples would live to see it themselves.

**D. Finally, Jesus answers the middle question: what will be the sign of your coming? (Matthew 24:36-42)**

1. The word 'coming' is used a lot in Matthew 24, but in our English translations, this is somewhat misleading
  - a. There are actually two different words for coming used here - *parousia* and *erchomenen*
  - b. Parousia is the word the disciples use for Jesus' return and taking up His throne in their question in verse 3
  - c. In His previous answer about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus specifically denies that the destruction of Jerusalem or the events surrounding it would be the sign of His *parousia* - *So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*
  - d. But, the destruction of Jerusalem would be Jesus visiting Israel with destruction, the *erchomenen* of the Son of Man is found in verse 30 - *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*
  - e. Jerusalem's destruction would be Jesus visiting (*erchomenen*) His people but not returning (*parousia*) to His kingdom
2. But now, in verses 37, the *parousia* is defined - *For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*
  - a. The destruction of the temple would not herald Jesus' return, but if an event of that significance did not herald Jesus' return, then what event would?
  - b. So, verses 36 through 42 answer the middle question - what will be the sign of your coming?
  - c. But, like the first answer, there is no answer given - no one knows when the return of Christ will be, even Jesus Himself pled ignorance of the answer, the Father alone knows the perfection of His timing
  - d. Far from being predictable, the return of Christ will be surprising - people will be going about their daily lives and Christ will come quickly to His people to gather them to Himself
3. So, when will Jesus return? You don't know and you can't predict, so be ready always

**E. So, just to review the flow of the passage:**

1. First, Jesus tells us when the end will be - only after everyone who is supposed to hear the gospel hears it, which is an unpredictable but hopeful event
2. Second, Jesus tells us when the temple will be destroyed - after the burnt offerings are ceased and armies surround Jerusalem, and this is coming quickly
3. But even the destruction of the temple will not herald Jesus' return, so third, Jesus tells us when He will return - or rather, He doesn't, He says that no one knows the day or the hour, so we must always be ready
4. Hopefully that overview helps you get a sense of what is going on in Matthew 24, so now I want to turn and start applying these things to us - if this is what Jesus teaches, what does it have to do with us?
5. And I'm simply going to follow Jesus' lead here and pull out the ways that He applies these teachings to His disciples

### III. Two Warnings - Soon and Not Yet (Matthew 24:1-42)

#### A. Throughout Matthew 24, Jesus continually makes asides to His disciples about what they should do with this information

1. For example, in verse 6 Jesus says - *See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*
2. Jesus isn't merely answering the disciples questions, He's telling them how to react to the answers, how they need to respond to the end of all things and how they need to live in light of the truth that the world will end
3. When talking about eschatology or end times there seems to be two dangers for the church, two mistakes that generation after generation makes about the end, and Jesus warns His disciples against both dangers
4. Jesus starts His application of His teaching by telling us what not to do - how should we not approach eschatology?

#### B. First, Jesus makes great emphasis that we should not be deceived - the end is not necessarily soon

1. One danger in talking about eschatology is the pull to get drawn in to predicting when the end will be, but Jesus continually warns us against this
2. Matthew 24:6 - *See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*
3. Matthew 24:8 - *All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*
4. Matthew 24:23-28 - *Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*
5. Disciples should not be given to trying to predict when the end of the world is, and especially they should decide that the end of the world is imminent because of some confluence of events
6. Events, great and small, will continue until the end of the world - no event necessarily means that the end is now and no event should cause disciples to cease life in this world
7. Christians should not decide that the end is now and Jesus is returning and go quit their jobs and sit on top of a mountain and wait - this is exactly what Jesus warns us against
8. We can't predict the end and we shouldn't try to and we shouldn't let others deceive us with cleverly argued reasons for why Christ is returning now - the end is not yet, do not be deceived
9. Even with things like the reestablishment of the nation of Israel, or even with things like electing radically ungodly leaders, or whatever other event you might point to (like establishing a Christian nation) - these things can't predict the end and Christians shouldn't be drawn into debates trying to predict the end
10. In fact, this seems to be Jesus' main point about the destruction of Jerusalem - that would be a great, cataclysmic event, one which the like would never be seen again, and even that event did not herald Jesus' return, so we shouldn't be tricked into thinking the little events of our day and age declare that Jesus' return is now

#### C. But, on the other hand, Jesus makes great emphasis that we should not forget the end - the end could be soon

1. The other danger in talking about eschatology is getting dulled by continuing life in this world, being convinced, consciously or subconsciously, that the end is not imminent and we don't need to worry about it
2. But again, Jesus warns us against this - Matthew 24:40-42 - *Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.*
3. Just because life continues much the same for thousands of years doesn't mean that the end is not imminent, just because there will be no sign does not mean that the end could not be right now - the end will come when no one is looking for it, people will be going about their daily lives and the end will happen suddenly
4. There will be no sign given that declares the end is now, but that doesn't mean the end isn't now - we must stay awake because the end could happen at any moment

#### D. So the Christian's attitude should be that the end is not necessarily now, but it could be

1. The Christian life should have a healthy agnosticism at this question - we should not be convinced that the end is assuredly now and give up on our tasks here on earth, but neither should we be convinced that it is not now and live as though we were assured of more time
2. We should live all of life in light of the coming end - we don't know when it might be, but whenever it is, we'll be ready
3. We stay awake looking for the return of our Lord and Master so that we can rejoice when He returns
4. Which leads to our third point:

## IV. One Exhortation - Stay Awake (Matthew 24:42-25:30)

### A. As we move toward Matthew 25, Jesus starts telling a series of parables

1. There are four parables in Matthew 24 and 25 that follow right after each other and increase in length
2. Each parable develops verse 42 - *Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.*
3. What does it mean 'to stay awake'? How do we stay awake? Are we supposed to literally not sleep? Or, if not, what should we be doing to stay awake? This is what Jesus is going to teach us in the parables.
4. After warning us what not to do with His teaching, now He's going to teach us what to do with His teaching, and staying awake means four things:

### B. First, staying awake means being continual in vigilance (Matthew 24:43-44)

1. Jesus starts with a very short parable in Matthew 24:43-44 - *But know this, that if the master 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*
2. Jesus uses the example of a burglar coming in the night - if you knew that a burglar was going to break in at 12:30 am, you would stay awake to catch him and go to bed afterward - you wouldn't pretend that your knowledge didn't matter and you wouldn't get distracted doing something else, you would stay awake and watch for that burglar
3. Jesus is saying that we should have that same attitude toward His return, even though we don't know when He is coming - we should be continually vigilant, we should be looking for it always
4. There should be a continual expectation in the life of a Christian - could this be the hour? - an expectation that works into our daily lives and mundane tasks we do to fill them with hope and purpose - my Lord might return this minute
5. Jesus could return at any moment - am I living this moment in light of that truth, or am I ignoring that truth right now?

### C. Second, staying awake means being faithful in service (Matthew 24:45-51)

1. At the close of Matthew 24, Jesus tells another parable about a master and servants - the master goes away, one servant works hard for the master while he is gone while the other servants instead serve themselves
2. Jesus is saying that staying awake doesn't just mean anticipating His return, but using the time wisely while we wait
3. Being ready for Jesus' return isn't just about the moment of Jesus' return, but about all of the moments until Jesus' return - those who will rejoice at His return are those who have consistently served Him with their lives
4. So, right now, are you serving Christ with your whole heart or are you merely appearing to be a servant of Christ? That's the difference between the two groups here in the parable - one servant was truly serving, doing what His Lord desired, the wicked servant was known as a servant but he looked out for His own interests, not Christ's
5. And this is a common problem in the church, Paul even wrote the Philippians about it, Philippians 2:20-22 - *For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.*
6. But, we shouldn't think this warning is only about church leaders, although it surely applies to them well, but to all in the church - Jesus addresses all of His disciples as servants and expects us all to serve each other on His behalf
7. So Paul says a few verses earlier, Philippians 2:4-5 - *Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
8. We ought to be serving Christ while we wait for His return and which practically means serving Christ's people, serving each other - staying awake for Christ's return means doing what Christ has called us to in faithful service to His people
9. Jesus could return at any moment - am I serving Him right now or am I serving myself?

### D. Third, staying awake means being steadfast in perseverance (Matthew 25:1-13)

1. Jesus' third parable tells the story of ten bridesmaids waiting to accompany the groom as he brings his bride home
  - a. The important part of the parable, though, is that the groom was delayed - His arrival took longer than they had expected - so long, in fact, that they couldn't just sit there and wait, they all fell asleep
  - b. At an unexpected moment, though, the groom arrives - but then there is a problem, some of the bridesmaids are ready to accompany him and some are not - and once the groom appeared, there was no time to prepare for his arrival - only those who had already prepared themselves for His return were able to accompany him on his way
2. Jesus is saying that His return will be like this
  - a. His return will take longer than anyone anticipated so will we be like the wise or the foolish bridesmaids
  - b. The wise bridesmaids prepared themselves to endure through long periods of waiting, they looked to persevere through the watches of the night, while the foolish bridesmaids had no thought of endurance
  - c. The foolish bridesmaids were excited for a moment, but then lulled to distraction and believed they could rapidly prepare themselves when the groom arrived, but the wise bridesmaids knew that preparation must be happening now because when he returns there will be no time for preparation

3. We must be preparing ourselves now to endure through long periods of waiting, to have steadfast perseverance
  - a. The Christian life isn't about one-time decisions; it isn't about big, emotional events or one-time sacrifices - unique events will not sustain our Christian walk through the long years of waiting and looking back to what we did at one point in time will not prepare us to meet our Lord in the future
  - b. I'm not saying that one-time decisions or unique events are bad, but the Christian life is about persevering in the small things through long periods of time - being patient in obedience, being patient in watching, being prepared simply to obey for a lifetime
  - c. The Christian life is about steadfastly clinging to the gospel, preparing ourselves to be ready when He returns, as Paul says, Colossians 1:21-23 - *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*
4. Jesus could return at any moment - am I setting myself to endure to the end or am I resting in what I have already done?

#### **E. Staying awake means being faithful to our trust (Matthew 25:14-30)**

1. The last parable Jesus tells is the parable of the talents - a master going on a journey calls three servants to himself and entrusts them with his possessions for them to use while he is gone
  - a. Each of the servants were entrusted with different amounts of the master's possessions, but each were expected to use the master's possessions to further the master's goals
  - b. And two of the servants do use the master's possessions to further the master's goals - they used the money entrusted to them to make more money, they were faithful to their trust
  - c. But the last servant did not use the master's possessions in furthering his goals - instead he buried it, he hid it and did nothing with it and when the master returned, he rejoiced in the two servants who used his possessions wisely but He cast the wicked servant out of his kingdom
2. This is a well-known parable, and much has been made about the accidental confluence of the Greek word 'talent' and the English word 'talent' - we ought to use our talents to serve the master - and that is a fine application
  - a. But, it is a forced application of this passage because there is no connection between the Greek word here and what we call 'talents' in English - we should instead interpret this parable with the word money or possessions there and remember that parables often portray spiritual truths with physical pictures
  - b. The master goes away and as he goes away he entrusts something to his servants - when he comes back he will judge the servants based on how they used what he had entrusted to them
3. So, this parable hinges on being faithful to a trust - so what has been entrusted to us that we must faithfully use for the master, to further His goals and purposes?
  - a. And, the first thing we should say is 'everything' - everything have has been entrusted to us by our Lord to use to further His kingdom, and so we must use everything we have - including our talents, our possessions, our wisdom, our knowledge, our everything to advance His kingdom
  - b. But, there is a specific use of the word 'entrust' in the New Testament - usually the New Testament points to one trust that Christ's people have
    - i. II Corinthians 5:18-19 - *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*
    - ii. I Timothy 1:11 - *in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*
    - iii. II Timothy 2:2 - *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
  - c. Our Master has gone away and entrusted us His message, His gospel, the promise of His reconciliation
    - i. And He demands that we use this trust to build His kingdom - we should be using the gospel to change our lives and to change other's lives - we must not bury the message of the gospel but display the message of the gospel so that it bears fruit for when our Master returns
    - ii. And, when He returns, He will want to see the fruit of His trust - if we have been entrusted with the gospel and it has born no fruit in our lives and not been brought to bear on other's lives, then we will have failed in our trust
    - iii. It is not enough to know the gospel, it is not enough to have grasped the trust, we must use the trust to serve the Master and to build His kingdom
4. Staying awake means being faithful to our trust - using the gospel entrusted to us to produce fruit until Jesus returns
  - a. Jesus could return at any time - am I being faithful with what has been entrusted to me or am I squandering what has been entrusted to me? Is the gospel bearing fruit in my life and being brought to bear in other's lives or am I burying the gospel so that there will be no fruit at Jesus' return?

## V. Conclusion - We must live every moment in light of a final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)

### A. This teaching section ends with Jesus bringing us to a scene at the final judgment

1. Jesus is sitting on His throne and judging the nations and He splits them into two groups - the sheep and the goats
2. The sheep are welcomed into the kingdom because of what they had done - and the goats are thrown out of the kingdom into the eternal fire because of what they had done, the sheep and the goats are divided by works

### B. Jesus's conclusion to this passage is that we need to remember that we will be judged by what we do

1. How we live our lives on this earth will affect us at the final judgment
2. Our words and our actions will be taken into account at the final judgment, and so we need to live carefully now because all of these things will be displayed at the final judgment to justify or to condemn us
3. And this is what Jesus wants us to take away from the discussion of the end - we need to live life now in light of the final judgment, because how we live life now will be weighed at the final judgment

### C. Now, we need to be careful - is Jesus teaching justification by works in a way that denies justification by faith?

1. No, and we can see that in two ways here, first, we see that in the King's answer to both the sheep and the goats
  - a. Matthew 25:40, 45 - *And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' ... Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'*
  - b. Notice that Jesus judges the sheep and the goats not merely on their actions, but on their actions toward Him
  - c. The sheep had acted in certain ways because they belonged to Him and loved His people - their actions were actions of faith - they had not merely fed the hungry and clothed the naked, they had done it for Jesus
  - d. And the goats acted in certain ways because they did not belong to Jesus - it was not just that they had not fed the hungry, maybe they did feed the hungry, but they hadn't done it for Jesus - it had not been an action of faith
  - e. At the final judgment, Jesus judges works because they display faith - real faith will cause real action, and faith can be judged by that action - the works do not justify, but they do testify to that which does justify - faith
  - f. It is exactly what James says in James 2:18 - *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*
2. But we see the truth of justification by faith here in another way as well
  - a. Notice how surprised the sheep and the goats are at the final verdict
    - i. The sheep are surprised that their works are found worthy at the judgment while the goats are surprised that their works are not counted in their favor
    - ii. Sheep knew their works could not justify them; goats were surprised that their works didn't justify them
  - b. The one who has works that will be justified at the last day is one who would look at his life and say there was nothing worthy of justification the one who is surprised at the fact that Jesus judges him worthy
    - i. It wasn't the works that justified - those who are justified know that full well
    - ii. No amount of works, apart from faith, would ever be good enough to satisfy the king at the last judgment - working for justification, working to show yourself worthy, working in a way that produces pride and self-sufficiency will lead to being judged as a goat - being surprised your works were not enough
    - iii. But the smallest work that truly comes from faith, works by one who knows there is no way they could ever do enough to be worthy, works that are done by those who know that their best work is but a filthy rag will lead to being judged as a sheep - being surprised that your works were judged worthy
3. We will be judged by works and, in that sense, works will justify us - not because they make us right, but because they demonstrate faith - they demonstrate that God covered us with the blood of Christ and changed our hearts to love Him

### D. So our works will be evidence of our faith

1. And this calls us to be careful how we live - neither working to justify ourselves nor pretending that faith doesn't need to produce real change in our lives - we need to live in a way that demonstrates our faith, otherwise it isn't real faith
2. Will we all fail? Yes - Will we all live inconsistent, and sometimes even hypocritical lives? Yes
3. But, in the end, our faith will have real evidence in our life - our actions will testify to our heart
4. We may say we believe, we may say we treasure Christ, we may say we have left the world - but if these things are true, they will be shown in our actions, so our actions will testify to our faith
5. So we should live our lives in light of the final judgment - are we living in such a way that our lives will testify to our trust in Christ at the last day? This is what Jesus wants us to think about as we consider the end - this and nothing else.
6. The end may happen at any time, we shouldn't be caught up in trying to predict it or events surrounding it, nor should we forget that it is happening, we should be living our lives right now ready to face that final judgment - we should be living our lives by faith in the Son of God who came to rescue us