

The next Scripture we are going to read is from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. This is a Scripture which directs us to the future return of Christ. Today is the first Sunday of Advent and we usually read on the first Sunday of Advent a Scripture which directs us to the future return of Christ.

That may sound strange that we begin this season of preparing for the birth of Christ by reading a Scripture about the future return of Christ. But we do that so that we can begin Advent by pointing us toward hope for the future. And the second coming is not about fear but about hope.

In this Scripture we will read that the gospel writer Matthew divides the world into 2 ages. The present age includes characters like Satan, demons, idolatry, sin, injustice, exploitation, sickness, violence, and enmity between humans and God's creation. Matthew is going to contrast this with the future age where God is completely in charge which will be defined by authentic worship, forgiveness, health, and a blessing between God and God's Creation.

### **Read Matthew 24:36-44**

This is a Scripture about waiting. What does waiting look like? Here is one example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yg1-Cic9ApU>

“In Anne Tyler’s novel, *The Amateur Marriage*, we witness a sad series of events. The book’s main characters are Michael and Pauline, a pair of World War II-era sweethearts who get married and eventually have three children. But then one day their oldest child, Lindy, just disappears. She runs away from home and promptly falls off the face of the earth.

For the first days, weeks, and even months, they watch for her return. They seize on any and every clue as to her whereabouts. They pace, they peer out windows, they listen for a key scratching at the front door's lock, they sit upright in bed each time they think they hear someone coming up the driveway.

Over the years, her absence becomes just another part of life. They never finally give up on the idea that they'd see her again, but they stop watching for her. At first they were certain she'd be back soon. They would not have been at all surprised had she walked back through that front door. Years later, though, the surprise flipped: after a while, they would have been surprised if she *had* come back."

This Scripture from Matthew is a text about waiting. It is a text about waiting for the return of Christ. But we learn from this text that there is a healthy way to wait for the return of Christ. And the way that Matthew describes as the healthy way to wait is very different from the way that many people in our culture choose to wait for the return of Christ.

In our culture, many people of faith choose to wait for the return of Christ by focusing on trying to figure out when that will occur. There are people who every few years become the focus of some news coverage because they claim to have the definitive date of when Christ will return. They gather up their followers and they sit in some secluded location and wait for that date. But to my knowledge no one has been correct yet on their prediction of the return of Christ.

Others, however, have concluded that there is no real need to wait on Christ's return. These are people who are feeling overwhelmed by the violence and tragedy around them. They kind of check out of the world because they see no end in sight and they lose sight of God having any kind of divine plan. They decide to simply go through the motions or engaging in destructive behaviors to themselves, others, or to the earth.

These are the people who decide to give up on sustaining meaningful relationships so they just go from one destructive relationship to another where they use and are used by others. People who have given up on Christ's return have nothing to wait for so they engage in unethical business practices because it is all about them. They care little about the earth and see it simply as another resource to be used up and not sustained.

But that is not the way that Matthew understands what it means to wait on the return of the Lord. Matthew says to be ready because we never know when Christ will return. In fact, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying that Jesus himself does not know when Christ will return. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying we need to be ready no matter what we are doing and where we are doing it.

And how do we get ready for the return of the Christ? After the Scripture that we read Matthew quotes Jesus as saying that we prepare for the return of Christ by doing the everyday kinds of things but doing them with purpose and thought. So we do that by seeking out meaningful relationships where we treat one another with respect.

We prepare for the return of Christ by forgiving and extending forgiveness to others. We prepare for the return of Christ by conducting ourselves ethically in all that we do in business and personally. We wait for the return of Christ by taking good care of the earth that God has created.

In other words, according to Matthew, Christ wants us to live life where we are giving and caring of others and God's creation. We do not lead a life where we see others as objects to be used and we do not see God's creation as something to be devoured.

Jesus Christ will return to earth. When Jesus returns to earth that will be a day when God's kingdom is fully realized on earth. No one knows when that will be. Jesus himself does not know when Christ will return.

But while we wait, we care, we serve, and we forgive others.

While we wait we are honest in how we treat others.

While we wait we care for God's creation.

We are waiting. We are waiting with purpose. AMEN.

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