

Watch Out! Be Prepared

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of December 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Watch Out, Be Prepared and is based on Matthew 25 verses 1-13.

Well, as I said before, the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. And in light of that, we do need to be prepared for the end.

We need to think about those things that are coming up and prepare for them. We went out on Friday night to celebrate our anniversary on Friday night.

Some friends came down to Sydney and it was a terrific night, a great night. The food was so good, we did not want it to end. The mango souffle just melted in your mouth.

[1 : 03] It was magnificent. The duck done in Thai style, it was the winner of the night and I picked it, so I was very pleased. But I didn't want it to end.

In fact, I didn't want to share it really, but I thought I bet a little. It was just fantastic. It was a great night. But we knew that it would end and we would have to leave the restaurant because they'd close it up.

So we could be prepared for that. But there are some things where you need to prepare for the case where you're not sure whether it will happen or not. One of the instances I think of is going camping.

I love camping and we have quite a bit of camping equipment. One of the camping trips that we did some years ago was to go walking up in the Victorian Alps.

And so we had our tent. I bought Michelle some lovely hiking boots, which I don't think she's ever worn again. We've got backpacks. We had sleeping mats.

[2 : 01] We had not just one map but two because you've always got to be prepared just in case you lose one map. So we had maps, compasses. We had everything.

We thought we were prepared for every situation that might come along. It was summer. We had it all prepared. We rocked up to where we were going to go and someone said, Have you prepared for snow blizzards?

And I put that in context. We'd just come from Sydney where half of it was burning down in bushfires with 40 degree plus degree heat. And it was just so bizarre to think, What, it snows in summer down on the Victorian Alps?

What's with that? But he said, No, you need to be prepared for that. So we had to go out and find some plastic pants so that it would protect us from the snow. But you need to be prepared for those cases.

The what ifs. What if something happened? What if it snowed? Our passage today talks about being prepared. Being prepared for a situation that might just occur.

[3 : 10] I love weddings. Weddings are a great event, a great festival. And we have here Jesus telling a parable about a story of a wedding.

Now we don't know a great deal about the wedding festivals back then, but there are some details we do know. So one of the details that we do know back in Jesus' day, what would happen is the bridegroom would grab a few close mates and he would leave his house and head to the bride's house.

Once he arrived at the bride's house, they would have a few various ceremonies and a few different things that would happen there. Then after that they would then go parading through the streets with a great celebration and end up back at the groom's house where there would be a party for not just one afternoon or night, but perhaps for as long as a couple of days.

Now I think we need to bring this back in. I think this is a great idea. Parties for a couple of days. It sounds fantastic. Now Jesus tells us at the beginning of this story that there were ten bridesmaids. In the original it says there are ten virgins. Being virgin is not particularly the point that is driven home here. The point is that there were ten of them and they are the helpers of the bride.

[4 : 30] Now the bride doesn't get much of a mention in this, but they are there ready to help her, to care for her and that type of thing. And they are waiting, we see, ten bridesmaids. They had their lamp and they went to meet the bridegroom.

So they are waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Now we are not sure whether they are waiting outside the house for the bridegroom and his friends to arrive or they are waiting for the bridegroom to come out with the wedding party after the ceremonies at the bride's house.

We are not sure where they are waiting. But we are told in this parable that they are all waiting there and they have got their torches. Now it's important that they actually have these torches. Part of the culture back then is that I guess if you didn't have your torch then you might be seen as a gatecrasher to the party, that you might be seen as a renegade and so be chased out.

So it's important that you had your lamps and that you are ready for it. Now these lamps might have been just little small oil lamps or they might have been a stick with a rag on the end of it which you sort of dipped in oil and put some oil on it and then lit.

But either way there are these ten virgins and we find out in verse 2 that there are five that are foolish and five that are wise. And we find out that the wise ones are those who have enough oil.

[5 : 46] They are prepared just in case there is a really long delay. Just in case the minister gets up and he just keeps on waffling on and on and on and he just keeps on going and you think it's going to be a ten minute sermon and it ends up being a 45 or an hour long and you're just thinking when is this going to end?

But they're prepared for that. They're waiting. They've got oil to make sure that they're going to be there when the bride and the bridegroom come. They're going to be waiting, ready to go. So they're prepared.

But the foolish ones, well they don't have enough oil. They don't have enough oil waiting there. We see there that in verse 5 the bridegroom was in fact delayed and all of them became drowsy and slept.

Having a bit of a snooze on the side waiting is obviously taking a long time. Why not get a bit of a nap? It's going to be a couple of days of partying. If we can get a rest now it's going to be a good thing. They're actually not rebuked at this point for falling asleep.

But then we see what happens in verse 6. At midnight there was a shower. Look, here is the bridegroom. Come out to meet him. You can imagine the frantic, oh quick, let's get our lamps ready. And they're getting their lamps and they're pouring the oil onto them or trimming them and getting them all organised.

[7 : 00] And the foolish ones are looking going, ah, didn't think it was going to take that long. And so we see there in verse 7.

Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out. Come on, share around a little bit. We're a little bit foolish.

We should have been a little bit better prepared. But just give us a little bit of it. But the wise replied, no. There will not be enough for you and for us. You had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came. And those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. The door closed on them.

The opportunity to be a part of the wedding banquet, the great feast, the great celebration closed. They're off running around trying to get their oil, trying to catch up with everyone, trying to get their lamps, their card, their acceptance card ready so that they can go in.

[8 : 11] But the groom replies, truly I tell you, I do not know you. And they miss out.

Well, if we only just left it at that point and just read that in isolation, we think, well, that's a good bit of advice.

We need to make sure that when we go to our next wedding, we've got enough oil in our lamps. Let's change it. We need to make sure we've got enough petrol. Well, you know, perhaps we need a few more jelly beans so then we're waiting in the service.

We can, you know, just have that little bit of extra energy. But when we read the next verse and put this parable in the context of the chapters that they're read in, we see that Jesus is giving us a very clear warning for us to be prepared for even a greater event that is to come.

Verse 13, Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know neither the day nor the hour. Jesus is referring to his return.

[9 : 15] When he will return and bring judgment and salvation and change to this earth. Have a look back on the previous page in Matthew chapter 24, verse 40.

It picks up these same words a couple of times. Then two will be in the field. One will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together. One will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this. If the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and he would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore, you must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. When we read these words and understand it in the context of these chapters, we see that Jesus is saying that he is the bridegroom in this story.

He is the one who is the bridegroom. And this fits in with the Old Testament picture of God being the bridegroom of Israel. It's a great picture that we see throughout the Old Testament.

[10 : 28] Here we see that Jesus is claiming to be the bridegroom. And he is saying that the bridegroom will come. Jesus will come again.

Therefore, keep awake. Watch out. Be prepared. Don't fall asleep. Don't miss out on that opportunity when it comes. Because the consequences will be great.

The door will be closed. Well, it's easy to see that Jesus is the bridegroom in this story. And many commentators throughout history have tried to put in the different bits and pieces of how we should understand things.

So, the bridesmaids there that are in this story, obviously referring to God's people, to those who trust in Jesus.

They kept on, if you look there, the other thing that we need to work out is, well, what about the oil? What is this oil that we need to be prepared with? Well, many have thought that perhaps it's the good works that we do.

[11 : 35] If we have our life full of good works, that will be the thing that will keep that door open for us, that will make us prepared for that day when Jesus returns. Many think it's the Holy Spirit.

If you have that Holy Spirit, that's what the oil is referring to here. Having that Holy Spirit will be the thing that gets you in. It seems to me as we look at this story that the oil here is merely an element of the story to highlight the importance of being prepared.

It shows that the foolish virgins were unprepared for the delay and so were shut out. In a real sense, it's about preparedness.

That is the overall theme of this parable, being prepared. When I think back to chapter 13 and the parable of the good sower, of the sower, and there we see the story where the sower goes out and scatters the seed.

Some falls into the rocky places where it shoots up but just can't get its roots into the ground. Other seed falls amongst the thorns and some gets picked up by the birds even before it shoots and some falls on the good soil.

[12 : 58] In the story we see that those who shoot up and bear fruit for the kingdom, they're the ones who are the Christians, I guess, in many ways.

Those who stay to the end and cling to Christ to the end are the ones who are prepared for that day when he returns. Well, there are three things that I want to pull out of this.

The first is to say that there is an end in sight. That is, things will come to an end. The world thinks about the end and has a number of different options that it thinks about.

For some, they think that when they die, their soul goes into a spirit and it leaves the folly of this body, the passions, the human ills, all the things that are associated with the body which is wrong in this idea and we're released into this soul and we float around with the gods.

That's what people think in terms of what happens at the end. Others think that basically we're heading on a trajectory where humans are going to get better and better. The world is going to get better and better and what's going to happen is we're going to give longer and longer and that's the progress model that we are going to continue making progress.

[14 : 25] For others, it's just cosmic annihilation. Once you die, that's it. There is nothing more. For others, there's the eternal reoccurrence where you just keep on going round and round in circles, something like reincarnation.

For Christians, we believe that there is a moment in time where God will make things new. He will step into history and bring an end to the way that things are.

He will make things new the way that they ought to be. He will bring judgement. It's not a natural process. It's not something that we're slowly working up towards, this making things new.

It's not something that humans can actually, through programs, bring about. It's something that God will bring about when Christ returns again. It's clear from the Bible that when Christ does return again, it will be a day of both salvation and judgement.

As we read through Matthew, there are many words that describe this day of judgement. It is a time of suffering and destruction and judgement. It is a time of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[15 : 40] In our passage, we see that it is a day where the door will be shut. We see there, it is also a place of eternal punishment.

The picture in chapter 3 is that of burning up of chaff with an unquenchable fire, an internal fire in chapter 18. In chapter 24, is a picture of being swept away.

Judgment is not something to be taken lightly. In the parable, it is just missing out on the wedding banquet. But in reality, it is something far worse.

It seems to me that with Christians, we become ambivalent to it. What we do is we live like many of the rest of the world where we live for the here and now.

I did a survey in Sydney many years ago asking what people thought happened once they died. And you know, most actually said they had no idea. That it didn't really worry them.

[16 : 43] That it didn't think about it. It wasn't something that was a concern. What was the concern was living in the here and now. And you know, I think that's the problem that this passage is picking up and warning us against.

That we don't become ambivalent. That we don't get consumed with the here and now. With our culture and with the things that are pressing for us. Our work.

Our job. Hobbies. Whatever it happens to be. Living for the here and now and not being prepared for what is to come.

Losing sight of that great and glorious day. One of my good friends who went to beach mission with me gave many a great talk about being a Christian.

With his work he slowly started to drift away and is now no longer following Christ. He just became ambivalent to it all.

[17 : 43] And drifted away. This parable warns us not to be ambivalent. It will happen. Jesus is coming again.

You can guarantee it. If you want to put money on it this is the surest bet that you will ever get. Jesus will return. That's the first point.

The second is that we need to be prepared. It's the overriding theme of this is that idea of being prepared for that day. When I think of preparing I think of preparing for having a baby.

Not that we're about to have another baby. Let me just clarify that. But when you're preparing to have a baby there's so many things to organise. There's the bags to make sure that you've got organised for when you go into hospital.

There's make sure you've got the room organised. There's the baby car chair that you need to make sure that you hire and make sure it's correctly fitted in the car. Then you've got to make sure that you have enough petrol in the car for going to the hospital.

[18 : 49] Make sure you've got the CD player with the right CDs. Hot packs, drinks, books, crosswords. Very important. Clothes. Baby clothes and nappies for the little baby.

Make sure you get the right size. Camera and also film. The problem is the day arrives when the baby should have come.

Still no baby. A day later still waiting. A week later still waiting. At this point there's no petrol in the car. You've used up all the film in the camera and you are not utterly prepared for this moment at all.

And all of a sudden it hits you that you're about to have a baby. And so there's this mad panic of trying to make sure that you've got everything organised and ready for that moment. We need to be people who are prepared.

In chapter 24 verse 24 Jesus talks about warning about false prophets and false messiahs. About being distracted by false teachers.

[19 : 55] As we look back through the book of Mark one of the clear passages that speaks to this is that of the wise and foolish builder in Matthew chapter 7. In Matthew chapter 7 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives this very clear warning.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them would be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell the floods came and the winds blew and beat against the house and it fell and great was its fall.

We need to be people who hear trust and obey Jesus' words. Jesus is the one who brings us salvation who prepares us for that great day.

We need to cling to him listen to his words and act on those words. That is how we are prepared for that day listening to him growing in him allowing his spirit to change us and holding on to us until that day.

[21 : 16] There's nothing that we can do but what God has done for us. Therefore be prepared. Be prepared for that day.

Keep on meeting with one another. Keep on reading God's word. Keep on praying that God's spirit will be working in your life holding you close to your saviour. Be prepared for that day.

It is a day that is coming. It is a day that we need to be prepared for. My third and final point is life is fragile and fleeting.

We need to live in light of this fact that it is fragile and fleeting. I'm going to give you a somewhat reassuring fact that was very unreassuring for me.

Unlike the movies when a shark attacks you it doesn't circle round and round and round trying to size you up thinking whether you're going to be a good target or not.

[22 : 22] Basically when a shark attacks it is with speed and surprise. It's not going to go well that's a nice looking leg I think I'll have that one and I'll just come from the other angle and he doesn't look like he's got big teeth it'll be alright.

It comes very quickly and speedily. we need to remind ourselves that life is very fleeting and very fragile and can be taken away from us in an instant.

This point was hammered home to me just recently with my mother. God has been very gracious to our family and we haven't had a great deal of illness in our family. So to have my mother find out that she had bile duct and liver cancer and had maximum two months to live was something that was just mind blowing.

She only had two months to live. This little thing that had got in there somehow had just ended her life or had the potential to end her life.

We're very grateful for the many prayers that people have prayed and for the surgery that happened because now she's been given a fairly good clean bill of health and she can live much more but it was a wake up call of realising how fleeting and how fragile life is.

[23 : 43] In light of this fact we need to be prepared for the end. We need to be people who are prepared. It will happen.

Be prepared. Life is fragile and fleeting. I like travelling on planes. I love that little announcement when they get up at the beginning.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Paul Dudley. On behalf of the cabin and crew we would like to welcome you aboard Virgin's flight to Sydney. There is a serious side to this announcement and at that point you know you're starting to mind starting to wander.

You've made sure that you've got the right flight. Yeah this is flight 104 it's all okay. When I was travelling back just recently from my mother's at this point I pulled out a camera. I'd just been given a camera and I started playing with it and it was great fun you know and so instead of taking her seriously even though I travelled many times on Virgin and heard her say it many times I didn't listen to when she said in case of an emergency make sure you're acquainted where the exits are down the centre or at the back there like that.

I didn't pay attention to that. I wasn't paying attention to when they say when the gas mask comes down put it on your face and attach the life buoyancy jackets over and you have to pull the tags like

so and then to inflate pull the little tag and make sure you know where the little whistle is.

[25 : 17] I wasn't listening to any of that. My camera was far more interesting. Knowing about the brace position and all those type of things. But thinking back on it I wonder whether in a moment of panic when that plane started plummeting out of the air whether I would have thought oh my goodness what was it she said?

I can't remember now. Should I go for the brace first or should I put the jacket on? Or which door should I go to the front or the back? It'd be silly wouldn't it not to be prepared for that moment. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this world. I hope you enjoy your life but there's a serious side to this life.

You need to be prepared. Life will end. We are in the end days when Christ will return. You do not know when he will come, what day or what hour.

So be prepared. Be prepared. Thank you.

[26 : 45] Thank you.

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[29 : 15] Thank you.

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