

**“Must be Ready” Matthew 24:36-44 (11/30/25)**

Did you all have a good Thanksgiving? When I was young, my mother told me something: in your teens, life goes 10 miles per hour; in twenties, 20 miles; in thirties, 30 miles; and in forties, 40 miles per hour. At that time I was too young to understand what it meant for time to go by quickly. But this year especially, I feel that time is passing very fast. My heart is still at Thanksgiving, but the season of preparing for Christmas has already come.

Until this past Tuesday, I didn't even feel that Christmas was coming. At Walmart or other stores, they had been selling Christmas trees and Christmas items for a long time already. But even seeing those Christmas displays this year, I did not feel that Christmas was coming, nor did I feel the desire to prepare for Christmas. Then I remembered something the senior pastor of the church I served during my seminary years in South Korea said in a sermon at the beginning of Advent. He said that Advent and Christmas were very difficult seasons for pastors. Because they come every year, and because they are extremely important in the church calendar, it is hard to preach a different message, and it is not easy for a preacher to deliver the story of Jesus' birth the same way every year.

Before I became a Christian, Christmas was a very lonely day for me. My family was not a Christian family, so we did not celebrate Christmas together in a special way. My father always went to work even on Christmas, my sister went out with her boyfriend, and my mother wanted to rest at home on the holiday. So I simply spent Christmas watching Christmas movies or programs every year.

Then in 2004, I had my first Christmas at church, and I had never known that Christmas could be such a joyful, fun, and happy time. The youth group practiced a Christmas dance, and the young-adult group produced a short movie. Seeing the

whole church rejoice at the birth of Jesus, sharing that joy and preparing together, I felt warmth and love, and I spent the most fun and joyful Christmas of my life.

Holding on to that memory, I decided I should always prepare for Jesus' birthday with joy. But after becoming a seminary student and beginning church ministry, Christmas was no longer simply a happy day. Once I became the person who planned Christmas events, Advent and Christmas gradually became "work." The joy decreased, and the stress and burden increased, and I even thought, "Ah... I have to prepare for this every year for the rest of my life."

This year, it is the 22nd Advent I have had in the church. And I finally understood why God gave us Advent. This year, I did not feel that Christmas was coming at all. But then on Tuesday, we decorated the church for the Advent season. After finishing the Advent season decorations together, I finally felt in my heart, "Ah, now it is Advent; Christmas is coming." Even though the decorations and Advent preparations are repeated every year, as we observe this season, we remember the birth of Jesus again in our hearts, and only then does Christmas truly take its place in us.

This is why we have church seasons, especially Advent. When we properly understand the church seasons and encounter them each year, we can remember God's work. Advent begins today, and through this Advent, I hope that we will all have hearts that expect Jesus Christ, who came to this earth.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus*. *Adventus* means *coming, arrival, the act of coming toward*. In other words, Advent is the season of waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ. As we begin the first Sunday of Advent today, I would like us to look together, through Matthew 24, at what attitude we must have as we wait for Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 24:44, the Scripture for today, Jesus says, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Here Jesus says that the Son of Man will come, and that we must be ready. Then what is it that we must prepare?

After the period of the early church—the apostolic era—the church in the time of the early church fathers had a different culture from today, namely, people tried to delay baptism as long as possible. According to church rules, if someone confessed Jesus as Christ and desired baptism, they had to go through at least three years of preparation for the baptism. During those three years, the church prayed for the person and prepared this person’s baptism together spiritually. At that time, people believed that if they were baptized and then sinned again, they would go to hell. So they wanted to live freely as long as possible, and then just before dying, receive baptism to enter heaven.

When we talk about preparing for Jesus’ coming, we often think similarly to these people in the Roman church. The details differ because we give infant baptism and have confirmation when someone is older, but the desire to stand with a pure heart before God right before death is something all people understand. Imagine with me: even though Jesus said in today’s passage that “the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him,” suppose Jesus suddenly appeared here today and said, “I will return in one week,” and then disappeared. What would you do for the next seven days? You would probably try to prepare so as not to be judged by Jesus. You would stop all sinful habits before God, and with a humble heart, you would seek forgiveness for all the sins you previously committed, waiting for that day.

We do not know that day, but as we have Advent, we must ask: *Is waiting for the*

*coming of Jesus Christ something joyful for us?* When we prepare for Advent, we talk about joy, hope, peace, and love, but would those seven days really be filled with joy, hope, peace, and love? Instead, they would probably be filled with fear, worry, repentance, and humility.

The reason waiting for Jesus is not joy and thanksgiving for us is because we misunderstand something about that waiting. It is true that as we await Jesus' return, we should purify our hearts before God, but that is not the entire preparation. Today's passage teaches us why waiting for Jesus can be joy and hope for us.

If Luke's Gospel was written for Jews and Gentiles across the Roman Empire, Matthew's Gospel was written for Jews. Therefore, when Matthew recorded the Gospel, he wrote it so that Jews could understand Jesus Christ from their perspective. In today's passage Matthew records that Jesus quoted the story of Noah. Jesus quoted Noah, and Matthew recorded it, because Jews already understood the story of Noah well and knew exactly what it meant when that story was mentioned.

One funny thing I discovered while doing my ministry and attending seminars here in Wisconsin is that whenever someone mentions the Packers, people's eyes change. Even people who were half asleep or looked disengaged suddenly become joyful and pay attention when the Packers are mentioned. I think the story of Noah was similar for Jews. Jesus used a story that anyone could understand and relate to, and Matthew did not miss that point and recorded it here.

So we must ask: Why did Jesus quote the story of Noah? We need to look at Noah's story again. If we read Genesis carefully, Noah and the people knew the date when the flood would start. Genesis 7:4 says,  
"Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."

God told Noah. They knew that the great flood would happen seven days later. Even though we do not know the day of Jesus' return, God has already told us that Jesus will come again. But simply knowing the day does not give us joy or thanksgiving. The people of Noah's time knew the date, but their lives did not change. Jesus quoted the Noah story because knowing who Noah was helps us understand why. Two important verses describe Noah in Genesis.

First, Genesis 6:9: "This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." Second, Genesis 7:5: "And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him." What we must notice is that Noah was someone who walked faithfully with God.

When I first came to our church, I spoke about the Gospel. If someone asked me, "What is the gospel?" I would answer: "Immanuel, God is with us." God came to this earth in human form to be with us, sacrificed Himself on the cross to save us, and even now is with us through the Holy Spirit, guiding us so that we may live as followers of Jesus Christ. For Methodists, faith is the journey of walking with God to become a perfect Christian who loves God and loves neighbors. Jesus said His return would be like the days of Noah. In the days of Noah, even though people knew the date, their lives did not change. But if we walk faithfully with God, like Noah, then Jesus being with us right now means that it does not matter whether He returns today or tomorrow. Whenever He comes, it will not be surprising, and whenever He comes, His coming will naturally be joy to us.

Through this Advent, we must be prepared. As Jesus said today, not everyone enters the Kingdom of God. Because we do not know when Jesus will return, we must be prepared. What we must prepare is not something special or extraordinary—it is walking with God. Experiencing each day that God is already with us—that is

our preparation. If we are walking with God, the return of Jesus Christ cannot be something fearful. The very fact that the good Jesus comes to us becomes great joy. As we begin the first week of Advent this year, I hope that all of us may experience that God is with us. In this Advent of 2025, I hope that we can take the first step of living a life that walks with God. And through this journey with Jesus Christ, may joy, hope, peace, and love overflow in our lives.

Amen.