

**Parables of the Head of the House & the Two Slaves**  
**Matthew 24:36-51**  
**ABC 8/2/20**

All of us, I'm sure, have played Hide 'n Seek at some point in time. You know how it goes. The seeker begins counting & the hiders go hide. 1, 2, 3, ... 99, 100! What's the seeker then say? *Ready or not, here I come!* That could be applied to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming as well because He's coming according to the sovereign plan of God & we don't know when. Jesus is coming when He's coming. What does that mean for us? Jesus tells us in the parables in Mt 24 this morning & in chpt 25 next time. Jesus is speaking to His closest disciples about His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, answering their questions about **when will these things happen, & what *will be* the sign of Your coming, & of the end of the age?** (3). His answer is one of the hardest passages in Scripture. Some believe the whole thing is irrelevant because they think it all was fulfilled in 70 AD when Rome levelled Jerusalem & destroyed the temple. At the other extreme, there are those who think today's newspaper is key to understanding what Jesus says here. They search the news for **wars & rumors of wars** (Mt 24:6), **famines, pestilences, & earthquakes in various places** (7), & heavenly signs & wonders (29), & can always find reports that seem to fit the passage. Some think the whole discourse is a puzzle with a code that gives a hidden answer to the disciples' question, **When will these things happen?** (3). False prophets pop up regularly who claim to have figured out when Jesus will return. But Jesus emphatically denies the possibility of such knowledge. He says clearly, **of that day & hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone** (36). Jesus makes this point repeatedly: **You do not know which day your Lord is coming** (42). **You do not know the day nor the hour** (25:13). It's impossible for anyone to know the timing of His return. But we do know He'll come unexpectedly & suddenly at a time when no one will be watching for Him. Jesus doesn't answer the disciples' question about the timing of events surrounding His coming & He gives no room for speculation. He isn't telling us a way to figure out when He'll return. Nor is He trying to frighten us regarding the terrible time of tribulation that precedes His coming. What's the main point of this discourse? It's an encouragement from Christ to His disciples, urging them to remain faithful until He returns. Rather than answering their question about the timing of His return, He

gives them parables that cover every possibility, as we'll see. *Because we cannot know the timing of the end, we shouldn't spend our time trying to predict it. But Jesus stresses that we're to keep watch ... because we don't know when the end will come (42). Keeping watch, however, doesn't mean trying to correlate the daily newspaper with passages of Scripture. It does mean always being alert, always being prepared regardless of how soon or how distant the end turns out to be.*<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Be Alert 36-42**

Jesus used the Flood to illustrate the point He's making about **the coming of the Son of Man**. The attitude that dominated **the days of Noah ... before the flood** will also characterize people living during the end time before Christ returns. They won't be expecting His coming & won't care about it. Despite the signs & wonders, they'll be unconcerned about Jesus & His imminent return to judge them. At Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> coming, most refused to recognize Him for who He was. He healed every kind of disease, cast out demons, made water into wine, stilled the storm, & raised the dead, but even most of His own people refused to believe in Him. In fact, the religious leaders were so determined to discredit Him they accused Him of casting out demons in Satan's power (Mt 12:24). Sinful, godless humanity is willfully blind to God's truth, no matter how compelling that truth may be. & when God's truth exposes their wickedness, they make every effort to oppose & condemn it. Need proof? In the days of Noah before the Flood, **they were eating & drinking, they were marrying & giving in marriage**. While Noah built the ark, he was preaching (2 Pt 2:5), but the people were just as unconcerned about what he said as about what he was building, thinking both were absurd. They laughed when he spoke of the coming flood. They'd never seen rain, much less a flood, because the earth was probably covered by a vapor canopy that provided the moisture necessary for life to flourish. Because they'd never seen such a calamity, they scoffed at the idea it could even happen. Therefore, they went about their daily routines. It was business as usual until the day **Noah entered the ark** & it started to rain. Even when his prediction began to be fulfilled before their eyes, they didn't take his warning to heart. Noah had built & preached for 120 years without success. The people were so unmoved by God's truth that **they did not understand** their situation

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation*, p 193

until the flood came & took them all away into a godless eternity. Like the people of Noah's day, the generation of the Tribulation will be warned & warned again. When Jesus finally appears in His 2<sup>nd</sup>-coming judgment, **then there shall be 2 men in the field; one will be taken, & one will be left. 2 women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, & one will be left** (40-41). Jesus is giving a figure parallel to the unbelievers of Noah's day being **taken** away by the judgment through the Flood. When He returns, **one will be taken** to judgment & the other **will be left** to enter the kingdom & to reign with Him during the Millennium. **Therefore be on the alert**, Jesus said, **for you do not know which day your Lord is coming** (42). The phrase **be on the alert** indicates continual expectancy. Jesus may return at any time to rapture His church & the tribulation will begin. When the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation, the ungodly will be swept away, having lost forever their opportunity for salvation. Just as we don't know at what time the Lord is coming to take us to Himself in the rapture, the generation alive during the Tribulation won't know the exact time of His appearing to judge the ungodly & establish His kingdom. Peter put it this way,

**If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell & committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; & did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with 7 others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; & if He condemned the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; & if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw & heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation or trial, & to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment** (2 Pt 2:4-9).

Christians must be alert, even though they'll be secure & have no cause for dread.

**2. Be Ready** In vs 43 Jesus says, **be sure of this**. In other words, *as everyone knows*, **43-44**.

No competent thief would announce his intention of robbing a house, & no competent **head of the house**, who knew **at what time of the night the thief was coming**, would fail to be **on the alert** in order to prevent the **house** from being **broken into**. This stresses the unexpectedness of Christ's return. He'll come just like a thief, like a burglar who breaks into someone's home, catching the residents by surprise. That's the point here. Don't worry about trying to figure out what Jesus, the thief, is coming to steal from us. That's not it. The comparison is simply the unexpectedness of the timing: like that of a burglar, like the end of the world. Those living during the Tribulation are told

they won't know the exact time of Jesus' appearing, but they're informed in detail as to what the signs immediately preceding it will be. In other words, to use the imagery Jesus uses, they'll know that **the thief** will be breaking into **the house** sometime very soon & they should be prepared accordingly. Obviously, Jesus wasn't comparing Himself to a thief in character but was comparing His coming to the stealth & unexpectedness of a thief's coming (Lk 12:35–40; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Pt 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15). A thief never makes an appointment with you to rob you. Jesus will come with the unexpectedness of a thief. It seems impossible that most people in that day won't be expecting Jesus' coming. In light of the destructiveness & horror of the signs of the end time, how could they not turn to God for help & mercy? Yet most of them will be so overwhelmingly blinded by sin & self-will that no amount of evidence will cause them to seek God. Instead, their hostility toward God will reach a fever pitch never known before on earth. **For this reason, you be ready too**, Jesus said, just as Noah & his family were ready. Being **ready** seems to refer primarily to being saved, of being spiritually prepared to meet Christ as Lord & King rather than as Judge. As Jesus had already warned, everyone in the end time should be alert for His appearing (37-51) & faithfulness to Him by those who're already saved is commanded. The necessary preparation for His coming, is salvation, of being redeemed through the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ. Otherwise a person will be ready only for judgment & damnation. Jesus reemphasizes the fact that no one on earth will know exactly when He's coming. He proclaims, **The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will**. In divine fury & glory, **the Son of Man** will come in total surprise. Even believers who are expectantly & faithfully ready for His coming will be astonished when He arrives. Their readiness will enable them to meet the Lord with gladness & without shame, but it won't provide advance knowledge of His time of arrival. Christian readiness isn't passive. Christian watchfulness doesn't just mean reading books which speculate about the nature of the end times. It doesn't just mean thinking through different theories about when & how Jesus might come again & the sequence of events which will accompany it. Christian vigilance, Christian watchfulness means faithfulness<sup>2</sup> which we see in the next parable.

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<sup>2</sup> Ligon Duncan's sermon, *Be Ready, Part 1: The Faithful Slave*, <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/be-ready-part-1-the-faithful-slave/>

### 3. Be Faithful 45-51

Haddon Robinson retells this parable this way:

A teacher tells her students, *Class, I'm going down the hall to the school office for a few minutes. I don't expect to be away long. I'm sure there won't be any trouble. I'm trusting you to work on your assignments while I'm gone.* Fifteen minutes pass, then 20, then 40. Suddenly the teacher returns. Dennis has just thrown an eraser at Carol, who's doing her math. Steven is standing on the teacher's desk making faces. The students carrying out the teacher's instructions are delighted at the teacher's return, but Dennis & Steven wish she hadn't come back at all.

Jesus is coming back! That stands as both a warning & a promise throughout the NT ... It's good news or bad, depending on who hears it.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone knows the tendency to slack off when the boss or the teacher is gone. This parable envisions 2 possible scenarios involving the chief servant of an absentee master. The steward discovers his master returning home sooner than he'd expected him to. What will the master find that servant doing? Being a good steward or abusing his freedom & shirking his responsibilities? Will he be **faithful & sensible** or **evil** (24:45, 48). **Sensible** is from the root word for *wise*. It's used in reference *to understanding associated with insight & wisdom, thoughtful, prudent*.<sup>4</sup> In this parable, the master represents God & the servant represents every person in the world. We've all been given a great responsibility. It's as if the Lord said, *Manage everything I gave you in creating you in My image, your intellect, will, emotions, talents, & all the other good things I've given you. Use them all for serving Me.* We're like the servant who's told to manage all the goods in a house. Everything we have was granted to us by God. We're accountable for how we manage them all.

**A. Sensible Servant** The responsibility of the **slave** (feeding the household) seems incidental to Jesus' point, which is that every believer is a **slave** of Jesus Christ & obligated to serve Him in every way. Every believer's been given a divine stewardship & responsibility in the work of Christ on earth. We're to be **faithful & sensible** with the stewardship He's given us. Our life, breath, energy, talents, spiritual gifts, & every other good thing we have is a trust from God to be used in His service & for His glory. **Blessed is that slave**, Jesus said, **whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions** (47). Jesus is obviously

<sup>3</sup> *Our Daily Bread*, March 8, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Walter Baur, William F Arndt, & Wibur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT & Other Early Christian Literature*, p 1067

addressing believers, those who've submitted to Him as Savior & **master**. He'll bless the servants who're doing what He commands them to do. Those who are obedient give evidence of being believers. Doing the will of God is always a mark of true salvation. The believer who's found faithful to the Lord in what he's been given will be given **charge of all** of the Lord's **possessions**, having inherited the fullness of the kingdom of God as a fellow heir of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:17). Not only that, but **He who overcomes**, Jesus said in Rev 3, **I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame & sat down with My Father on His throne** (21). He'll allow His faithful servants to manage everything He possesses. Have you ever wondered what we'll be doing in the millennial kingdom & in eternity? We'll sit with Christ on His throne & rule over everything He possesses. The person who is proven faithful to God will be rewarded.

**B. Evil Servant** Unbelievers, represented by the **evil slave**, will also be held responsible for what they do with their stewardship from God. During the last days, some will remain openly sinful & rebellious against God. Others will be aware of their lost condition & their need of a Savior but will put off believing, thinking they'll have time before He comes in judgment. They'll say by their lives if not by their words, **My master is not coming for a long time**. Many today do the same things. Don't try to slide into the kingdom at the last minute. If you won't give your life to Christ now, what makes you think you'll do it in the future? Those who put off receiving Christ until later rarely do so. Many people probably waited until the floodwaters were up to their knees before they started banging on the door of Noah's ark. But by that time it was too late. The character of the **evil** servant is seen when the master is called away. He tells himself his master isn't going to return anytime soon. That belief removes any sense of accountability from his mind & he does as he pleases, thinking nothing of his responsibilities to his master. The evil activities Jesus mentions, the beating of **fellow slaves** & eating & drinking **with drunkards**, aren't meant to characterize every unbeliever during the Tribulation but they reflect the attitude many of them will have. Because they think the Lord will not come **for a long time**, they'll feel free to indulge themselves in whatever sins & pleasures they desire. Even though they may observe the signs of Christ's return, they'll wait until the last possible moment to try to turn to Him. Instead of using their resources for others, they'll

squander them on themselves. They'll abuse others & indulge themselves. But **the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him & at an hour which he does not know**. In this case the **master** won't come as Savior & King to bless & reward but will come as Judge & Executioner to condemn & destroy. He'll **cut** the unbelieving slave **in pieces & assign him a place with the hypocrites** in eternal fire. The phrase **cut ... in pieces** literally means to cut into 2 parts. It was used in that sense in the Greek translation of the OT in preparing animal sacrifices (Ex 29:17). It carries the idea of destruction & death. That such people will be assigned along **with the hypocrites** suggests they weren't hypocrites. Just as today, many people in the end time will be open & honest about their unbelief. But honest unbelievers are just as lost as **hypocrites** who pretend to have faith. When Jesus appears, the same splendid glory & power (Mt 24:30) that will draw His own people to Him in loving gratitude will repel unbelievers in hateful resentment. For His followers it'll be a time of reception & redemption. For unbelievers it'll be a time of rejection & judgment. All unbelievers, those who reject the Lord & those who think they'll trust in Him some day, those who are honest in their unbelief & those who are hypocritical in their faith, will all suffer the same destiny of hell. In that place there will be **weeping ... & the gnashing of teeth**. The thrust of Jesus' warning isn't simply to inform unbelievers about the horror of facing an eternal hell but to use that prospect as a motive for believing in Him in order to escape it. His appeal is to believe while there's opportunity, rather than foolishly wait for a supposedly better time that might never come & might not be taken advantage of if it did come.

The contrast between the 2 servants is clear. The wise & faithful servant understood that the master's absence increased his responsibility. He needed to work harder & be more conscientious than ever because he knew he'd have to give account. Whether the master returned early or late, this sensible servant wanted to be found faithfully fulfilling his duties. But the evil servant saw the master's absence as an opportunity to live as he pleased. He threw off all constraint & neglected his responsibilities. He did whatever his evil heart wanted because there was no one to watch him & he had no sense of accountability. When the master suddenly returns, the faithful servant is rewarded beyond expectation. He's immediately promoted to the highest position of authority &

honor. That pictures the eternal reward for all faithful Christians. As I said, they'll reign with Christ in the kingdom (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:6). They're joint heirs with Him & they'll be glorified with Him (Rom 8:17). Their place in heaven will be a position of high honor & reward. They'll sit with Him on His throne (Rev 3:21). The **evil** servant, however, represents a self-deluded unbeliever who has possibly identified with Jesus & pretends to be serving Him. But he really doesn't love or respect Him or look forward to His return. In fact, he doesn't seem to believe the Master will return at all, or at least not any time soon. He **says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time'** (48). His lack of faith emboldens his evil conduct. When the master does return sooner than expected, the evil servant is instantly exposed for what he is. His punishment is as severe as the reward of the 1<sup>st</sup> servant was lavish. He's **cut...in pieces** (51) but that isn't the end of him. He'll be assigned **a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth. That place is hell**, so we know this man pictures an unbeliever (Mt 8:12; 22:13; Lk 13:28). The evil servant's attitude about his master's return is representative of unbelief, & as Jesus said, **he who does not believe is condemned already** (Jn 3:18). This shows what a grave sin it is to scoff at the promise of Christ's return (2 Pt 3:3-4).

The same grace that saves us teaches us that **we should live soberly, righteously, & godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope & glorious appearing of our great God & Savior Jesus Christ** (Titus 2:12-13). **He who is coming will come & will not tarry** (Heb 10:37). In Revelation, Jesus repeatedly says, **Behold, I am coming quickly!** (Rev 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). That's the lesson of this parable. Christ's return is imminent; it could happen at any time. **The coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the door!** (Js 5:8-9). Nothing stands in the way of our Lord's immediate return & we're taught repeatedly in Scripture that we should be ready, expectant, busy, obedient, loyal, fully prepared, like the wise & faithful servant in this parable. If you've never trusted in Jesus as your Lord, your sovereign master, & accepted the free gift of salvation, today is the day for you to make that commitment. William Barclay tells this story to illustrate the danger of putting off spiritual things:

There is a fable which tells of 3 apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt & to



ruin men. The 1<sup>st</sup> said, *I will tell them that there is no God.* Satan said, *That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God.* The 2<sup>nd</sup> said, *I will tell men that there is no hell.* Satan answered, *You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin.* The 3<sup>rd</sup> said, *I will tell men that there is no hurry.* Satan said, *Go, & you will ruin men by the thousand.* The most dangerous of all delusions is that there's plenty of time.<sup>5</sup>

Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). Today is the time to be faithfully serving our Master. Don't think you'll have more time, time to trust in Christ later. You're not guaranteed that. You're not even guaranteed the rest of today. Peter declares, **Do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, & a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance** (2 Pt 3:8–9). What seems to us to be a long period of time is but a moment to God & we shouldn't rely on our own limited views of time to judge the delay in fulfilling His promises. It isn't that God couldn't act in judgment at any time He chooses, but that in His sovereign patience & love He's allowing the most time possible for men to repent & come to Him in faith. But because He's chosen to delay judgment for what's already been 2,000 years, some people in the last days will mockingly declare, **Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation** (2 Pt 3:3–4). Like those who believe natural laws have always & will always operate in exactly the same way they operate now, religious scoffers will assume that because God hasn't yet judged the world He never will. **It escapes their notice, Peter says, that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago & the earth was formed out of water & by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water** (5–6). The mockers will foolishly ignore the most catastrophic upheaval the world has yet experienced, in which every human being on earth was killed except for Noah & his family. How are we to be prepared for the unexpected & sudden coming of Jesus? We're to be alert, ready, & faithful. What does Jesus tell us in this parable? 1) God rewards & punishes people at the final judgment based on their stewardship of the tasks given them. 2) Faithful stewardship requires perseverance & consistency, for the end could come at any time. 3) Those who postpone their responsibilities & do evil instead may discover it's too late for them to

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<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, p 317

make amends for their errors.<sup>6</sup> We must be ready for His return & faithful to Him & the stewardship He's given us. Each day, we move closer & closer to Christ's return. Are you ready? Being ready means loving, trusting, & waiting for Jesus Christ. The faithful servant is faithful because he's expecting his Lord's return. But it also has to do with faithful service, that is, continuing to carry out what Jesus has left us in this world to do.<sup>7</sup> He's given every one of us unique gifts & opportunities to be used for Him & His glory. We're to be faithfully using them until He calls us home, either by death or the rapture. I believe in Mt 24–25 Jesus addresses those who'll be alive during the generation of the Tribulation (24:34). But believers today should be prepared for the Lord's coming in the rapture of the church, in which the Lord takes us to heaven, just as believers in the end time should be prepared for His appearing in power & glory to establish the millennial kingdom. To the church at Rome Paul wrote these sobering words:

**You know the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, & the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness & put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing & drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity & sensuality, not in strife & jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, & make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (13:11–14).**

Paul commended the church in Corinth for **awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7)** & he reminded the Philippian believers that **our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:20)**. The writer of Hebrews admonished believers, **Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love & good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; & all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb 10:24–25)**. Peter wrote, **The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment & sober spirit for the purpose of prayer (1 Pt 4:7)**, & John declared, **Children, it is the last hour; & just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour (1 Jn 2:18)**. & the last words spoken directly by Jesus in Scripture are, **Yes, I am coming quickly (Rev 22:20)**. Let's take our cue from the faithful servant & get busy doing the work He's commanded us to do. Let's be faithful stewards of all He's

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<sup>6</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, electronic edition

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p 520

entrusted us with. Then we can know that, when the end does come, God will say to us as well, **Well done, good & faithful servant** (Mt 25:23). We must be ready by being faithful. He isn't telling us to scour the news to predict His return. He's saying be faithful to what He's commanded us to do. & as we're faithful, we'll be ready. Be & remain actively loyal to the master, sensibly & joyfully doing the tasks assigned to you by Him. That is how we can be ready for the coming of the Lord. Even so, **come quickly, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen** (Rev 22:20-21). COMMUNION

As we come to communion we know that it too speaks of His return. Paul tells us that **as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes** (1 Cor 11:26).

In Matthew's account we read:

**While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." & when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom"** (Mt 26:26-29).

There's always a note of hope or expectation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Jesus refers to the fact that He won't drink the fruit of the vine until He drinks it with us in His kingdom. His words point to the hope of the kingdom of God, the great banquet feast in the presence of God and all His people. Paul expresses it this way: Do this **until He comes...** The Lord's Supper is temporary in that we'll share in it only until He returns. & when He comes, He comes as Bridegroom for His bride and will take her to the great banquet feast. There all His people will see and enjoy Him, face-to-face forever. Are you faithfully ready for that day? PRAY

Bread: We eat of the bread remembering His atoning death, taking God's wrath for our sins & giving us His righteousness. Thankfully, gratefully, worshipfully, we eat of the bread together.

Cup: We drink of the cup remembering His shed blood, His death on the cross in our place. Thankfully, gratefully, worshipfully, we drink of the cup together. **After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives** (Mt 26:30). We'll sing a hymn & then be dismissed to serve Him faithfully in the week ahead.