

"The Last Day" **Matthew 24:42-44**

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Good morning everyone. I am so excited to see all of you here this morning and am delighted to have this chance to address you in brother Baxter's absence. I'd also like to extend a very special welcome to our visitors. We want you to know that you are our honored guests and we are so happy that you chose to worship the Lord with us here this morning.

This morning's lesson is somewhat unorthodox. Instead of a typical sermon, I will be telling you a story. It is a tale about a man in the throws of a seemingly ordinary day that turns out to be anything but. This man could be your neighbor. He could be your friend. He might be someone you know at church. Or he might be some nameless, faceless man that you haven't met or don't even know. But I guarantee that someone does know him and does care for him. He has a gorgeous faithful Christian wife of 7 years and two beautiful young children. He attends "church" because his wife wants him to but he hasn't yet committed his life to serving Jesus. He hasn't yet given up "partying" with his friends...or sneaking a peek or two at pornography every now and then...or given up swearing or telling those little white lies. The world looks at him and considers him a "good man." He's your average Joe. Because I lack imagination, let's call him Joe.

It's a Sunday night and Joe can't sleep. His mind is racing. He can't quit thinking about the sermon that a certain dashing young preacher just delivered that morning. Oh sure, he put it out of his mind for a while and went to sleep easily enough. But that slumber lasted for only a few hours. Just as he was starting to drift into a deep sleep, a nightmare overwhelmed him and startled him awake. His heart was beating so hard he felt like it would explode. His whole body was drenched with sweat. He was overcome with fear. Now he couldn't sleep...and he couldn't get that blasted sermon out of his head - it was burned into his brain. He remembered the preacher quoting **Matthew 24** concerning the second coming of Christ where Jesus said:

***"⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master 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. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* (ESV)**

He alone understood the irony. Here he was, sitting awake pondering a verse about staying awake. He would have chuckled to himself about this irony but he knew deep down that he wasn't quite ready for the Lord's return. He was awake but he surely

wasn't ready. After tossing and turning for a couple of hours because of this thought he eventually fell back to sleep.

Monday morning came quickly. Joe woke up but was still groggy from the night's restlessness. After brushing his teeth and shaving he jumped into the shower. The hot water felt so good running through his hair and down his body. He felt revived and ready to take on his class of 15 second graders. While he was getting ready for work, his lovely Christian wife Sarah readied their two kids for their play date and cooked the family their favorite breakfast – pancakes topped with whipped cream and maple syrup. They also sipped French vanilla cappuccinos for that little extra kick they both knew they'd need later that day. After finishing his breakfast, Joe leaned over and kissed little Jenny on the forehead...then little Ben...and then he gave his wife a tender kiss on the lips. Both kids giggled as mommy and daddy kissed. Joe just knew that today would turn out fine despite his awful night. He closed the door out to the garage as his family yelled "we love you daddy." A smile swept over his face. Today started out just like every other day. It was going to be a good day.

On the drive to the elementary school, his mind crept back to the sermon from the day before. He remembered Jesus' words in **Matthew** from a few verses earlier:

***"³⁶ But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."* (ESV)**

He felt a strange sensation as he contemplated these verses. He knew that today could be the day. But what were the odds. It has been 2000 years since Christ was last on the earth! And today started just like any other day. Surely it won't be today. It can't be today. He found comfort in watching some kids from his class playing kickball. He greeted some of the parents as they dropped their children off at school. The school buses rolled in and kids poured out of the big yellow beasts. The bell rang. Of course, today wouldn't be the day. It was just like every other day.

Joe was beaming when his class finally took their seats. This was his favorite activity - it was now time for the children to say the "Pledge of Allegiance." As a veteran of the Gulf war, he was so proud of his country and he just loved hearing these youngsters recite their loyalty to this great land. When the class finished its pledge, he took attendance, and turned around to write a math problem on the chalkboard.

Just then, he heard an ear-splitting sound – a sound that he had never ever heard before. It sounded like a trumpet, only at a decibel level many times louder than the loudest rock concert he'd ever been at. The sound was overwhelming. He had a hard time thinking straight. He spun around to see how his pupils were reacting to the noise. As he turned, he noticed empty desk after empty desk after empty desk. There was not another soul with him in that classroom. Was he dreaming? What

happened to the kids? What is that deafening sound? And why won't it stop? He raced to the next classroom. The teacher there was as dumbfounded as he was. Her class had vanished as well! What was going on?!? Just then he remembered the preacher quoting **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**:

"¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (ESV)

His heart sank.

The two teachers ran out of the school building. The noise was still deafening. The light outside was almost blinding. They noticed all of the children ascending up into the clouds. They saw what appeared to Jesus descending from heaven to the clouds. Yet they were still planted firmly on the ground. Why was that? What did they do wrong? Why are the children ascending to meet Jesus? Why are most of the teachers still on the ground? Deep down Joe knew all of the answers to all of these questions for he had attended services with his wife pretty regularly over the last few years. Yet, he wanted to see his beloved wife and kids and he quickly bound to his car. He heard the preacher quoting Jesus again:

"⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left."

Joe never drove so fast. He passed car after car after car. Some were empty. Most were filled with panicked inhabitants thinking the same exact thoughts he had - "I have to be with my family. I have to hold them in my arms. I have to protect them. I have to tell them how much they mean to me." He passed a cemetery. The graves had already given up their residents. Some had already ascended to be with Jesus but most were still milling around awaiting their fated doom. The sky darkened. Joe felt more and more alone...and more and more scared. Only one more block to go until he was home and he could see his family again. Covering the distance of that block seemed to take an eternity.

He jumped out of the car and raced into the house yelling for his wife and kids "Sarah! Jenny! Ben! Sarah! Jenny! Ben!" No one called back. Now, it was pitch black outside even though it was only nine in the morning. "Sarah! Jenny! Ben!" he screamed. Tears streamed down his face. All he wanted was to see his family again. "Sarah! Jenny! Ben!" He clung to a family picture as he darted from room to room. By now, he was sobbing uncontrollably. His words became unintelligible. For he now knew that he'd never see his family again. He knew that they had all ascended to be with Jesus and that he hadn't. On more than one occasion he was so close to accepting the gospel. But he didn't do it. He had thought "I can always do it later." Now, he found himself alone in absolute darkness. Even his own house seemed eerie and strange to him. He clutched onto that picture as he crawled to the deepest

recesses of the house still weeping and still crying out for his family "Sarah...Jenny...Ben. I love you." He spent his last instant on earth all alone, in the dark, covered away in a corner in his basement sobbing. For he knew that this was indeed the last day and there would not be a tomorrow.

In an instant, Joe was standing before the God Almighty awaiting his judgment. He gave the account of himself to God but he had never bothered to have his name written in the book of life. He pleaded "**Lord Lord**" but he had never actually done the will of the Father. Jesus declared "**I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.**" His stint in the eternal fires of hell began that day...a day that started out just like any other day.

Brothers and sisters, most people will have an experience much like this one on that day. Most people will choose not to follow Christ. It doesn't have to be this way. This fate is entirely avoidable. God loves us and he wants us to be saved. But he also is a God of truth and a God of justice. He hates sin! How does one reconcile these two ideas – love and justice? The answer can be found in Christ Jesus. God loved us so much that he sent Christ Jesus to this earth and had him die in our place as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. We enjoy eternal life through his death.

Our job, our sole purpose for existence, is to, first, avoid this peril ourselves and, second, lead as many souls away from it as possible. Are you ready for Christ's return? If not, what is preventing you from accepting God's grace? Are all of your loved ones ready? If not, when was the last time you shared the gospel with them? The best time to act is now. We have no idea when the world is going to end. It very well could be later today.

If you are here today and have not yet obeyed the gospel, perhaps Joe's story has pricked your heart. The Bible is very clear about what you need to do to be saved. You need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, have faith that he indeed is the Son of God and that he died for your sins, confess this faith before men, turn away from the sins in your life, and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. When you arise out of the waters of baptism you will be a new creature...and completely forgiven for all of your past sins. If you have already put on Christ but some sin has taken over your life, there is still hope for you as well. In either case, please feel free to come forward as we stand and sing our song of invitation. Let's stand and sing.

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org