

"Deadlines and Lifelines"

Text: Matthew 24:37-44

1 John 3:1-2 *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, we hear it from others and do it ourselves. All the time. Linguistic overkill. Gross exaggeration to make a point. It's unlikely, for example, that anyone ever actually finds himself ROTFLOL (rolling on the floor laughing out loud) but I often read of others who seem to do so quite regularly. I never have, just as I no longer get what exactly "awesome" means, since the last time I heard it was after I told a clerk that I didn't need a printed receipt. I was under the impression the word should be reserved for things like space shuttle launches and politicians telling the truth.

We all get it, of course. People like to use dramatic expressions to make a point – which brings us to the first word in the title of the sermon this morning: *"Deadlines."* Rather dramatic when you stop to think about it, isn't it? An assignment is due at school on a certain date and time, and if you miss it you've crossed over a "deadline." Again, sounds so ominous. Historically, it actually was. I remember hearing the history of the word when we toured the infamous Civil War POW camp in Andersonville, GA. The first recorded use had to do with a wooden railing that was erected 17 feet from the outer wall of the camp. Any prisoner that went beyond that line was shot – without question and without hesitation. The original truly was, therefore, a deadline.

Our "everything is negotiable" society doesn't seem to put much stock in deadlines any more, does it? We've come to expect that there is an exception to every rule. "Close" is widely regarded as good enough. In fact the concept of deadlines has become so vague that our fellow citizens tend to get rather indignant when a deadline is actually enforced.

While missing deadlines in our secular pursuits can be little more than an annoyance, the same is not true in things spiritual. In fact when it comes to spiritual deadlines, far from an exaggeration, the term itself isn't dramatic enough. Our text for this morning provides examples. That text is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 24th Chapter:

ESV **Matthew 24:37-44** *For 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. 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. 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.*

This is the Word of God. We seek to remind ourselves of just who gave us these words and what we hope to gain from them as we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Did you catch the first "deadline" mentioned in our text? God himself set a deadline for the destruction of the unbelieving world of Noah's day. By the point in time that God sent the floods, Noah had been building the Ark for about 100 years. Understand the incessant, ongoing ridicule that Noah and his family undoubtedly endured. One hundred years came and went not only without the promised flood, the Ark is believed to have been constructed in a place where there was no body of water. Worse still, many Bible scholars believe that there was no such thing as rain prior to the flood. Here's the Bible's description of the way things were prior to the flood: **"When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ ...a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground."** Genesis 2:5-6

So in a land where there may have been no large body of water nearby and no potential (at least in the mind of man) for such a craft to actually be useful, Noah and his sons labored away on the Ark. Our text described the setting in which Noah and his family labored with these words: **"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."**

You can understand their skepticism, doubt, and even their ridicule, can't you? In their eyes what Noah and his sons were doing was just nuts. The godless went about their faithless lives right up until the moment that God's deadline arrived. Obviously their doubt had no power over God's reality. The fact that they steadfastly refused to believe that the flood would come had no power to prevent that flood. And when it did come, there was absolutely no compromise. God's deadline was truly just that – a line past which there was only death. Mathematicians and Bible scholars tell us that it is very possible – in fact many say "highly likely" – that there were billions of people alive on the earth on the day the flood came. Whatever the number, every single one of them missed the very deadline that they had undoubtedly held in such derision. All except for 8 human souls. All others perished without mercy and without exception.

Clearly this is a profoundly sobering truth. It is also a wake-up call for believer and unbeliever alike. God had set his deadline, but there was no dramatic change to warn the people that that deadline was fast approaching. Everything went on as it always had – for one hundred years after its coming was announced. In fact the passage of time very likely only served to harden the godless in their denial of what was coming. With every passing year they became all the more convinced that Noah was wrong and that they were right.

Sound familiar? It should. Each one of you here this morning is a modern-day Noah. The Godless world all around you is also firmly convinced that God's next deadline is also a myth believed only by the simple-minded. Our text – words spoken by the Son of God himself – draws this very comparison: ***For 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.***

Don't cheat yourself by passing lightly over this dramatic truth. Just as it seemed that the deadline that God had established for the sending of the Flood would never arrive, so too Jesus himself here warns *us* that the unbelieving world will also ignore and ridicule his last great deadline – earth's final and complete destruction and the coming of the great Day of Judgment.

So why bring up something like this in this particular setting. Here, after all, we are surrounded by others who believe just as we do. Here we are not

in the midst of godless skeptics but of those who share a common conviction that, just as God kept his first promise to send his Son to pay our sin debt, so too will he keep his final promise that that same Son of God will return to judge the living and the dead. So why bring up this truth while we are in the safe confines of our Christian fellowship?

The answer is that arguably our greatest threat in this regard isn't from the outside but from the inside; it isn't "out there," it's in here – that old Adam or sinful flesh that will cling to us until we are called home. It is, in fact, our own flesh that often makes the most reasonable and persuasive arguments for giving up and going along. It's our own sinful self that hears the doubt and scorn of the world around us, and *agrees*, and then lobbies for the same. There is an evil within each of us that actually wants us to join the other side. It buys into the world's talking points and whispers reasonable arguments in our ears: *"What if the world is right? What if religion really is just so much mythology and we are the ones who have it all wrong? It's been 2000 years since Christ promised to return. If he really is coming, shouldn't he have been here by now?"*

Our Savior's words in our text remind us that the teeming masses of Noah's day probably offered up the same reasonable arguments – right up until the deadline arrived and the doors of the Ark were sealed. At that moment, the rage of the flood must have seemed as nothing compared to the horror that washed over them in the realization that they were wrong. Dead wrong. Noah's family, trusting God's promise, lived. The others – *all* the others – realized their tragic mistake only when it was far too late. All died.

Beat your old Adam into submission with this truth. The very same scenario will, without question, be repeated. Another deadline will arrive. Jesus Christ will return ***"on the clouds with power and great glory."*** All who at that moment are living in denial of the Son of God will view that day with abject horror. Suddenly, and without warning, nothing in their entire existence will have any value, any worth. All on that day would gladly trade all that they have for what you have, right this very moment.

You and I need to see this world with divinely trained eyes. We need to see that there is not only a looming deadline coming we know not when, there is right here and right now another sort of "deadline" – a line of death. Vast hoards of the godless march confidently to their own eternal destruction. The only souls not walking in that terrible, tragic procession are those that know and believe that faith in Jesus Christ is

our ark. As the very same waters that destroyed the world also saved Noah and his family by lifting them safely above the destruction, so also Jesus Christ is the key. Those that believe in him will be saved by him; those who do not will be destroyed by him. Proximity to other Christians will save no one. It's the difference between inside and outside the ark. The faith of friends and family members will not save the unbeliever. God knows those that are his. So also our text tells us: ***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.*** One thing, and one thing alone, will matter. When that final deadline arrives, did you or did you not pass from this world believing that Jesus Christ, God's Son, rendered the full and complete payment for all of your sins when he offered his perfect life on Calvary's cross. Those who deny are, even now, in the dead-line. Those who believe are even now in the possession of a life that will never end. They (you) are, even now, in that same "ark" that carried the saints of old, and we will land where our Savior himself has landed.

One final word of wisdom we glean from our text. Many who even now shuffle along in the dead-line seek to calm their night-terrors with the idea that there is plenty of time. They buy into the devil's own lie that there will come a day – typically when they are much older – when perhaps all of that "religion stuff" will be right for them. They assure themselves that they will extricate themselves from the procession of the damned, but only when the time seems right; only when they are good and ready. This too our Savior addressed in our text: ***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.*** Unfortunately, tragically, the tomorrow of unbelief is always the same as today. "Always tomorrow," is never. "Good intentions" is just another way to spell "failure."

Thanks be to God it is not so among you – you who even now look not to your own goodness but trust that the goodness of Jesus Christ has washed you of your sin. You know and believe that you are even now an heir of heaven solely because of what the Son of God has done for you, in your place, as your substitute. You are not in the dead-line; you walk the path of life eternal.

Yet there is another word in our sermon title. Though first used by sailors around 1700, like "deadline" it has come to mean many other things today. The original referred to a rope thrown to one who had fallen overboard. As the Word of God is our lifeline, so it is also the only hope for

those who are adrift in their unbelief. Cast them the lifeline. The deadline approaches. You yourself might well be their only hope. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 2:1-5** The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

^{ESV} **Romans 13:11-14** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

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First Sunday in Advent – December 1, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 705 (Brown Hymnal)

"Come O Long Expected Jesus"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 2:1-5) It often takes eyes of faith to see the truth. This is certainly true in our first lesson this morning, where the Holy Spirit through Isaiah gives a preview of the rise of Christianity and the peace which comes to those who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. God grant us always such wisdom and insight.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 13:11-14) Our Epistle Lesson warns against the very sins that are most common among the unbelievers during the holiday season we have just entered. Let it not be so among us. Our Lord came to sacrifice Himself for us. The appropriate response from each of us is to live each moment as His ambassadors, and to serve as lights in a sin-darkened world. New life, new lifestyle.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 63 (Red Hymnal)

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

The Sermon – Matthew 24:37-44 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Deadline and the Lifeline"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 95 (Stanzas 1-4, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Savior of the Nations Come"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 56 (Stanzas 1 & 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Saturday	-5:00 p.m.	– Church Christmas Party
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – The CLC Call Committee on Institutions is scheduled to meet this evening to issue a new call for the soon-to-be vacant ILC professor position. Steven Sydow has returned the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. Pastor Andrew Schaller is considering the call to serve as the CLC's 3rd Foreign Missionary. The current YTD deficit in the General Fund is now over \$100,000.

Confirmation Class and Advent Services – Confirmation Class begins at 5:45p for the next three weeks, followed by our Midweek Advent Services at 7p.

Church Christmas Party – Our Church Christmas Party is scheduled for this Saturday, from 5-9p. Please let Sandy Roehl know if you plan to attend.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the Fellowship Hour. As always, please bring any agenda items to the attention of a Council member prior to the meeting.

Annual Meeting Announcement – The Annual Voters Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, December 22 – following a fellowship meal. Announcement is hereby made, in accord with our constitution, that Mr. Timothy Meyer has applied for voting membership. The **Women's Fellowship** is also scheduled to meet at that time.