

## Sermon Notes – November 8, 2020

*“Ready or Not”*

Matthew 25:1-13

Most of us know about being prepared, don't we? If you ask the Boy Scouts what their motto is, it is about being prepared. If I were to ask some of you who served in the military, you had to be prepared and trained – whether you were trained to operate a tank or were preparing for battle – you had to be prepared and trained to go at any moment's notice and to be ready for whatever that commanding officer told you to do. It's important to be prepared, isn't it?

Back in 1912, there was an ocean liner that everybody thought was the top ocean-liner to be put out to sea. It was called “The Titanic” and they believed it was unsinkable. But four days after that ocean liner was out, it sunk to the bottom. Now I want you to know that part of it had to do with preparation – the captain and crew were not prepared for what was about to happen. You see, they ran into icebergs and by the time the first officer could tell the officer at the stern to turn, he was already hitting the iceberg. They knew that if three or four (out of sixteen) of the compartments of the ocean liner got a hole in them that the liner would not sink; but if five or six of those compartments got hit and filled with water the ship would sink – and that's what happened. What you also need to know is that the captain had SIX warnings that there was something wrong – there was trouble at sea – and he never paid attention. He kept sitting in the dining room with distinguished guests, smoking cigars, drinking, eating, and having a good time - after SIX warnings he did not go to the top of the ship to see what was going on! By the time that he got word, it was too late. They weren't prepared. They had twenty life-boats on that ship when they should've at least had forty. They had almost 1600-1800 people on there. Guess how many died? ... 1490. There weren't enough lifeboats for the number of people they had and on top of that, those lifeboats would hold forty people each. Many of them only had 12, 15, or 20 people in them. They weren't prepared. The captain and the crew weren't prepared for what happened. By telling this gospel story, Jesus tells us to be ready to wait and be prepared – there is going to be a second-coming. Jesus is going to come back again. We don't know when that day or hour is. All we know is that Jesus said, NO man will know, not even him – only God the Father knows when that day or hour is. Simon Peter (in second Peter's epistle)

says these words, “To the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.” We don’t know when that time will come – is it 500 years from now? – is it in my lifetime or yours? – we don’t know. But Jesus says, “Be ready to wait and be prepared.”

In the gospel lesson, you need to know what it was like in ancient Palestine to have a wedding. When you have a wedding today, there is usually a rehearsal and a rehearsal dinner on one day and the ceremony and reception the next day. In ancient Palestine, a wedding might go on for several days or a week. The bride and her family would have a party for two or three days; the groom and his family would have a party for two or three days; and it could even go on longer than that! These bridesmaids were always supposed to be ready to go because they would have a processional. The groom and his family would come to the home of the bride and her family and there they would have the wedding ceremony. Then they would leave the bride’s family and go to the groom’s house for the reception – the wedding banquet. When they thought everyone was in, they would shut the door and nobody else could come in. *Think of it this way*... what if the symbolism of it is that Jesus is the bridegroom and the wedding reception is the Messianic banquet. We are all invited to that Messianic banquet when Christ comes in his glory, and we go to be with him. The bridesmaids represent those who are prepared and those who are unprepared – those who lived for Christ and were faithful and persevered – and the foolish bridesmaids were those who were not prepared; they didn’t believe; they weren’t ready when he came.

Being prepared is important, isn’t it? You know when we are spiritually prepared, we are in better shape to deal with adversity, trials, and temptations when they come our way. How do we prepare? ... We prepare by meshing ourselves into weekly worship, in reading the Bible, praying, fellowshiping with other Christians, and building a network of support for us so that when we go through the trials and temptations of life, we have that conditioning, that support, to help us get through those times. Now Jesus says that we are to be prepared. We are to be ready to wait! How many of us like to wait? ... Not many of us, do we? It’s a good wait when you are a groom waiting at the front of the church for your bride to walk down the aisle. That’s a wonderful wait. But if you have to wait for a doctor’s diagnosis, that is more of a dreadful wait – isn’t it? It’s a good wait if your son or daughter is graduating from High School or

College. That's a good wait. But if you're waiting to hear bad news, that's a bad wait.

***Jesus wants us to wait positively and anticipate his coming again.***

There's a guy who wrote a commentary on the gospel of Matthew - his name is David Platt. David Platt (in this gospel about the bridesmaids) says that when his wife was expecting their third child, the doctor gave them a due date of December 7<sup>th</sup>. "Somewhere around the second week in November, I started getting nervous and anxiously awaiting. My wife and I already loved that child. I would sit down with her and read stories to the baby; we would pray over the baby; we had named that baby; we were already in love with that baby before it was born. We were graciously and gladly anticipating the birth of that child. In the last two or three weeks before that baby was born, waiting on that baby changed how I did things: I didn't go as far away from home to work; I had my phone with me all the time in case I got a call from my wife; in fact, if she didn't call me, I would call her and ask her how she was feeling today. That anticipation and waiting for that child changed what I did and how I did it." David Platt says that maybe that is what Jesus is talking about when he wanted us to wait for him. He wanted us to have a joyful, glad anticipation. ***But he wanted us to keep on and to know (in our minds and in our hearts) that he's coming back, and knowing that - it should effect the way that we live our lives now. He wants us to be prepared and live for him every day!***

You know there are many people that have made a decision for Christ when they were ten years old - or maybe they were baptized as a child - or confirmed as a young child - and many have wandered away from their faith. They've strayed from it. They are not reading and growing in their walk with God. It's an on-and-off kind of thing. When I was in my church in Florida there were some people there who were "snow-birds." They came to live in south Florida from the New England, mid-west, and the western part of the country. They were there for about six months out of the year - some only for three months of the year. But what was so interesting was that many of those people had a spiritual hunger to know Jesus. They had made a decision as a young child - but when they grew up, they got married, had children, and they got away from living for God. They said, "We didn't go to church. We didn't read our Bible. We didn't teach our children about God - and now, I regret that." As

they've gotten older, they have developed a spiritual hunger to know God and they came to our church to fill that hunger. People invited them to our church; they began attending worship and Bible study. They began to read their Bibles and pray. Many of them made a decision to follow Christ and to live for him.

Jesus says that one day he is going to come back and when he comes, how will he find us? ***Will he find us as faithful followers who've lived for him and persevered through the faith, adversity, and trials of life or will he find us as a casual acquaintance or a stranger?*** I would classify a "casual acquaintance" as those who know of God but they don't know him personally. A stranger doesn't even know him at all. Sometimes I wonder how God will find us? ***What Jesus is saying in this passage is that every person has to make a decision for Jesus Christ themselves. It's not based on your mom and dad; it's not based on something you did twenty years ago; it's every day. And one day, not knowing when he's coming, are we living trusting him and persevering and living for him?***

It's important to be prepared so that we can deal with everyday life and what it brings. We never know what it brings.

There's a cartoon (Calvin and Hobbs) that came out a few years ago. In the first scene, you see Calvin coming into the living room where his mother is sitting and he's got on a space helmet and a cape. He's got a flashlight in one hand and a baseball bat in the other. His mother looks at his costume and says, "Calvin, what's up today?" He said, "Nothing so far." She says, "What do you mean... so far?" and he responded with, "Well nothing's happened yet, but something COULD happen today." In the last section of the cartoon, it shows his mother looking at his costume and thinking, "You know maybe I need to get one of those costumes so I'll be prepared for every day."

**You see we never know what is going to happen in life from day to day but when we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and it's a growing relationship, then we have a network of supporters as Christians.** We are able to face things and get through it in ways that we can't by our self. Jesus wants us to have that. He wants us to persevere. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in Timothy? ... He said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race and I have kept the

faith.” When Jesus comes back and receives us, how will he find us - a stranger, a casual acquaintance, or will he find us as a faithful follower? Are we prepared?

Some of you have heard the name Bobby Fischer. Years ago, he was the world chess champion and he represented the United States against Russia. The leading champion for many years was a guy named Boris Spassky from Russia. Bobby Fischer was a child prodigy at age 13. At age 15 he was a grandmaster and at 18 he became the world champion, representing the United States. How did he do it? ... After he won the world match, all the Russians and Americans asked him, “How did you win that match?” He said it went on into the wee-hours of the morning and you have to be mentally sharp and alert to be able to win a match and go for hours and hours without getting up. He said, “I prepared myself.” Do you know what he did to prepare himself? ... He did underwater laps to build the oxygen level to his brain. He said, “I prepared my brain to think and be more mentally acute and sharp so that I would be able to stay during those long hours and still be as rested and sharp as when I started.” He mentally prepared, and he won the world chess championship.

A mother giraffe’s body stands about ten feet off the ground. Did you know that when a mother giraffe has a baby that she doesn’t lay down to have that calf? ... She drops it ten feet to the ground. It lands on its back and will turn over on its stomach with its legs up under it. The mother will wait a few minutes and then she will kick that baby calf and send it head over heels. If the baby doesn’t get up on its wobbly legs, she will kick it again. She’s practicing tough love, but she’s not being cruel. Do you know why she does it? ... *She wants to prepare her baby calf to get up on its wobbly legs and to be able to walk and run because otherwise it will not be able to get away from predators. She is trying to prepare the baby for the predators.*

Bobby Fischer prepared to win the chess match. The mother giraffe prepared her baby against predators. Jesus wants us to be prepared for his coming whenever that is. He wants it to affect how we live now and every day. In this passage, will we be found as faithful, persevering until the end? Jesus knew that trials and temptations and adversities will come. Are we strong enough in our relationship with God and our network of support to keep us faithful until he comes - even if he doesn’t

come in our lifetime? You remember I said that we never know from one day to the next what's going to happen? Are we ready to meet our Maker?

Years ago my brother and his wife were friends with a young couple who had a little girl about four years old and a little girl about twelve years old. One day after school, the mother took the two kids roller skating. They roller skated and neither one fell on the skating rink. When they got home the mother got busy preparing dinner, and the oldest daughter said, "Mother, I have a headache and I don't feel good. May I go lay down until dinner is ready?" Her mother let her go lay down. About 15 minutes after she laid down, she came in crying to her mother, "Mom, I have a splitting headache! It hurts so bad!" The mother gave her some baby aspirin, sat down with her, and held her for a few minutes. The girl got worse and the mother called an ambulance. They took her to the local hospital and transferred her to Chapel Hill. That little girl had a brain aneurysm and she died that night. Unexpected. Can you imagine trying to be with that family and walking with them through it? I am so glad that they had a strong faith in God and a network of support around them.

You see Jesus knew that we need to grow in our relationship with God. He knew that we need to be prepared and that we need that network of support - whether he comes now or later or calls us home - that we're ready to face him. It won't be based upon what you did forty years ago... how are you living right now? ***Are we continuing to live for Christ every day and persevere in the faith? May God find us faithful followers.***  
Amen.