

STAY AWAKE
Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on November 30, 2025

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 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, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Text: Matthew 24:36-44

FOR MY WIFE AND me, the experience of becoming parents for the first time was all about waiting and learning to live in the tension between what is and what will be. First, we waited to get pregnant. That waiting lasted more than a year. Then we waited until the second trimester to tell our family and friends because that’s when the likelihood of miscarriage goes down. That waiting lasted three months. Then we waited from the moment when an ultrasound indicated the possibility of Down syndrome until Jinju was born to find out if she’d have a developmental disability. That waiting lasted four months, and it overlapped with a long night of waiting for the actual delivery.

And all of that was just our introduction to waiting. After Jinju was born, in the first few weeks, we waited for her to get the hang of nursing. We waited for her to stop throwing up all the time. And we waited for her to settle into some kind of sleep routine. Any kind of sleep routine—we really didn’t care. Then we moved into a whole new phase of waiting. We waited for her to get through teething. We waited for her to crawl, and then to walk. We waited for all that babbling to finally turn into words.

So much waiting. And what it taught me was that when you’re waiting for something, it’s hard to believe it’s really going to happen, and it’s even harder to imagine what it’ll be like when it does—how it’ll feel and how it’ll change your life. I remember thinking Jinju would never sleep in her own bed—that it would just never happen. And

when I tried to picture what it would be like to stretch out as much as I liked or to not have her kicking me all night, I just couldn’t mentally put myself into that reality. I was too caught up in the present—too immersed in how things were right then.

That’s the challenge of waiting. The present is so in-your-face, and so demanding of your attention, that the future seems abstract, almost hypothetical. Even when you know it’s coming, the reality of now makes it hard to imagine then. And when I look at this morning’s reading from Matthew, which has to do with waiting, I get the feeling Jesus understood what that’s like for us.

EARLIER IN CHAPTER 24, Jesus tells the disciples about “the coming of the Son of Man”—the time when Jesus will return and establish God’s kingdom on earth, and the world will be restored to what God created it to be: a place where we live together in peace—with each other and with God. It’s an event that Jesus says will happen in stages, beginning with the resurrection, and it won’t be easy. There’s going to be a lot of turmoil before everything’s complete—including the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus tells the disciples that not one stone will be left standing.

So naturally the disciples want to know when’s all this going to happen. “Tell us,” they say, “when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And that’s where we pick up this morning. They want

certainty. They're looking for a date they can circle on their calendars in red Sharpie—hopefully one that's way off in the future. But Jesus won't give them one. He tells them no one knows the day or the hour except for God—not even him. It could be a million years from now. Or it could be tomorrow. Who knows?

So put yourself in their shoes. Imagine hearing about this cataclysm and then being told it could start at any moment? I'm sure it made them a little bit anxious. And that's the point. Jesus wants them to feel unsettled. He wants them to be on edge. Not so much that they go hide under a rock somewhere, but enough that they're engaged.

Think about it. If the disciples knew the end wasn't coming for a long time, and they didn't have to worry about it, they wouldn't have any sense of urgency. It's just human nature. Jesus has given them a job to do—to go out and proclaim the kingdom of God—and if they knew they had all the time in the world, they'd be like, "Eh, what's the hurry? We'll get around to it eventually."

But the thing is, they don't have all the time in the world, and they can't afford to put things off. They have to understand that today matters, and they have to live like every moment counts. Because the kingdom may not be here yet, but it's coming.

SO I THINK JESUS definitely understood what I discovered early-on as a parent—that even when you know the future is coming, the reality of now makes it hard to imagine then. Which makes it hard to stay motivated. And that's why he describes the coming of the Son of Man in such an ominous way.

He tells the disciples it's going to be like a flood that comes out of nowhere and catches everyone off guard, and he emphasizes the unknowableness of the timing. Because he wants to jar them out of their complacency. He wants them to quit worrying about when things are going to happen and just focus on being disciples. That's what he means when he tells them to "Keep awake." He means, "Just keep doing your job."

And what we need to understand is that he's speaking to us, too. Because the job hasn't changed. We're still called to proclaim the kingdom. The only difference is, we've been at it for two-thousand years now. So, if anything, Jesus' message is even more important for us to

hear. Because the longer you keep awake, the harder it is to not fall asleep.

So how do we keep awake today? That's the question. And the answer really isn't that complicated.

First, we use our spiritual gifts and resources—prayer, worship, scripture, tithing, along with imagination and creativity—to help us see beyond the reality of now to the reality of then. To help us keep the vision of a new day alive in our hearts and minds.

Then we take that vision and live it. We leave here on Sunday morning, go out into the world, and do the things that characterize the kingdom—just like Jesus did. We notice people who are struggling and show them compassion. We offer forgiveness even when it's hard. We choose peace over conflict and generosity over self-interest. We act responsibly and think about how our choices impact everyone around us.

And now is the time of year when we put a special emphasis on that. During Advent, we're not just counting down to Christmas, and we're not just waiting for a baby to be born. We're practicing what it means to stay awake. We're being intentional about it. We light candles in the darkness as a sign that the light is coming. We sing songs of longing and hope. And we remind ourselves that history is moving toward something. God is at work bringing about a new creation. And we get to be part of it.

I think back to those early days as a parent—how impossible it seemed that the future would ever arrive. But lo and behold, it did. All the work paid off. All the effort mattered. And that's how it is with the kingdom of God, too.

We're waiting for the kingdom to come, but we're not waiting passively. We're not just marking time until Jesus finally shows up. We're participating in the unfolding of that event. We're helping to build the kingdom. We're living it into existence. So don't fall asleep. Stay alert. Stay engaged. Live like every moment counts. Because the kingdom may not be here yet, but it's coming. And while we're waiting for it, we've all got a job to do.

Pray with me please.

God of all time, you hold past, present, and future in your hands, and you invite us into the work you're doing in the world. As we begin this season of Advent, help us to stay awake—to resist the pull of complacency, to live with

purpose and intention, to watch for signs of your kingdom breaking into our world.

Give us courage to be your disciples, proclaiming your reign not just with our words but with our lives—through acts of mercy and compassion, through choices that honor our neighbors, through faithfulness in the small things and the big things alike. Keep the vision of your promised future alive in our hearts, and give us strength to work toward that future today. We know the kingdom is coming. Until it arrives in fullness, keep us alert, keep us engaged, and keep us hopeful. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.