So are you ready for Christmas yet? Now perhaps you are the type of person who would answer: **Yes, I am.** Perhaps you are the type of person who has already written your Christmas letter and mailed out all your Christmas cards. Perhaps you are the sort of person who has already purchased and wrapped presents for everyone in your life – whether they have to mailed out or placed under the Christmas tree, which is already perfectly decorated.

If you are that sort of person, the rest of us look at you and say: **Good for you.** Of course, we probably say it through gritted teeth.

But most of us are the sort of people who will freely admit that we are not ready for Christmas yet and probably will not be ready tomorrow either. But we would also say that we are not getting too worried about it just yet, because, as we look at a calendar and figure we still have a good three weeks before we need to be ready for Christmas.

Are you sure? That depends on what Christmas I am talking about. If I am talking about the Christmas that is the celebration of Christ's coming to this earth, then yes, you have nearly a month. And if you have been through enough Christmases in your life, you do probably have a pretty good sense of the things that you want to have done by December 25 and how you will be able to make them happen within that time frame.

But if I am talking about the Christmas that will happen when Jesus comes to this earth for a second time - are you ready for that? Because you do not know how much time you have left to prepare for that.

The words that Jesus spoke in our text were spoken to his disciples shortly before his death, and they were intended to make sure that his disciples were prepared for **The second Christmas.**

The disciples, albeit unknowingly, set Jesus up nicely with the question they asked in the early verses of this chapter. They had been in Jerusalem during Holy Week and after they left the temple area one day, they looked back at Jerusalem and especially the magnificent temple area. It was a majestic sight and the disciples just could not help commenting on it: **Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!**

Jesus began his reply with an utterly disturbing comment: **Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.** It must've been nearly impossible for the disciples to imagine these majestic buildings knocked to the ground, that majestic city in ruins!

But Jesus left them no doubt that he was talking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and he used that to move to a discussion of the destruction of the world when he returns. Understandably, the disciples want to know when this will happen.

**When will the end of the world be?** is a question that still fascinates people today. And if you go into a Christian bookstore and look at the section titled **Eschatology** or **Last things**, you will find plenty of people who claim to give the answer, as we saw in news a few weeks ago. Some have even offered a rather complete **timetable** of political events that will supposedly take place among the nations.

And of course there are plenty of people on the Internet who seem to find the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy in each and every event that happens on the national, international and political scene. Sometimes they back it up by twisting a portion of Scripture. Sometimes they even back it up by inventing Scripture, trusting that most people will not bother to consult the Scriptures to see if what they are saying is true.

You can ignore all of them. In our text Jesus did not give the answer to his disciples - the very men he was trusting to get his message out there! If Jesus did not give the answer to his closest friends and his chosen messengers, the notion that he has chosen instead to give the answer to some basement blogger is, to put it mildly, unlikely.

In fact, not only did Jesus not give the answer to his disciples, but he even went so far as
No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Now, some hear those words and ask: How could Jesus, the very Son of God, not know when Judgment Day would be? According to his human nature, Jesus did not know the day or the hour when he would return to earth to judge all people. Just as we might say that Jesus set aside his ability to walk when he was born as a baby, we might also say that the knowledge of the date of Judgment Day was something he set aside when he came to earth and took on our human nature.

But although no one knows when he will return, we know that it is coming. And so Jesus goes on to say: Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It is like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

There is an urgency in these words. Jesus is trying to stir sleeping people. The word that is translated as be on guard has the idea of looking carefully, as if you expected to see something happen at any moment. And the word that's translated as be alert reinforces that, because it has the idea of chasing away sleep or not letting oneself get drowsy. Jesus wants us to be wide awake and to keep looking for him as if he could come at any moment, which he could.

Jesus underscores that with the picture he uses - that of a man who has to go to a country a long ways away and who leaves his servants in charge of his house. When will he come back and ask the servants to give an accounting? Who knows? It could be during the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. In other words, at any time.

Jesus is the man, of course, and we are the servants. When will he return? Like the man in the illustration, the time of Jesus’ return is uncertain.

But it might be today. So we had better be alert! - lest he come suddenly and find us sleeping. Shouldn't that wake us up and create in us a sense of urgency about being prepared for the second Christmas?

Indeed - but perhaps not in the way that we might think. If we think that it means that we ought to hurry up and get to work so we can do the good things that we must do that will cause Jesus to take us to heaven when he returns, you do not know or have forgotten what your past means. The mess you have made in the past, the debt you have accumulated before God, the sheer volume of things that we have left undone - those things are so huge that any effort to clean them up in the short time before Christ returns or before your own life ends is …

It is as hopeless as when you were a kid and your parents said they were going out for the night but they wanted you to clean your room before they got home. But shortly after they left, you wanted to play with some toys, and anyway, it was not like they were going to come home in the next 15 minutes. You were right, of course. They did not come home in the 15 minutes after that, either.

And eventually you became so engrossed in what you were doing that you did not really notice the mess you were making nor the progress that the clock was making. And suddenly you heard the door to the house opening and you knew it was too late.

If we think that we are ready for the second Christmas because we are pretty good people, we are in a spiritual stupor that has made us spiritually stupid. And if we think that we are going to be ready for the second Christmas if only we can have enough time to frantically get our lives in order so long as we start today, not only are we not near being ready, but we are heading in the wrong direction.

But we are truly prepared for the second Christmas when we remember the first Christmas, when Jesus came to this earth to take our place and to live a life of perfect spiritual alertness, a life of perfect obedience to God’s commands and to die an innocent death to atone for our sins!
We know that his death did atone for all of our sins, for all of our spiritual slumber because God did not allow Jesus to remain asleep in the grave but raised him from the dead and then received him into heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of God in a position of power and exaltation.

It is that knowledge - the knowledge of what God has done for us through his Son - that wakes us up from spiritual slumber and apathy and rouses us to service that is not only obedient but also joyful.

And the fact that Jesus is coming back - and perhaps very soon - wakes us up even more, makes us even more alert. It dramatically changes the way we live our lives. It should cause us to live as end-time Christians instead of as we-still-have-along-long-time-Christians.

If he is coming back - maybe within a month - then the question, What would you do if you only had one month to live? Is not a purely hypothetical one, but one worth answering - and the answer to that question is worth living.

What would you do if you knew that the second Christmas was only a month away? Don’t you think you would have a markedly different set of priorities if you knew Jesus was going to return one month from today? I cannot imagine we would spend as much time watching TV or reading magazines about celebrities. I think I would want to spend the time talking with my family and getting into the Word instead - because I think I would be more concerned about my spiritual health and less concerned about the health of my pop culture IQ.

And I cannot see myself going out and buying a lot of things - not merely because I would not be able to enjoy them for very long but because I would have different plans for how I wanted to use my money - as well as my time and my talents - in the next month.

I do not know, of course, if I have just one month to live, nor do I know if the world has one month left before Jesus returns. But judging by the signs of the last times that are being fulfilled all around us, he certainly could return before Christmas.

Therefore I know that I want to be ready for his return, carrying out the task he has given to me. Jesus says that the man in the illustration puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task. If each one has an assigned task, then I know that every believer has some responsibility that the Lord has entrusted to him or her.

What is mine? and - more important for you to consider – what is yours? It is a question that many believers have: What is the task Jesus has assigned to me. What is my purpose in life? But there is not one particular thing that may be decreed to be God’s purpose for our lives. Rather, he has given us many tasks in our many roles - serving our family members through our role as parent, spouse, child; serving my employer by being a hardworking employee; serving my customer by putting together a quality product; serving my neighbor by my role in the community; serving the cause of the good news of salvation through my role as a member of this congregation and in my daily conversations with others.

So what do you want to be doing when Christ returns? Be alert and ready, trusting in him alone for heaven. Then when he comes back, you will be ready for the second Christmas – which will be an even better Christmas than the first one - because this time he will not come to be on this earth with us, but to take us to be with him in heaven. Amen.