

1<sup>st</sup> in Advent, December 2, 2007 (Communion Sunday)  
 Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

### **The Necessity for Watchfulness**

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

<sup>36)</sup> “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37)</sup> For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38)</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39)</sup> and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40)</sup> Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>41)</sup> Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>42)</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43)</sup> But 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. <sup>44)</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Are you ready for Christmas? Don't you wish you were? Well we have about 23 shopping days left before Christmas so maybe we will make it. This passage of Scripture says nothing about getting ready for Christmas so why deal with it? Why did they choose this portion of the Gospel to read for this Sunday? I have no idea except to say that it talks about Christ's second coming and we have no idea when that is. Back in the days before Christ they did not know when he was coming either. Oh, Mary and Joseph had an idea but the exact day and hour no one knew. The shepherds did not know but had an idea when they heard the angels sing. The Wise Men traveled for approximately two years knowing that there was a baby born somewhere in Judea that would be the Messiah, or the new king of the Jews as they put it.

We really do not know when Jesus was born, only that it was before King Herod the Great died. Matthew 2:1 tells us that “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise came from the East to Jerusalem.” King Herod, the Great died in 4 B.C. so Jesus had to be born before that. And, if the wise men traveled two years before they got to Jerusalem to enquire of King Herod where Jesus was born then Jesus could have been born as early as 6 or 7 B.C. Well, that is not as important as the fact that he was born and the world has not been the same since!

No one really knew the day of Jesus' birth so the early church settled on December 25<sup>th</sup> as a day to celebrate it. That day really coincided with a pagan holiday which we have forgotten all about. This is another example how God can take something pagan and redeem it into something wonderful.

There are some lessons in this Scripture for today. <sup>36)</sup> “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Here is a promise that God's future and our future belong to this Messiah, the Son of Man. The future of our church belongs to God, your future as an individual belongs to God. Jesus said that even his future was unknown to him at that time, it belonged to God.

Then in the following verses we read: <sup>37)</sup> “For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38)</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39)</sup> and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.” When Jesus says that they were “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” that does not mean they were doing anything wrong. What it

means is that they were going about the normal everyday task of living and so immersed in it that they were heedless of God! They were not ready for the flood. That can be true of our age, so busy with the everyday tasks of living that we are heedless of God, we are not ready for the unexpected. We can be so immersed in getting ready for Christmas that we are not really ready for Christmas!

Maybe you never thought of this and I hope it is not true that we can get so immersed in the everyday task of doing church work, keeping the machinery oiled, so to speak; keeping the organization going and seeing to it that all the jobs are filled and working that we are heedless of God, we are not ready for the unexpected, we are not ready for the new thing God is preparing for us. We can get so immersed in preparing for a new pastor that we are not really ready for a new pastor. I suspect that I better not push that too far; maybe I've stopped preaching and gone to meddling!

Our next two verses say: <sup>40)</sup> "Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>41)</sup> Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left." That simply means that some will be ready for the new thing God is doing and some will not. Some are watching and some are not. "Watchfulness" is another great theme of this passage of Scripture. Being watchful for the new thing that God is doing. I think of the stories Matthew tells following this scripture. It seems that he is trying to tell us what watchfulness looks like. Matthew 24:45-51 tells about the faithful or unfaithful slave. The faithful slave faithfully fulfills his responsibilities even though his master has left and he does not know when he will return. The unfaithful slave says, "My master is delayed" and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards. The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him. Matthew 25:1-13 is the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. Five were foolish and five were wise. They all had lamps and five of them took oil with them to keep the lamps burning. Five did not. When the bridegroom came those who had the extra oil were received into the celebration of the bridegroom and the five whose lamps had gone out were and did not have extra oil were not received. Or watchfulness is like the parable of the talents, 25:14-30. All of them were given talents to trade with, each according to their ability. Those watchful ones were careful and invested wisely but the one that was not so watchful, was fearful lest he lose what he had, buried his talent. In the end it was taken from him and given to the others. Another story follows that one, 25:31-46, the story of the sheep and the goats, a story of judgment. Those who went about faithfully, watching how they could do good to others even though they did not know it was to Jesus himself were received into the kingdom.

You may be interested to know that the word in Greek that is translated "taken" in other places is normally translated "received." Those that are ready will be received.

Watchfulness is an important theme in Matthew. It is important to us, too and even more so during this interim time we are in. Jesus says this in the next verse: <sup>42)</sup> "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." Keep awake for you do not know when Christmas is coming in your heart. Keep away for you do not know when the Lord is going to do this new thing he has planned for you. Keep awake and be ready.

The next verse illustrates this same truth again. <sup>43)</sup> "But 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."

Jesus concludes with <sup>44)</sup> "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." It is more than just being awake" – it is not just for what is to come, but it is to a continuous preparedness for what is already taking place in our midst. The danger is that we will be lulled to sleep in the seeming routine of daily living or in the disappointing news of the world around us. When

this happens, our failure is in not knowing the meaning of each day that we are living. We miss the sense of the living Christ in the here and now! Each day has in it the promise of the Lord's nearness. The Son of Man is coming and you must be ready.

First, ask yourself, "What is happening right now? What is God doing right now, here in this church? What is happening right now in my heart? What is God doing in my heart?" Secondly, tell yourself, "I want to be ready for what God is doing in this church, in my life. I want to be ready for what God is doing in the world!" The third thing you can do is pray, ask God to help you prepare for what he is doing, to help you be ready. Truly he is doing a new thing in us, in you. Do you not see it? Do I?

Join me in singing "In Remembrance," number 322, and we will prepare to eat at his table.

*(Read in unison)*

This is the table, not of the church, but of the Lord.

It is made ready for those who love him

And for those who want to love him more.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little,

You who have been here often and you who have not been here long,

You who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

Come, because it is the Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

*(Christian Century, 9-19-06, p. 25)*