

HOPE IS ON THE WAY #3 SERMON

Sermon Manuscript — Weekend 3

Series: *Hope Is on the Way*

"Stay Awake"

Faith in a Numb and Distracted World

Key Texts: Matthew 25:1–13; Mark 13:32–37 **Supporting Texts:** Matthew 24:42; 1 Thessalonians 5:5–8; Romans 13:11–14; Revelation 3:1–3 **Theme:** Spiritual sleep is the greatest danger to faith — not open rebellion, but quiet drift. The most connected generation in history is also among the most spiritually disengaged. The danger is not rejection of the truth. It is distraction from it.

Tone: Honest, culturally perceptive, gently confrontational. This sermon should feel less like a warning shouted from a distance and more like a friend tapping you on the shoulder before you miss something important.

Estimated Delivery: 42–50 minutes Series Week: 3 of [X] Suggested Congregational Reading: Matthew 25; Mark 13

Before You Preach This

A final pastoral note for this leg of the series.

Weekend 1 spoke to the anxious — the ones checking headlines with white knuckles. Weekend 2 spoke to the cynical — the ones who quietly stopped expecting Jesus to return. This week you are speaking to almost everyone in the room, because this danger does not announce itself the way the other two do. Nobody wakes up and decides to stop caring about God. Nobody signs a document renouncing their faith. Spiritual drift does not feel like a crisis. It feels like a Tuesday. It feels like falling asleep on the couch with the television still on — gradual, comfortable, and completely undramatic until you wake up and realize how much time has passed.

This sermon is not primarily about people who have walked away from the faith. It is about people who are still in the pew, still saying the right words, still nominally engaged — and quietly, almost imperceptibly, asleep.

Be careful with your tone here. This is not a sermon to preach with frustration or alarm. The temptation will be to come in hot — to scold a distracted generation for its phones, its entertainment, its shallow attention spans. Resist that. Shame produces defensiveness, not wakefulness. The way to wake someone gently is not to yell at them. It is to help them see, with clear eyes and without humiliation, what they have been missing — and to make the alternative more compelling than the sleep.

You are not preaching against technology. You are preaching for attentiveness. Those are different sermons, and only one of them will actually wake anyone up.

HOOK — The Most Connected, Least Aware Generation in History

[Let this build. Don't rush the data — let the irony land.]

We are, by any historical measure, the most connected generation that has ever lived.

You are carrying, in your pocket right now, more computing power than what guided the Apollo missions to the moon. You can see the face of someone on the other side of the planet in real time. You can access nearly every book ever written, every song ever recorded, every piece of human knowledge ever catalogued — instantly, from a device the size of a deck of cards.

We have never had more access. More information. More connection.

And yet — by nearly every measure we have, we have also never been more anxious, more isolated, more distracted, and more spiritually numb.

How is that possible? How can a civilization be more connected than any in history and somehow more disconnected from the things that matter most?

Here is an image I want you to sit with for a moment. Picture someone falling asleep with their phone in their hand. The screen is still glowing. Their thumb might even still be moving, scrolling reflexively, on autopilot, long after their mind has actually checked out. They are not awake. But they are not entirely asleep either. They are somewhere in between — present in body, absent in attention, technically engaged and functionally gone.

I want to suggest to you this morning that this image is not just a description of how many of us fall asleep at night. It is a description of how many of us are living our entire spiritual lives.

Still scrolling. Still present. Still nominally engaged.

But not awake.

And Jesus has something to say about that. Not a scolding. A warning born out of love — the kind a friend gives you before you miss something irreplaceable.

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:13.

Let's see what he means.

Part One: The Danger No One Sees Coming

Matthew 25:1–13

Jesus tells a story about ten bridesmaids — virgins, in the language of the text — waiting for a bridegroom to arrive for a wedding celebration. In first-century Jewish wedding customs, this waiting period could stretch unpredictably; the bridegroom's arrival was often delayed, sometimes for hours, as final arrangements and negotiations were completed. The bridesmaids' job was

simple: be ready with lit lamps to escort the groom into the wedding feast whenever he came.

Five of them came prepared. They brought extra oil — enough to keep their lamps burning no matter how long the wait stretched. Five of them did not. They brought lamps, but no reserve oil. They were planning for a short wait, not a long one.

"As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept." Matthew 25:5.

Pause here. I want you to notice something easy to miss.

All ten of them fell asleep. Not just the five foolish ones. All ten.

This is not a parable about staying physically awake every minute. Jesus is not condemning rest. He is making a much sharper point: the difference between the wise and the foolish was not whether they fell asleep. It was what they had prepared before they did.

"At midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'"

And in that moment — the moment that actually mattered — five had what they needed and five did not.

"And while they went to buy [oil], the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut."

That phrase — *the door was shut* — is one of the most haunting lines in the Gospels. Not because of cruelty. Because of finality. There was a moment when the door was still open, and they did not know it was closing. By the time they understood what they had missed, there was nothing left to do.

Here is the central insight I want to build the whole sermon around:

The foolish bridesmaids were not punished for falling asleep. They were caught unprepared because of what they failed to bring before the waiting began.

This is not a parable about an isolated moment of failure. It is a parable about a thousand small moments of preparation — or neglect — that happened long before the midnight cry. The oil was not something you could acquire in a panic at the last second. It had to be gathered, stored, carried, tended to, over the long ordinary stretch of waiting.

This is exactly the danger of spiritual drift. It is never one dramatic decision to walk away from God. It is the slow, undramatic failure to keep the lamp tended during the long, uneventful middle of life — the Tuesdays, the ordinary weeks, the seasons where nothing in particular seems to be happening, and so nothing in particular seems necessary.

Part Two: Even the Angels Don't Know

Mark 13:32–37

Now let's add Mark's account, because it adds a dimension Matthew's parable does not quite cover — the dimension of mystery and the appropriate response to it.

"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Mark 13:32.

This is one of the more theologically dense verses in the Gospels, and I do not want to rush past it. Jesus himself, in his incarnate state, says he does not know the exact timing of his own return. This is not a contradiction of his divinity — theologians have long understood this as part of the mystery of the incarnation, where the Son, in taking on full humanity, also took on the limitations proper to that humanity, while remaining fully God. What matters for our purposes this morning is what Jesus draws from this uncertainty.

He does not say: *"Since no one knows, don't worry about it."*

He says the opposite:

"Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come." Mark 13:33.

"It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning — lest he come suddenly and find you asleep."

Notice the specificity. Evening, midnight, the early hours, morning. Jesus is naming every possible watch of the night — every conceivable time someone might be tempted to assume the master surely will not come *right now*. And his point is precisely that there is no safe window. There is no hour when relaxing your watch is without risk.

This matters enormously for how we live, because most of us do not consciously decide to fall spiritually asleep during the hours when something significant seems to be happening. We fall asleep during the hours when nothing seems to be happening. The unremarkable middle of the night. The long stretch between events. The ordinary Tuesday with nothing on the calendar.

That is precisely the watch Jesus is most concerned about — because it is the one we are least prepared to guard.

Part Three: The Anatomy of Spiritual Sleep

I want to slow down here and actually name what spiritual sleep looks like in our specific cultural moment, because I do not think most of us would recognize it in ourselves even while it is happening. That is, after all, the nature of sleep — you are rarely aware of it from the inside.

It looks like digital saturation mistaken for spiritual engagement.

We have confused information with formation. You can listen to a sermon podcast every day, follow a dozen Christian accounts, read theology threads on

social media, and still be spiritually asleep — because consuming content about God is not the same thing as actually attending to him. The five foolish bridesmaids had lamps too. They simply did not have what kept the lamps burning.

It looks like entertainment saturation that leaves no room for stillness.

Consider the sheer volume of content engineered, with extraordinary sophistication, to capture and hold your attention every single day. Streaming services, social feeds, games, notifications — every one of them designed by teams of brilliant people whose explicit job is to make disengagement from their platform feel uncomfortable. We are not simply distracted by accident. We are being actively, expertly, relentlessly cultivated toward distraction. And the soul that never experiences stillness rarely notices what it is missing, because there is no quiet moment in which the absence becomes apparent.

It looks like spiritual apathy disguised as busyness.

Many of us are not asleep because we are lazy. We are asleep because we are exhausted — exhausted from a pace of life that leaves no margin for attentiveness to God. Busyness can function exactly like drowsiness: a state in which you are technically moving but not actually perceiving what is around you. You can be busy serving in church, busy raising your kids in the faith, busy doing all the right things, and still be spiritually asleep at the wheel, because the doing has crowded out the attending.

It looks like outrage and information consumption mistaken for discernment.

Especially after Weekend 1 of this series — the temptation is to think that staying awake means staying maximally informed about every possible sign and headline. But hyper-vigilance about the world is not the same as wakefulness toward God. In fact, it can become its own form of sleep — a way of being intensely engaged with the noise while remaining completely disengaged from the Lord the noise is supposed to point us toward.

None of this is necessarily sin in the dramatic sense. None of it looks like rebellion. That is exactly Jesus' point. The danger he is naming is not a frontal assault on faith. It is a quiet, comfortable, almost pleasant drift — the spiritual equivalent of falling asleep with the television still glowing in your hand.

Interlude: The Diagnostic Question

[Slow down here. Let there be some silence after this. Don't rush to fill it.]

I want to ask you a question, and I want you to actually sit with it rather than reflexively answering it.

When was the last time you were truly, attentively present with God? Not consuming content about him. Not singing songs about him in a room full of other people, important as that is. Not reading a verse quickly before falling

asleep. I mean genuinely, unhurriedly attentive — the way you would be attentive to a person you love who was sitting across the table from you. Some of you can answer that easily, and that is a gift — guard it. Some of you are realizing, right now, in this room, that you cannot remember. That is not a moment for shame. Shame does not wake anyone up — it just makes them want to go back to sleep where it is less painful to look at themselves. This is a moment for honesty. The five foolish bridesmaids were not condemned for being foolish people in some deep moral sense. They were caught unprepared because they assumed there would always be time later to attend to what mattered. They were not evil. They were asleep. And here is the strange mercy buried inside this hard parable: the fact that you are asking the question right now means you are, in this very moment, waking up.

Part Four: What Wakefulness Actually Looks Like

1 Thessalonians 5:5–8; Romans 13:11–14

So if spiritual sleep is the danger, what is the alternative? Jesus does not leave us only with a warning. The rest of the New Testament fills in what wakefulness practically requires.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

"For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober." 1 Thessalonians 5:5–6.

Notice the pairing: *awake and sober*. These are not identical commands. You can be awake and still impaired — present but not clear-headed, conscious but not discerning. Sobriety here means clarity. It means seeing things as they actually are rather than through whatever haze currently has hold of your attention.

And then Paul gives a beautifully concrete image of what that sobriety looks like in practice:

"But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Wakefulness is not primarily a feeling of alertness. It is a posture — armor, intentionally put on, every day, like a soldier preparing for a watch. It does not happen automatically. It requires deliberate practice.

Paul says something similar in Romans 13:11–12: *"You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep... let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."*

Notice the active verbs throughout these passages: put on, cast off, watch, be sober. Wakefulness is not a passive state you happen to be in. It is a discipline you practice. Which means the antidote to spiritual sleep is not simply trying harder to feel alert. It is building specific, intentional practices into the rhythm of

your life that keep the lamp tended during the long, uneventful watches of the night.

Let me name some of those practices directly, because vague exhortations to "wake up" rarely produce actual change.

Practice One: Build margin into your days deliberately.

The bridesmaids who brought extra oil were not naturally more spiritual than the ones who did not. They were simply more prepared, because they anticipated that the wait might be longer than felt comfortable. Margin is the modern equivalent of carrying extra oil. If every moment of your day is full — if there is no space carved out where you are not consuming something, producing something, or scrolling something — you will not have the capacity to notice God even if he is standing directly in front of you.

Practice Two: Practice solitude and silence on purpose.

Jesus himself withdrew to lonely places to pray, repeatedly, throughout his ministry, even when the crowds were clamoring for him. If the Son of God needed deliberate withdrawal from noise to remain attuned to the Father, we should not assume we are exempt from that need. Silence is not the absence of something — it is the presence of the conditions under which attentiveness becomes possible.

Practice Three: Return to Scripture as encounter, not information.

There is a real difference between reading the Bible to gather information and reading the Bible to actually meet God in it. The first can be done quickly, efficiently, even while distracted. The second requires slowing down enough to let the words actually land — to read a single passage and sit with it rather than rushing to the next one. The five wise bridesmaids did not buy their oil in bulk all at once. They tended it steadily. Steady, unhurried attention to Scripture is the daily tending of the lamp.

Practice Four: Build honest community that can see what you cannot see in yourself.

Sleep, by definition, is something you cannot fully diagnose from the inside. You need someone else — a spouse, a close friend, a small group, a mentor — who is close enough to your life to notice when you have quietly drifted, and brave enough to say something about it. Isolation is fertile ground for spiritual sleep, because no one is there to nudge you awake.

Practice Five: Practice attentiveness to the ordinary moment, not just the dramatic one.

This is perhaps the most countercultural practice of all, because our culture trains us to pay attention to crisis and spectacle, not to the unremarkable present moment. But Jesus said the master might come in the evening, at midnight, or in the morning — meaning the ordinary watch is exactly the one we must learn to stay present to. Practicing gratitude, noticing the people in front of you, praying through the actual texture of your actual day rather than only in

moments of crisis — these are all forms of staying awake in the watch that matters most: the one you are in right now.

Part Five: The Door That Is Still Open

I want to return to the hardest line in the parable, because I do not want to soften it more than it should be softened, but I also do not want to leave us only with dread.

"And the door was shut."

This is real. There is a point at which the opportunity for readiness passes. The parable would lose all its force if we pretended otherwise. Jesus is not being needlessly severe here — he is being honest about something true: time is not infinite, and the invitation to wakefulness, while open, will not remain open forever.

But notice something important about where we are in this series.

Last week, we spent an entire message establishing that the reason Jesus has not yet returned is mercy. The door has not yet shut. The bridegroom has not yet come. The master has not yet returned from his journey. The wait you are in right now — however long it has felt, however ordinary and uneventful it may seem — is itself the open door.

This sermon is not a message about a door that has already closed on you. It is a message about a door that is still open, given to you specifically so that you would hear this and wake up while there is still time to tend the lamp.

That is the mercy hiding inside the warning. Jesus does not tell this parable to people who have already missed their chance. He tells it to people who still have time to go get oil — today, this week, in the ordinary unremarkable Tuesday that is currently unfolding in front of you.

The five foolish bridesmaids did not lack time. They lacked foresight. And the most merciful thing anyone could do for them — which is exactly what this sermon is trying to do for you — is to say clearly, before midnight: *go get oil now, while you still can.*

Conclusion: Wake Up Gently, but Wake Up

We are the most connected generation in history, and one of the most spiritually asleep.

Not because we rejected the truth. Not because we walked away in some dramatic act of rebellion. But because the noise was loud, the days were full, the entertainment was endless, and the long, uneventful middle of the waiting lulled us into a kind of comfortable, undramatic drowsiness that felt, from the inside, like nothing was wrong at all.

Jesus' word to us today is not a word of condemnation. It is a word of love spoken before midnight: *stay awake.*

Not because the world is ending today. Not because you should live in constant anxious vigilance — we have already spent two weeks dismantling that posture. But because the door is still open, the oil is still available, and the most loving thing you can do for your own soul right now is to stop assuming there will always be time later to tend to what matters most.

You do not need to overhaul your entire life today. You need to do one true thing: put down the phone for ten minutes, sit in silence, and actually attend to the God who has been patiently, mercifully waiting for you to notice him.

That is how you wake up. Not all at once. Gently. Deliberately. One tended lamp at a time.

The bridegroom is coming. The door is still open.

Stay awake.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we confess that we have mistaken motion for attentiveness, noise for engagement, and busyness for faithfulness. We have let our lamps run low without noticing, distracted by everything except the one thing that matters most. Wake us, gently but truly. Give us the discipline to tend what we have been given — to build margin, to seek silence, to return to your Word as encounter and not just information, to surround ourselves with people who will tell us the truth when we have drifted. Thank you that the door is still open. Help us not to waste the mercy of this moment. We want to be found awake, with our lamps burning, when you come. Amen.

Preacher's Notes & Connection Points

On tone: This is the sermon most likely to be received as a guilt trip if mishandled. Resist every urge to list statistics about screen time as condemnation. Use them as diagnosis, not indictment. The goal is recognition, not shame.

The phone-falling-asleep illustration: This image does a lot of work in the opening. Consider extending it with a personal admission — has this happened to you? Naming your own complicity in distraction disarms any sense that you are speaking down to the congregation.

On Mark 13:32 and the Son's knowledge: Handle this carefully and briefly. It is theologically significant but easy to derail the sermon into a Christology lecture. One or two sentences of clear explanation, then move to the application Jesus himself draws from it.

Avoid making this only about phones: Digital distraction is the most visible form of this danger in our cultural moment, but the deeper issue is attentiveness, not technology per se. Name busyness, exhaustion, and even "good" Christian activity as potential vehicles for spiritual sleep, so the sermon does not become a referendum on smartphones alone.

The diagnostic question interlude: Consider genuinely pausing here in delivery — five to ten seconds of real silence after asking the question. This is uncomfortable to do from the pulpit but it is exactly the kind of stillness the sermon is asking the congregation to practice. Model it in the room.

Connecting the series: Weekend 1 addressed fear (don't be alarmed by the signs). Weekend 2 addressed cynicism (don't be surprised by the delay). Weekend 3 addresses apathy (don't drift into sleep). Together these three messages cover the full emotional landscape of how people fail to live well in the "in-between" — and each one offers the same underlying reframe: what looks like a problem (the signs, the delay, the waiting) is actually an invitation into deeper faithfulness.

If this is the final week of the series: Consider closing not just with the sermon's own conclusion but with a brief look back across all three weeks — naming the throughline of "Hope Is on the Way" as a series about learning to wait well: alert but not anxious, patient but not cynical, awake but not frantic.

Key Memory Verse: **"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." — Matthew 25:13**