When He Comes

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Date: 06 October 2019

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[0:00] Well, in this chapter, this Matthew chapter 24, obviously the subject matter is when he comes, when Christ comes again. And that is something which, although it is something of a dread perhaps to some people, I mean, we do read, for example, in verse 30, what we read, then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And in Revelation chapter 1, it says that all the peoples of the world shall wail when the Lord appears again. But for those who are looking for and longing for Christ's coming, his coming again should not be an occasion of dread or terror.

Obviously, we're all going to be guilty and feeling guilty when we stand before him because of the sin of which we know we are guilty. But at the same time, if we are looking for and longing for his coming again, it's not only because we love him.

And if we love him, it is because we know what he has done for us. And if he has taken away our sin through his death upon the cross, we don't actually need to fear our sin anymore because it's been put to death by Christ.

But when we think of his coming, we need to recognise again what it says in God's word about it. And one of the main things that we see, if we look at some of these verses in this chapter, we see that when his coming arrives, although it has been predicted and prophesied for a long, long time, it will be sudden.

I mentioned, sort of half-joking with the children, that no matter how many times you look out the window when somebody's meant to be coming and you try to get ready and the dusting and the hoovering and make sure the fire's going, you know, everything nice and ready for them, no matter how many times you look out the window, almost, always, they manage to arrive in that time when you're not looking.

And it always kind of catches you out a wee bit. And it'll be like that when the Lord comes. Because it will, in a sense, catch almost everybody out. Because it will be so sudden.

We read verse 27. As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Now, although we can't predict a bolt of lightning, we have hints beforehand of when a storm, a thunder and lightning storm, is gathering, when it's coming.

We can see that the clouds beginning to gather. We might have read the weather forecast and see what's predicted by the Met Office. We might see little hints like, you know, Jesus says here about the eagles gathering around the carcasses, or buzzards or vultures gathering around the carcass.

And in the same way, the animals give us a clue of what is there. We know that if a bunch of buzzards are circling, there's a carcass somewhere. And likewise, prior to a storm, sometimes you'll have seen how cows in a field will all gather in one corner.

Because there's a storm coming. No doubt for mutual warmth or protection or comfort or whatever. That they will gather in one corner of the field when there's a storm coming. So we can know when the storm is coming.

But even if we hear the thunder and we see the dark clouds, we can't predict what an individual bolt of lightning is going to form. We can't say, oh yes, three, two, one, there it is now, that's it, there goes the flash.

No, we can't do that. It's completely outwith our ability to predict. We can never say it's going to be at this particular moment. Now, each bolt of lightning, as we know, lights up the entire surface of the world in front of us.

Everything we can see, it's lit up as bright as day. It's only a split second. But it is, even if it's at night time, it's as bright as day for that split second.

[3:58] And it lights up everything from the east to the west. And that's what it says. If the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

And remember how, you know, it says in Psalm 103, verse 12, As far as the east is from the west, so far hath it removed our transgressions from us. That's going to be an infinite amount of space, as far as the east is from the west.

You can never reach the other end of that east and west as you go round the globe. But likewise, it lights up the whole infinite amount of the heavens and the earth when Christ comes.

And one reason he's saying this, and one reason he's spelling it out, is not just for the suddenness of the lightning when it comes, but also that you can't ignore it.

He's saying, you know, there will arise false Christs and false prophets, and will show great signs and wonders, and so much as if it were possible, they'll deceive the very elect. Behold, I've told you before.

[4:55] So if they say to you, he's in the desert, go not forth. And he's in the secret chambers, don't believe it. Because it's not going to be something hidden away in a corner. Oh, he's out in the desert, but nobody knows he's there.

Oh, he's in the hidden chambers. Christ has come back, but just nobody knows he gets this. When I come, it will light up the entire surface of the earth, from the east to the west.

It will be as bright as the lightning. It will be as sudden as the lightning. You won't be in any doubt at all. I remember many years ago, a minister was saying that when he was anxious about a call to a particular place, and he was looking for a sign from the Lord, whether or not it should be this place or that place.

And he was looking for a sign, the size of a little hair. He said, oh, look, that's the Lord's sign to me. And when the sign actually came, when the guidance from the Lord actually came, it was like a great big motorway sign, but he couldn't miss it.

So he wasn't left in any doubt. And it's going to be like that when the Lord comes. It's not to be, oh, Jesus has come back, but actually he's in this faraway country, or he's out in the desert like John the Baptist was, you know, and it's all kind of secret, nobody knows.

[6:06] Could this be Jesus coming, come back? No. When Jesus comes back, it will light up the entire sky. It will light up the heavens and the earth. As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even out of the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

There won't be any doubt. Like a bolt of lightning, even if it's in the middle of the night, it will make it like daylight and light up everything.

It will be sudden as the lightning and undeniable. But at the same time, it will have been, although it will be sudden, it will have been signalled.

Sudden, but also signalled. Verse 32. Learn a parable of the fig tree. When the branches yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.

Now, it doesn't just mean, okay, what weather is on the way. What it means, rather, is summer is nigh because the leaves appear on the fig tree. It's proof that as far as the plant world is concerned, the winter is over.

[7:13] The cold, hard frost, the time of struggle, the time of tribulation, of plants sort of turning into themselves and almost hibernating, as it were, the beasts of the fields, some of them hibernating as well.

But that time of tribulation, that time of trial, of testing, of lack of the supply of food or sunlight or whatever, that is passing. It's passed and the leaves are sprouting on the fig tree now.

Summer is coming. Winter is gone. And so the time of tribulation is drawing to an end. And this fallen world is very much a time of tribulation.

Most of the things that Jesus describes as signs that will happen before the end comes, they've already been happening, some of them, for 2,000 years. They're still happening nowadays.

There's wars and rumours of wars and famines and earthquakes in diverse places and so on. All of these things have happened. So we know that there's been a long time of tribulation.

[8:13] There's been a long time of suffering, we might say, in this fallen world. But when you see the fig tree begin to boot forth its green leaves, you know that summer is near. Summer is on its way.

And it means that winter is past and summer is coming. And the ultimate act of summer, the ultimate joy, the ultimate sunshine of everything is the Son of Man coming, the Son risen with healing in his wings.

And this is what we look for and long for is Christ coming. But although it is sudden, it will have been signaled. Not just by the likes of the fig tree, because tribulation is coming to an end.

And summer is on its way. And the time of the suffering of this world is drawing to an end. If we're in Christ, of course, if we're outside of Christ, then the time of eternal suffering is well and truly on its way.

But that is not God's desire. However, God's desire is that souls should be saved. God's desire is that they should embrace the Son of Righteousness, who is outridden with healing in his wings.

[9:19] That they should embrace the Messiah and receive the forgiveness that he freely offers. But if you think in terms of like, you know, the mainland, where there's railway lines and so on and tragedy, but signals on a railway line, these signals are ultimately not really meant for the public in general.

They're meant for the train drivers. So they can see the signals, whether they're up or down, and whether this track is safe, or whether they stop, or whether there's a train coming in another direction. So ultimately, these signals are all telling the train drivers and the traffic different things.

Nowadays, of course, it's all electronic and computerized and so on. But there was a time, as I'm sure you all know, when signal boxes pulled different levers and so on, and the wires would send the signals up or down, and the train drivers could see them, and people on the stations could see where the signals were going up and down, and they could tell whether the train was coming.

And we've all been in situations, I'm sure, where you're going to a level crossing somewhere. And a level crossing, most of the time, the gates are up and you just drive right through it. They still take a wee anxious set of look up and down the line as you go across by that guard or some other place like that.

But supposing then the gates come down, and the lights start flashing and clanging bells and so on, and, well, you know there's a train coming soon. And that's a wee bit more scary.

You might, if you're a real fool, try and run the lights and try and get across quick before the gates completely come down. But the likelihood is that once the gates come down and the lights start flashing and the bells start clanging away, you slow down and you stop, you really hope that you will have got through to the other side of your journey.

You won't be held up all the time. You've got the trains coming along, but you look back and say, oh, the poor souls that are stuck on the other side there. Well, of course, when the gates come down, ultimately, in spiritual terms, there is going to be a great divide as to those from one side we might see at the track and those on the other.

Because the one thing you cannot do is park or stand or remain. in the way of the train when it comes. Because that, when it comes, although you're looking up the track, I don't hear anything or I don't see anything.

Oh, I can hear it. Oh, there it is now. Once you see it coming, it is unstoppable. Once you see it coming, although you've been warned and the lights have been flashing and the gates have come down, still nothing seems to happen.

And you're waiting and you're sitting in your car and you're waiting and nothing's happening. And then finally, it comes. And when it comes, it comes suddenly. And when it comes, it is unstoppable.

[11:52] And anything in its track will be flattened, will be destroyed. It has been signalled in advance. And the Lord's coming has been signalled in advance.

And there will come a time, whilst you can pass freely over the level crossing, just now, there will come a time when the gates come down and the lights flash and the bells are clanging. And then whichever divide you are on, that's where you have to stay until the train has come.

There is no other way through. So this will be sudden when it comes. But it has been signalled. It has been warned beforehand.

We can see the signs happening. We can see the fake trees putting forth its leaves. We can see things surely drawing to a conclusion, even in terms of the world.

We can look and see the world has never, in a sense, been smaller than it is now. We're so interconnected. There's so much meltdown, it seems, not only of climate, but also of all kinds of morality and legality seems to be just melting into mush.

[13:03] And the things that once seemed rock solid are just fluid now. Who knows where the law of the land stands now? Who knows where parliament stands?

Parliament doesn't seem to even respect itself, let alone each other's laws or each other's signs or whatever. What hope for us ordinary mortals? We are in a state of complete flux.

Everything seems to be melting down to soup at the end and everything is far less certain than once it was. Things are coming to a conclusion.

The fig tree is putting forth her green leaves. This event is being signalled and yet it hasn't come yet. And even when the gate's gone down, and even when the light's gone, you don't see the train coming.

But by then, you're already on one side or the other. Friend, you are going to end up on one side or the other. You will be on one side or the other.

[14:03] There is no neutrality with God. You cannot sit on the tracks with God but in on either one side or the other. It's okay. I'm here in the middle. I'll be all right whatever happens.

You will not be all right whatever happens. The only way to be all right is to be safe in the arms of Christ. To know that what he has done upon the cross has been done for a sinner like me.

has been done so that my sin, you can see, has been put to death upon the cross. Not just, oh, good man, he went to the cross. Wasn't that sad sort of thing? But rather that he is your personal saviour.

Because he has already been. He has already gone to the cross. He's already paid the price of sin. The question for you and me is not, did he do it? Because yes, he did it.

The question is whether or not it was done for you. Whether or not it is for you personally that this sacrifice has been made. And that offer is free and the invitation is open.

[15:05] But his coming will be sudden. Although it has been signal. Also his coming, we read, is certain. That may seem like stating the obvious.

But sometimes perhaps you might think, well, if he was going to come, surely he would have come by now. Jesus is quite definite. Heaven and earth shall pass away.

Verse 35. But my words shall not pass away. His coming is as certain as his word. Now, whilst, for example, many people might have issues with the church of Jesus Christ.

It's full of hypocrites. They'll say it's full of sinners, which of course it is, with all sinners. We're all fallible. And we are very, very imperfect. But Christ is not imperfect. Most people who wouldn't hesitate to slag off the church of Jesus Christ would probably think twice about having a go at Jesus himself.

It takes quite a brass neck to actually slag off Jesus of Nazareth. Because he is so unequivocally good and kind and merciful and gracious and God-like.

[16:18] There is nothing to criticize in Jesus. Unless he threatens your vested interest, as he did with the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Romans and so on.

And they put him to death. Yes, but there is nothing to take issue with in Jesus except his challenge to sin. It's easy to criticize the church. It's a lot more difficult to criticize Jesus.

So, of course, say, well, the church spouts all this, and ministers say all that, but Jesus himself says, heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Are we really going to say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth is a liar?

Are we really going to say, well, he didn't actually know what he was speaking about then. He was a man of his time. He wasn't sophisticated like we are. He didn't know half the things that we know.

Wow. Now, this breathtaking arrogance, not to say, well, my blasphemous unbelief. But his coming again is as certain as his word.

[17:23] It is saddened as the lightning. It is signal. But it is certain as the word. Verse 35, the word of God is still live.

It still speaks to people. People are still touched and converted through reading it. God still works through these sacred pages. It's not just print and binding and ink and paper.

This is a living word. And it still has the power to convert. Or rather, to be used by the Holy Spirit to convert. Because it is a living word of a living God.

It is not false. And it is not dead. It is as certain as the word is Christ's coming again. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Jesus' words stand. From 2,000 years later, we are still talking about them. Here we are today, still reading them, still discussing them. It is happening all over the world. Today, as we speak, Christians are gathering everywhere.

[18:26] And part of their worship service will be reading a portion of God's living word. Which doesn't pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away, but his word will not pass away.

His coming again is as certain as the word. And yet, at the same time, it is secret. It is secret in the sense of the exact moment and hour.

It is not known to us. And that is intentional. It is secret in the heart of the Father. So, we read to you likewise, but of that day, verse 36, in that hour, knoweth no man, know not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

And it is secret in the heart of the Father. It is also, as a thief in the night, Jesus goes on to talk about it. The good man of the house had known when the thief would come.

He would have watched and not suffered his house to be broken up. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 2, For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

[19:32] For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as to avail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day, who are not of the night, nor of darkness. And will come, though, nevertheless, as a thief in the night.

But we shouldn't be caught out by that. Peter says, likewise, chapter 3, verse 10 of 2 Peter, That the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

The earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Seeing then, all these things shall be dissolved. What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

It is as certain as the word, but it is as secret as the knowledge of God in the heart of the Father. We do not know these things, but we know they will happen.

[20:38] We know they will come. We know that Christ is coming again because he has promised. We know that his word will never fail. It is as certain as the word. It is being signaled.

It will be certain, but it is certain, although it is secret. When it comes, of course, whilst it will be secretive and whilst it will be sudden, it also will be fearful for a great many people.

As the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving and managing until the day that Noah entered into the ark and knew not until the flood came and took them all away.

So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. Now, there is a sense in which when the Lord comes again, there might be some people who will think, is this really it?

I mean, or is this just, am I just having a vision like Paul had, you know, seeing the sun lighting up, the sky lighting up with the Son of Man? Am I just hallucinating here? Is this real?

[21:36] Some people might still doubt even right up to the end. Now, when we think about the flood, the flood didn't come on in a water. It didn't come suddenly, instant flash flood.

It started raining. It started raining ceaselessly. And then all the fountains of the deep were broken up. You can almost imagine if you're looking out to sea and suddenly he's creeping jets of water like geysers spouting out of the sea and then splashing down.

And two or three others bursting out of the land as well. So as well as the rain coming down from heaven, the fountains of the deep are broken up as well. But still, you're like, wow, I've never seen that before.

My, this flooding's getting really bad. I'm going to, I'm going to have to move to higher ground. I wish it would stop raining. Three days on, three weeks on, it's still raining. This is getting bad. Our levels are coming up.

Our home's flooded. This is terrible. It's going to take me ages to get this dried out. And they're still thinking in terms of, this is going to go away again. This is bad. We've not seen it this bad, but it's going to dry out again.

[22:37] We're going to go back to normal. We'll recover. We'll get on. Come on. And still keep on going higher ground. And it's still coming up and up. And more and more people having drowned. And more and more properties having been washed away.

And more and more things floating by on the surface of the water, including, tragically, bodies as well. And beginning to think, maybe I'm not going to make it out of this. I'm going to have to keep climbing.

And gradually, as you get higher and higher, and then thinking, we're not going to make it. We're not going to get out of this. The water just isn't receding. And eventually, you succumb to it. But there's going to be an awful long time of first of all, assuming, everything's going to be okay.

It's raining. So what? And then thinking, wow, we've never seen it as bad as this before. And then thinking, this is really bad. It's going to take us ages to recover. And finally realizing, maybe we're not going to recover.

Maybe we're not going to get out of this. Well, as far as the Lord coming back is concerned, friend, you're not going to get out of this. You're either going to be found with Christ or against him.

[23:42] This is going to be fearful when the Lord comes. Fearful as the flood when it comes. And there will be a sense in which the vast majority of humanity will still not believe this is for real right up until the last minute.

Right up until the end. Thinking, oh, this is going to, it's boundaries. It's going to stop really. Tomorrow, soon, it's bound to stop. Eventually, it must stop the waters. It must, this can't continue.

We've never seen it like this before. No, you've never seen it like this before. And we'll never see it like this again. Because that is the end of all things when Christ comes back.

And it is fearful as the flood. The flood was designed to destroy all of humanity, all the creatures of the field, except the fish of the sea, of course, all the beasts of the field, everything.

It was even to redesign the surface of the earth. Because if you think about it, such would be the pressure of water and that sort of ocean depth when it covered the whole of, the whole of the planet, that it was a pressure upon whatever earth and mountains and so on had been before.

[24:55] It would rearrange the entire topography of the world. so the whole world was being effectively wiped clean and remoulded. Not unlike what we were looking like at Jeremiah with the potter.

Remaking and remoulding a new world. So it will be fearful as the flood burns. His coming again will also be faithful as the promise.

Verses 45 and 46. Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Now, these are not meant, these verses are not meant to say, so you better watch out, ha, and be faithful or you'll be caught out.

Rather, I would suggest to you these verses are intended as calm reassurance that there is a way to survive this.

[25:58] There is a way to be ready. There is a way to be able to face this ultimate event without fear.

We keep on being faithful to the Lord because he is faithful that promise and if he is faithful as his promise then we are called to be faithful to his promise.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Now, if he's going to come suddenly and he's going to come when you don't expect him, how are you going to know that he's going to find you doing what you're meant to be doing? How do you know that when he comes back he's going to find you as you ought to be occupied?

Busy with the things you should be busy with. Where you should be, when you should be. That on the Lord's day or on a prayer meeting night, you know, just at home watching the TV you're with the Lord's people in the Lord's house.

[27:09] That when you're called to worship or you sense that the Lord knowing that that you should be in worship and you're reading a Bible and not just being concerned with the things of the world.

There's a time and a place for the things of the world. We all have our duties, we all have our employments and our daily work and so on. But there's also so much just pure vanity in the world, pure emptiness that we get so easily distracted by and it does us no good.

It's just empty, it's vanity, it's brought. And when the Lord comes back you don't want to be found busy with trough. You don't want to be found doing what you should be doing. You don't want to be found faithful.

So that the servant, as Jesus has used the parables elsewhere, when he comes back, the servant's ready to open to his master, ready with the lights burning and lamps lit and everything ready for him to come in and tables set and he wants to get something to eat when he comes in, even if he's late so that we are ready for him when he comes.

We don't know exactly when he's going to come. Just like a visitor who rolls off the ferry, we know the ferry's arrived, we know they've texted, they say that's me off the ferry now, but if they're coming down from Storway, we don't know exactly how long they'll be, we know roughly, but we don't know what hazards that might be on the way, we don't know whether we'll have a clear road or ultimate different instructions along the way.

[28:34] They're coming in from Tarver, it's a lot closer, we know we've got less time, but equally, it could be bold ups along the way, there could be anything getting in the way, there could be anything holding them up, we don't know exactly when it will be, but we know we need to be ready when they come.

Blessed is that servant from his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. So this is to reassure, that you don't have to be Superman to be ready when the Lord comes.

There is a way to survive this, and it's not complicated, there is a way to be ready, there is a way to be able to face this ultimate event without fear.

Remember the fig tree science that's beginning to spout its leaves. We've heard of the wars and rumours of wars, we've heard of the earthquakes in diverse places, we're seeing a meltdown in not only climate change, but in political spheres, in society, everything that at one time we knew was sacred is now being regarded with contempt.

Things that once were regarded with contempt are now the sacred cows of our secular society. Everything is unfolding, as it should, or rather as the Lord has predicted that it would.

[29:49] Nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, false prophets are rising, and likewise, and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold, many shall be offended.

Many people are offended by the cross nowadays, many people are offended by the truth of God's word nowadays. It has been regarded by some lawyers speaking publicly in court in England as though the reading of the Bible in public should be regarded as a hate crime.

There you go. There's so many offended by the truth of God's word. And there shall many be offended and shall betray one another and shall hate one another.

And many false prophets shall rise and deceive many and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall be scolded. And then it says verse 14, this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come.

How far along do you suppose that is? How many nations of the world have yet to hear? And in every nation of the world where people hear, of course there's going to be most that won't accept it.

[31:00] They've heard it but they won't receive it. You know, what tribes are we still waiting for that are still needed? What nations are the world? Every nation state under heaven has had the gospel, maybe not every single corner of it, but it has gone out into all the world.

That means we must be getting close. Every nation has heard the gospel. Maybe not every people group, maybe not every tribe, certainly not every individual, but the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come.

Well, we're not far off. And with all the internet and all the way people can download things nowadays and get the scriptures and get Bible teaching and download lectures and so on from all over the world, you can't say, oh, but missionaries haven't been to that country yet, so they haven't got it.

They can beam it in from anywhere now. They can download it from anywhere now. Who's to say just how close we are? This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come.

How close do you think we are now? And yet we wait still, seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved.

[32:25] What manner of persons are ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens shall be on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless.

Be found faithful, not fearful. We don't have to fear these things. We don't have to fear the meltdown of the world. We don't have to fear the wars and rumors of wars.

We don't have to fear the false prophets. All that they can do is take away our bodily lives. They cannot take away our saviour. Be faithful, not fearful of these things.

But rather, if you want to be afraid of something, as Isaiah tells us, chapter 8, verse 13, sanctify the Lord of hosts himself and let him be your fear and let him be your dread.

[33:33] Rather than dreading him, what you should dread is dread being without him. Don't be afraid of being with the Lord. Be afraid of ever being without him.

Be afraid of being found without him. Be afraid of him coming back and you on the wrong side of the railway tracks when the gates come back. who then is a faithful and wise servant?

Therefore be he also ready. For in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man cometh. Be faithful. It's not fearful. It's not even that difficult just to follow him, just to be faithfully at your post, just to be faithfully fulfilling what he invites you and calls you to do, just to be faithfully there, following him day by day.

It's not that complicated just to follow him faithfully in love, to fulfil his commands. We are not asked to do anything beyond our powers or abilities to do.

Just love the Lord and serve him with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength. Love and serve him with your life so that we may each be found ready.

[34:53] We may at last be found faithful when he comes. Let's come. Let's come.