

Matthew 24:36-51  
Feilding Baptist  
30.3.25

### Call to Worship

Welcome to worship at Feilding Baptist!

Here is God speaking to us through Paul as he writes to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. 14 Do everything in love.

God can expect us to be like this, because this is the character of God. God does, so should we. We come to worship thinking about other things that God does. Our songs remind us, our readings remind us, so that we can worship in a spirit of thankfulness.

Let's pause, and in the quiet think about what you're thankful to God for, and be thankful.

Father God, we come with thankfulness this morning. Thank you for your generous character. Thank you for wanting the best for us. Thank you for continuing to overpower evil. Thank you for Jesus, for His sacrifice for us, for breaking the powers of death and darkness. Thank you for the hope we have, the assurance we have. Holy Spirit, thank you for your guidance this week, for your energy, your prompting. Please give us energy to worship now. Please continue to speak to us I pray, Amen.

### Message - Be Ready - Be faithful

It's really simple, there are consequences for taking Jesus for granted.

It would all start at 2pm on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Twenty five years ago I was very much looking forward to the end of Term 1 and the school holidays. I was teaching in Waitara, Year 4 and 5. We had been planning for several months, to walk the Milford Track. Diane's dad was coming with us, not to chaperone us, we were married.

Getting tickets for the track involved phone calls to the DoC centre in Te Anau, there was no online desperation on a day in June back then. You have to catch a boat across Lake Te Anau to the start of the track, and at the other end, a boat across Milford Sound, and a bus back to Te Anau. You have three nights on the track.

DoC sorted all that, we just paid the money. But there were plenty of other logistics to worry about, the gear to wear in all weathers, four days of food that we had to carry, accommodation before and after. And transport there and back.

Denis arrived in Christchurch and we drove down. We were psyched up and ready to go. All the planning had paid off. The day of departure dawned and we did some tiki touring in the morning before driving up to Te Anau Downs with plenty of time to spare. This was where we were leaving the car and catching the boat. We carefully unloaded everything, heavy packs all ready, and went in to pay for parking before walking to the wharf.

I got a strange look from the staff. It was well before 2pm and boat departure. But guess what? There was no 2pm departure. It was 1pm. We'd missed the boat! And I can tell you, it's a pretty hideous feeling!

So I get these verses about Noah, about being ready, about Jesus returning and us not being ready. We need to be ready for the return of Jesus, or that time when our days in this age come to a close.

Let's read - from v29 from last week to help set the scene

Matthew 24:36-51 (NIV - UK)

29 'Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”[b]

30 'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth[c] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.[d] 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

32 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs become tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[e] is near, right at the door. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

#### The day and hour unknown

36 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,[a] but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

45 'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, “My master is staying away a long time,” 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

#### Footnotes

Matthew 24:36 Some manuscripts do not have nor the Son.

Now, if I were to tell you when Jesus was coming back, you probably wouldn't believe me. But if I did say that, who am I saying that I am? Here are Jesus' own words, saying that only the Father knows, v36. Jesus doesn't even know! So for someone to say that they know, they're placing themselves beside God the Father, and above Jesus. What's the word for that??? Let's not listen to these people. They are not God.

The following three verses talk about those in Noah's time. Here people ignored God, and just carried on with life without God. But they were forgetting something. Within humans is a spiritual element that needs feeding, or at least respecting.

We can be so grateful for Sir Mason Durie (of Feilding or arguably Bunnythorpe) who developed the model of health; Te Whare Tapa Wha. Sir Mason recognised the need for family and friends in our lives. He recognised the need for physical exercise. He recognised the need for good mental and emotional health. And he recognised the need for good spiritual health. Each of these four are like the walls of a house. Take one out and the roof will stay up, but won't be very stable. Take two out and in a storm the building will collapse and the roof will come down.

These people in Noah's day were only interested in three of the four aspects of health. It's dangerous, actually it's not healthy. Keeping the faith side, spiritual side, strong is actually really good for us. Let's not get so caught up in everyday activities that we neglect our spiritual side.

It really is not that hard to begin the day with a cuppa, and a prayer. Adding in a Bible reading is pretty sound too. Fifteen minutes to talk to God, to listen to God. It's not that much. It's a great start.

So what about the next few verses, especially the workers, one will be taken, one will be left? In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the 1800's there was no doubt that the person who was taken was the faithful one. They were taken to be with God in heaven. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, now, not so many people are content with that. Many theologians think that the person taken is the unfaithful one. The faithful are left.

Well, as I've pondered this, I don't think it matters. The point here is, those who look to God go one way, and those who have rejected God go elsewhere, with the hypocrites.

Let's be clear here, God doesn't bully us into submission. We have a choice. We can choose not to follow Jesus. But these verses are clear on the consequences. Instead of being free of evil and with God, you'll be free of God and with evil.

And sometimes we can think that we've done something that is beyond God's grace. That we've been so bad that we've missed the boat. Well, you have to want God to give up on you. These verses are about taking God for granted. About apathy, not really caring. For us, missing the boat was an accident. It wasn't how it was meant to be. But through the grace of DoC, we got a water taxi, and still made it to the start of the track. A bit later than we should have been, and didn't get the first choice of the bunks, but we got onto the track, and still made it. God hasn't written you off. Jesus hasn't returned yet. Don't give up on God. God won't give up on you.

The point of the next verses 42 to 44, is being ready. If we knew when the thief was going to break into our house we could set our wake up alarm. Wake up, have a cuppa, and be ready. Because no one except the Father knows when Jesus is coming back, we have to be in a state of readiness. For life will remain as normal until that time.

How does this state of readiness look? Well, some people take from these verses that work is evil, that we shouldn't work, we should remain on the hill tops waiting for Jesus. Well, that is in contrast to verses 45 to 51.

We tend to think of slaves as the people who harvest our fruit, or prune our vineyards, people doing the same work. That couldn't be further from the slaves in Jesus' day. Back then slaves had all sorts of jobs, jobs that reflected their skills and gifts. One wealthy person was reported to have 400 slaves who were employed to manage his finances, livestock, household, kitchen, you name it. These people were effectively employees, except they were owned by the landowner, but they had far more freedom than the African slaves in the Americas. Some even earned wages and had choices. They were respected and used honourably.

So this story of Jesus is not extreme, that a land owner would head off, leaving a slave in charge of the slaves. Think of Joseph and the responsibilities that he had as a slave. Slaves with leadership potential were used for leadership. And look what happens to this faithful slave in v47. Their

reward was not less, but greater responsibility, they were allowed to go up the ladder, allowed to reach their potential.

This parable isn't just for leaders, it's for all believers. Here in the waiting for Jesus to return, we are being encouraged to use our gifts, to go as far as we can with them! This is not about just maintaining faithfulness, but growing faithfulness.

There is something here about the church. We're to use our gifts not only in the marketplace, but in the church. This is how the church functions, this is how the church grows, each with our gifts contributing to the whole. It's a remarkable thing. We so appreciate each other for what each is able to do, from the least to the greatest. Early childhood teachers are as much valued as university lecturers. I couldn't do either, I was a Primary teacher, that was where my gift mix was best.

Let's be faithful in waiting for Jesus' return.

Finally, Matthew loves this image of someone gnashing their teeth. Six times he uses it (8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30). And the image couldn't be clearer than at church business meetings. Several people have wondered why we don't have our AGM after the Sunday service. Or instead of the Sunday service as some churches do. I find that idea repugnant, that we would replace worship with business. Bizarre.

We have our AGM on another day of the week because too often at church meetings something is said that upsets people, and people leave in tears, or grinding their teeth. What I want after a Sunday service is to have people leaving, feeling lifted up, encouraged, and grateful for God. How easy it would be it be to ruin that with a meeting?!

But why does Matthew use this phrase? From what I can tell, this phrase is used once in the Old Testament. And it's in Psalm 112. Look, it could be just coincidence, but it looks awfully like what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 24.

Psalm 112 New International Version - UK

1 Praise the Lord.[b]

Blessed are those who fear the Lord,  
who find great delight in his commands.

2 Their children will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches are in their houses,  
and their righteousness endures for ever.

4 Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,  
for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.

5 Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely,  
who conduct their affairs with justice.

6 Surely the righteous will never be shaken;  
they will be remembered for ever.

7 They will have no fear of bad news;  
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

8 Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear;  
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

9 They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor,  
their righteousness endures for ever;  
their horn[dignity] will be lifted high in honour.

10 The wicked will see and be vexed,  
they will gnash their teeth and waste away;  
the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

## Footnotes

Psalm 112:1 This psalm is an acrostic poem, the lines of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 112:1 Hebrew Hallelu Yah

Psalm 112:9 Horn here symbolises dignity.

These verses in Matthew are not to frighten us. Though if they scare us into action or faithfulness, that's a good thing. These verses are to encourage us to be faithful, and to stay faithful. And how does that look? It looks like Psalm 112. We're to be gracious and compassionate. We're to be generous. We're to conduct our affairs with justice. When bad news comes, we're to remain steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Those who don't do these things will live in frustration, they will gnash their teeth and waste away.

This is our challenge!!! Let us be faithful in our following, in our discipleship, in our apprenticing to Jesus. Let's not take Jesus for granted.