

Until He Comes (again)

In the message last Sunday we were talking about how to keep Christmas 24/7; i.e., we were talking about receiving Christ and keeping Christ central in our lives, maintaining an intimate connection with Him, 24 hours a day--7 days a week. I suggested three things, three disciplines to accomplish this: #1 cultivate the gift of silence, #2 maintain an attitude of expectancy, and #3, actively seek after the Lord, making use of every available means.

If you happened to pick up a printed copy of the sermon or if you weren't here last Sunday and you read the copy I sent you, you may have noticed that I promised more than I delivered. That is to say, I told you that there would be 4 points in the message and I gave you only 3. The reason for that is simple: Although I originally had 4 points, I decided that I only had time for sharing 3, so I changed the 4 point sermon to a 3 point sermon and forgot to change the number of points promised in the introduction. Christmas week was pretty hectic.

At any rate, I thought I'd pick up the fourth point to that sermon this morning because it's too important to be ignored. As we have already seen, part of staying connected to Christ involves passive waiting; establishing times for solitude and for silence, and cultivating an attitude of expectancy. Staying connected to the Lord also involves active pursuit; it requires seeking for the Lord through private and corporate Bible Study, prayer, and worship. The fourth point has both passive and active elements, and I'm going to simply call it being faithful. Both in waiting for the Lord and pursuing the Lord we need to be faithful. I want to suggest further that there are at least 4 areas in particular where we need to be faithful.

In Luke 12:35-40, Jesus gives specific instruction for what it means to be faithful to Him as we wait for His return. Verses 35-36 say, "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him."

Perhaps the best way to get at what Jesus is asking of us here is to ask the question: If we knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow, what would we worry about today? I don't know about you, but I would want to make sure that He would find no unconfessed sin in my life. I would want to be found clothed in His forgiveness and fully alive in His Spirit. I would want nothing in my life that would make me hesitant to open the door for the Lord to enter my house. I would not want Him to find anything that I would be ashamed of.

Paul's word to Timothy in I Timothy 4:16 applies here: Paul says, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." Hebrews 12:14 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." In other words we don't want any moral, theological, or relational skeletons in our spiritual closets. We want our actions to be pure, our thoughts to be pure, our relationships to be pure, because we know that anything impure has no part in the Kingdom of God. **We must be holy because our God is holy.**

The words of Jesus in Luke 12 continue with verses 37-40: "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief

was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

The first part of being faithful to the Lord until He comes again is to pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. The second part of being faithful to the Lord until He comes again is to live with the understanding that no matter how long it takes, the return of the Lord is imminent; it means to live in a constant state of alert, expecting Him to return at any moment.

Someone started this conversation in my head Wednesday night after choir rehearsal. Someone asked if I was familiar with a certain author who writes about prophecies of the Lord's return. The author's name didn't ring a bell with me, and I had to admit that I tend to shy away from the subject. I admitted that I am rather cynical when it comes to contemporary interpretations of end time prophecies. I guess I've seen too much of it over the years. I did a major paper in seminary on a female evangelist who held wonderful revival meetings and planted many churches of God churches in the late 1800's, especially in Ohio and Indiana, most of which are now extinct. She brought reproach on her ministry and on the Churches of God by predicting that the world would come to an end in 1904; obviously, it didn't. Hal Lindsay's The Late Great Planet Earth, had me going for a while, and the yearly predictions of Pat Robertson have also caught my interest from time to time. The "Left Behind" series was very popular a year or so ago. People who can put this stuff together and make it sound good, make a bundle of money, get everybody "wired," and then as nothing happens they sort of fade into the woodwork and wait for the next guy to light the torch. The Armageddon authors and movie makers, both the religious and secular varieties, do well for themselves; I'm just not sure how much long-term good they do for the church and for the cause of Christ.

As I said, I tend to be cynical about this stuff. But as I reflected on my conversation with our choir member, the Holy Spirit gently reminded me that one can err on both sides of the issue. Certainly, one can be too gullible and run willy-nilly after every prophet who claims to be a prophet and subject himself and her church to unnecessary ridicule. Or, one can be cynical and greet all prophets with a hardened heart and deaf ears. What is needed is something else. What is needed is reasonable caution coupled with an open mind and a sensitive spirit. One of these days somebody is going to call it right, and as I said Wednesday night: "This much I believe: He is coming again, and His coming is closer today than it was yesterday and it will be closer tomorrow than it was today." I best add, "If He doesn't come today or tonight," it will be closer tomorrow than it was today.

The plain charge given us by Jesus is to live our lives on tip-toe, watching and expecting Him to come back at any and every moment, so that no matter when He comes we will be found faithful. **It may be today or maybe tomorrow that the Lord will come for me and for you. We must be faithful in keeping our hearts open for His imminent return.**

We are called to pursue holiness and readiness for the Lord's return. The third part of being faithful is to be found doing what the Lord told us to do before His ascension. The last section of our Scripture lesson from Luke 12 says is verses 42-43: "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns."

Faithfulness requires us to help a neighbor in need, to pray for our church and civic leaders, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and to work for the

liberation of the oppressed. Faithfulness requires us to proclaim the good news of God's salvation offered to all in the gift of His Son Jesus. **There is a lot to do until He comes, so we would do well to be doing it.**

Faithfulness asks a fourth thing as well. Writing in I Corinthians 11:23-26 Paul says, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Regular participation in the Lord's Supper reminds us of our Lord's sacrifice for us on the cross and of His promise to come again. Coming to His table helps keep us connected and ready.

As we move into 2008, let us stay intimately connected to the Lord by exercising the disciplines of silence, expectancy, spiritual seeking, and faithfulness. Let us remain faithful by pursuing holiness, watching for Christ's imminent return, obeying His commands, and participating in His table.

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Luke 12:35-43

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