

**Be Ready!**  
**November 27, 2022**  
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Good morning, and welcome to the Sunday after Thanksgiving! I have been asking around, and the adjective that has been used most this morning is “awesome,” with regards to our Thanksgiving. And what a wonderful time we live in, where not only are we thankful and grateful, but we can be thankful and grateful for the time in which we get to be thankful and grateful. That’s profound! Let that sink in. We’re going to be looking at Matthew 24:36-44, this morning. But before I get started, let me indulge a little bit. It was Thanksgiving. I got to spend some time with my wife’s family, and my nephew asked me what my favorite football team is. And I was commissioned into the United States Army through Oregon State University, and I believe they played the Ducks this weekend and my favorite team is not the Ducks! So, Matthew 24:36-44. If you could, would you please stand with me as we read from God’s word?

“But concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 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. 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.”

This is the word of the Lord, and we are grateful for it. Please be seated.

Be ready! Be ready! Be ready!

How many of you guys have had a day in which you thought, “Lord, just come right now!” Right? “Just come right now, Lord!” So, there I was. I had been summoned. I had been summoned by a board of full bird Colonels. And I’d heard the rumors; I knew it wasn’t good. And so there I was, standing in front of three full bird Colonels who were asking me questions. I was the lowliest man in the room: Captain Johnson. There was a major at the far end of the table, and I could discern that he was a lawyer. And I could also discern that he wasn’t there to represent me. You see, days before, our battalion commander was in the platoon room of one of his platoons. And in that platoon was a poster, a political poster of Muqtada al-Sadr. And if you don’t know who Muqtada al-Sadr was, at that time, he was kind of the bogeyman. He was running for office in a free and open election in Iraq, but he wasn’t the person that we really wanted to be in charge. He had gone to Iran to go through his seminary, in order to boost his legitimacy, and he had come back. But every American soldier knew who Muqtada al-Sadr was. And the battalion commander said, “Where did you get that poster?” And they said, “Well, it was sold to us on the streets.” And the battalion commander said, “Man, I wouldn’t mind having one of those.” And so that platoon, in the course of their mission, had gone out and they found the poster of all posters. It was large enough to hang on

an overpass, and it was a poster of Muqtada al-Sadr, and his revered grandfather on the other side. Muqtada al-Sadr was trying to bolster his legitimacy by associating himself with an imam who was almost universally revered. And that platoon said, "That's the poster we're gonna get for our battalion commander!" So they pulled over and they climbed up on the overpass and they cut it down. And one, it's not our country; there are international laws against taking trophies. But when they cut that poster down, they recognized Muqtada al-Sadr, but they cut right through his revered grandfather, and left half of him on the overpass. It was a significantly disrespectful act, on top of the fact that Muqtada al-Sadr had returned to Iraq in order to run for office. We were on the verge of an international incident. And, to a man, that platoon said, "Captain Johnson told us to get that poster."

So there I was, standing in front of this whole three full bird Colonel board, answering questions, knowing that my career was crashing right before my eyes. I went to my friends and I begged them, "You've got to report and tell them what you know." And most of them did. Some of them didn't want to have anything to do with it. But my good friend Chaplain Johnson recognized that I was faltering, and he knew I needed a distraction. And so he said, "Aaron, would you preach a sermon on Sunday?" And his argument must have been compelling because I said, "Sure." And that is absolutely not what I needed. And so I went to the chapel on one of the largest bases in Iraq and delivered a sermon, while my career was crashing in the next room over. And I preached on Peter, and who Peter was before, and who Peter was after the resurrection. And I don't remember the details, but what I will never forget is when I was done with that sermon, I was greeted at the back of the sanctuary by a lady. She was an Iraqi lady. There were two gentlemen with her. She had accepted Christ in northern Iraq. And when she did, her dad went to the local imam to get a fatwa issued: a fatwa authorizing his entire family to kill his daughter. And this lady was encouraging me to be a better preacher. But what struck me is, in the midst of this war, in the midst of that situation, she was excited because the US government was providing for her enough stability to be able to take the Word of God to northern Iraq, where she knew at any minute she could die at the hands of her family. She was ready.

Today's passage is one part of Jesus' answer to a question posed by his disciples. Back at the beginning of chapter 22, the disciples were admiring the buildings of the temple when Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." The disciples knew Isaiah's prophecy, and because they knew Isaiah's prophecy, they had a problem. In Isaiah 2:2-4, we read:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it.

And many people shall come and say, "Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide the disputes for many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

If you come into my office, you're going to notice a lamp, and that lamp is a 75-millimeter artillery shell that stands about this tall, and on the top of it is a replica of a

Doughboy helmet from World War 1 and it's called a Victory Lamp. Towards the end of World War 1 a munitions plant had exploded, and when that plant exploded, they went and retrieved all of those shells. And they couldn't use them anymore, and so they turned them into lamps. Etched in the top of it is "Victory, November 11, 1918, 75 M/M Shell," which is a reference to the ending of World War 1, the war to end all wars. But on the copper band at the base of it, it reads, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," quoting Isaiah. The hope was that this war to end all wars would in fact end all wars. This period of peace at the end of time was and is the hope of mankind. This peace was the hope of Israel. This peace was the hope of the disciples, and this hope appeared to require a temple in Jerusalem. The disciples, knowing all of this, were astonished that their Messiah was predicting the destruction of that temple. So the disciples asked the question, "Tell us when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming in the end of the age?" Don't miss that the disciples were asking for "the sign." Does it strike you odd, when you read the New Testament and the Pharisees keep saying, "Give us a sign. Give us a sign. Give us a sign," when signs are happening all around them? Jesus is feeding thousands of people; Jesus is turning water into wine; Jesus is healing the blind and resurrecting the dead; and yet the Pharisees continue to demand a sign. And the reason that they are demanding a sign is because they are looking for the sign, the sign that is going to usher in this peace, the establishment of the Son of man as the King ruling from Israel. It's ironic because the disciples are asking for that sign right now. How will they know when that later time would arrive? And Jesus, being Jesus, gives them a whole bunch of non-signs. Jesus tells them to watch for false messiahs and prophets, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famines and earthquakes, tribulation, death sentences for the believers, a hatred of God's Word, the falling away of believers, lawlessness, and growing cold of our love for God and probably for one another. I don't know about you, but it sounds to me as if the end is near!

But is that any more evident today than it was yesterday? What about the generation of the fall of Jerusalem, or the generation of the fall of Rome, or the Reformation, the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War 1, World War 2, and our current Global War on Terror? Do any of these generations have any more or less cause to think that the end is nigh? No. And add on to this the fact that the day of His return will look like any other day. Weddings will be scheduled; funerals will be arranged; contracts bid and won; meals prepared and consumed. Thanksgivings, Christmases, New Years are going to come and go. No one suspected the day in which the rains began to fall to be the day of God's judgment in Noah's day. Could you imagine watching the OSU game, looking outside the window and seeing rain, and going, "It's just another rainy day." That's what was going on in Noah's day. But Jesus does say that we are to be ready, and we are to look for some things. While it will look like any other day, the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world, and the abomination of desolation will occur. So, there's some things that tell us that this has not yet occurred. The peace promised in Isaiah is yet to come. But there is a definitive sign, the sign the Pharisees were seeking, the sign that Israel waits for, the sign that Jesus' disciples were asking about His coming. We read it in verse 30: "Then will appear in the heavens the sign of the Son of Man. And then all the tribes of earth will mourn. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

So, I was walking through the airport one day. I don't even remember where I was going. But I was carrying my cavalry hat because the hat is important, and we would never trust it to checked luggage. So, there I am, on my way through the airport carrying my cavalry hat. And, if you ask my wife, it's the ugliest hat in all the world but it is my cavalry hat. And I'm walking through the airport when a TSA agent comes up beside me. And he matches me step for step, and he says, "Son, when you joined the army, I hope you remembered that God loves the infantry." You see, there's an inter-service and inter-branch rivalry going on, and he was telling me that he was a proud infantryman, while I was a proud cavalryman, and so I could not leave that unanswered. I stopped right there in the airport, and I looked at him and I said, "I absolutely know that God loves the infantry. But did you know at His Second Coming, He will be coming at the head of a cavalry charge?" What I know is that a cavalry charge is swift, it's sudden, and it's decisive. When you find yourself receiving one, especially when it is executed correctly, it is too late. You can't fix it. You are done. And that is what Jesus is saying: When the sign of the Son of Man appears, there will be mourning because it will be too late. Our Lord is warning His disciples to be prepared for the judgment that is to come; a judgment that will cause all the tribes of the earth to mourn. Don't try to predict when it's coming. "What and when will the sign be?" are the wrong questions. The right question is, "Are you ready?"

The next two parables, the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Parable of the Talents, are Jesus telling His disciples how to be ready. Each is a sermon unto itself. So in the interest of time, I'm going to go with James' paraphrase: "You can be ready right now by doing this one thing." (Now, if I was an infomercial, you'd have to scroll all the way down, watch a couple of videos, and then you'd have to pay me ten bucks to get this one thing!) "You can be ready right now by doing this one thing: Receive the Word of God, receive the good news of the gospel." James writes in chapter one, verse 21, "Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your soul. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself." We are to receive the implanted Word. Now hear me, because this isn't about conversion; it's about so much more. Douglas Moo, the New Testament scholar from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes, "What James is suggesting by describing the Word in this way is that the Christian must not think that he is done with the Word of God after it has saved him. That Word becomes a permanent, inseparable part of the Christian, a commanding and guiding presence within him. The command to receive the implanted Word then is not a command to be converted, but to accept its precepts as binding and to seek to live by them."

Have you accepted the precepts of God's Word and are you seeking to live by them? That's what it means to be ready. To be ready is to receive God's Word in such a way that it affects every aspect of your life. It is to put every aspect of reality in the terms of your eternal reality. Apart from Jesus you cannot be ready, and with Jesus you are ready for anything and everything. Jesus' disciples were asking for a sign. They were expecting to be told what to look for. But instead, they were told not to look for a sign but to be **ready** for the sign. Are you in the midst of a war? Or has the rumor of a war got you worried? Be ready. Earthquakes? Famines? Be ready. Tribulations? Death sentences? Be ready. What about the beginning of a new marriage or the ending of an old marriage? Be ready. The loss of a job? Be ready. A seriously ill loved one, or your own serious illness? Be ready. That's what set that woman apart after that sermon so many years ago. She was ready. She had accepted the Word of God and it was

informing every aspect of her life, including encouraging a young officer. And apart from her encouragement, I'm not entirely sure I would be standing here today.

Every one of us has a scheduled meeting with the Son of Man. He will either come to you at the end of the age, or you will go to Him at the end of yours. Both will be sudden and sure. And, in that moment, it will be too late. Be ready. If you have not accepted the Word, then seek to answer this one question: Can I trust this thing called the Bible? There are so many misconceptions about it that are patently false. And when you start to really understand what it is, where it came from, how we got it, then when you read it, you will be compelled to stand. It is God's written Word. Read it and be ready. If you've already accepted the Word, I would encourage you to get into the Bible and take it seriously. Learn it, understand it, apply it and cling to it. And I'm not inviting you into knowledge. I'm inviting you into a relationship with the Creator of all things. Get to know Him.

James tells us that we are to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Most people miss that he is talking about God's Word. We are to be quick to hear what the Word says. We are to be slow to speak about the Word until we understand what it is really telling us. And finally, we are to be slow to respond in anger regarding the claims that the word of God has on our lives because, make no mistake, the Word of God has a claim on your life. And if you are not living in accordance with that claim, you are not ready. Accept it and be about it. Be ready. Either way, know that the Word of God is the only thing that will produce the righteousness necessary for you to be ready when the Son of Man comes: when He comes or when we go to be with Him. We need to be ready. Be ready. Be ready!