

Be Prepare

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray as we come to look at God's word. Lord our God, thanks so much for the Bible. Thanks that it introduces us to the living Lord Jesus.
- Please help us to get to know him better tonight and especially what he wants for us, from us, as we wait for him.
- Amen. Well, last month some of you might know that I went to a conference in Malaysia and I flew there, flew Malaysian Airlines, and I'm a very, very good girl when I fly.
- I'm a very good traveller. My plane was leaving at a quarter past midnight, so I got there nice and early. And although my luggage was a little bit heavy, I was travelling with another girl who believes you only need two pairs of shoes for a week-long conference.
- So they evened out our luggage and that was okay. Good girl. Just. But when I got on the plane, then I thought, I'm going to be a super good girl. I put my luggage where it was supposed to go without being asked.
- [1 : 1 0] I didn't get out my iPod just in case it interfered with the plane systems. I put my seatbelt on straight away. Other people are still coming in doing their like, oh, I've got my seatbelt on.
- I watched very carefully as the cabin crew did their safety demonstration. And I made sure my seat was in the upright position.
- And then I waited for the plane to take off. And waited. And waited. And after a little while, announcement was made that they needed to do some maintenance to one of the motors.
- Okay, that's a good thing to do. They'd get back to us with an estimated time of departure. And so we waited some more. Thought, well, maybe I can undo my seatbelt just for a bit.
- So I did that. And we waited some more. I got out my book. We waited some more. I thought, oh, man, if I'm waiting this long, I'm getting out my iPod.
- [2 : 0 9] Okay. So I did. By this time, it's like three o'clock in the morning. And I'm so sick of waiting. I just thought, nah, stuff it. I got the armrests up from the seats next to me.
- Lay down on the seats. Got all the pillows I could find. I got out my luggage. I didn't care. I didn't stow it under the seat anymore. I ate all my snacks. By about 4 a.m., I thought, this plane is never leaving.
- I'm just going to start kicking up a fuss. I want to get off. Anyway, I am a good girl. And I didn't do that. But eventually, the plane did leave at 5.30 a.m. And we made it to Kuala Lumpur without any other problems.
- And the conference was really cool. So that was all fine. But those five hours sitting in a darkened plane on Tullamarine tarmac really were a great lesson in what can happen when something you're waiting for is put off and put off and put off.
- Being prepared starts to get really hard. Your behavior can start to change. And the longer it's put off, the harder it gets to keep yourself ready, to keep yourself expectant, acting like you know you're supposed to.

[3 : 29] You get slack. Or you get a bit fed up and start to act up like me on the plane. Waiting is hard. And being prepared while you're waiting is really hard.

And depending what you're waiting for, sometimes it even becomes difficult to believe that it's ever going to happen at all. Well, if waiting is hard, then actually Christians have it harder than most.

Because we're called to be a waiting people. We're waiting for Jesus. In the biographies of Jesus' life called the Gospels in the Bible, we've recorded for us, we have recorded for us really clearly what Jesus said about his death, resurrection, his return to the Father, and the fact that that is not the end of the story.

One day Jesus said he will come back again to make all things right. And part of believing in him, having faith in him, trusting him, means looking to that day.

We must live every day waiting until he comes. But surely the big question is when?

[4 : 56] How can we be prepared if we don't know when he's going to come? If we can't put it in our diary for 2007 or 2070?

Well, again, in the Gospel accounts, we read that Jesus said that no one could know the date or the time of his return. It's God's secret. What he did say is that it will be really obvious when it happens, so we don't need to worry that we're going to miss it and we shouldn't get taken in if somebody says it's already happened.

But he didn't say when. It could be a short time. It could be a long time. He said we have to keep waiting. And more than that, we have to be prepared.

But waiting for a long time and being prepared is hard. It's like if you're babysitting your little sister or brother and your parents say they'll be back at 11pm or maybe a bit later.

Well, at 11pm the house is clean and you're ready. You might even have the books open, the DVD off for the first time in the evening and the chocolate wrappers all cleaned up.

[6 : 12] You're ready. You're prepared for their arrival. But if by 11.30 they still haven't come, well, then maybe the books get shut and the DVD goes back on.

Maybe you make some toasted cheese and you get a bit too tired to bother cleaning up the grill. Then if they're not home by midnight, well, you're in your pyjamas, the dishes are sitting in the sink, and by 1am, of course, you're in bed and your sister or brother can take him or herself to the toilet if they need to go because that's it.

You're sleepy. You're slack. But Jesus doesn't want us to get slack as we wait for him. The Bible says that welcoming Jesus, living a life that will be prepared for Jesus' return is a holy life, a godly life, one that's focused on Jesus, focused on telling others about him and living obediently.

That's what it means to be ready. And he wants us to be ready and waiting all the time. But the wait will be long. Or it could be short.

So he told stories to his disciples and they wrote them down for us because they apply to us as well. And so we looked at that passage. We had it read for us tonight.

[7 : 33] Luke chapter 12, starting at verse 35. You might want to get your Bible open because we'll just be looking at... There's three pictures in there. We'll be spending most of our time looking at the first one, but we'll also have a little look at the last two as well.

Luke chapter 12. So first of all, starting at verse 35, Jesus uses a picture of slaves waiting for their master who's at a wedding.

Now weddings in Jesus' day weren't like your one day thing where the bride and groom go off to Hamilton Island the next day. No, it was like, could be up to a week long.

Serious, serious party. And so if a master went away to a wedding, he could be back... You know, if he went away on Friday night, he could be back on Monday, Wednesday afternoon, maybe the next Friday night, even at three o'clock in the morning.

And so it would be tempting for those slaves to start getting a bit slack in those in-between times when they thought, ah, he won't be back yet.

[8 : 40] Maybe, you know, like me on the plane or us when we're babysitting, just starting to get a bit sleepy, a little unfocused, a bit slack. But Jesus tells them exactly what these servants should be like.

Verse 35. Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat and he will come and serve them.

If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. So firstly, he says, the slaves need to be dressed, ready for action.

In the original language that this was written in, in Greek, it's a really cool picture. You know how people in Jesus' day used to wear, like, flowing robes? I'm sure we've seen them on movies like, I don't know, The Passion of the Christ or Ben-Hur or something.

[9 : 52] Well, those robes really got in the way when people tried to run or do kind of significant work. And so it's kind of like if you've ever tried to run with a towel, long towel wrapped around your legs at the beach or something.

It's possible you might do a face plant into the sand. So to get stuff done, they used to tie up their robes and kind of make them into short pants.

And it was called girding your loins. And that's what this passage is saying. It's saying, slaves, don't be chilling around the house in your PJs, in your comfy flowing robes.

Gird your loins. Have your cargo pants on. Have your running shoes laced. Don't be lazy. Don't be sleepy. Be dressed, ready for action.

Secondly, slaves, keep your lamps lit. Now, of course, the slaves needed to be able to quickly make their way to the door when the master came home.

[11 : 00] And they didn't want to be fumbling around in the dark like some Mr Bean movie and tripping over each other and standing on the cat and all of that. They needed to go straight to the door, let the master in, guide him through the house.

But they didn't have torches with batteries. They didn't have electric lights. They had oil lamps which had wicks that needed to be trimmed and oil that needed to be refilled to keep the lamp burning bright.

It took regular, consistent effort to keep the house lit. And it took regular effort to ensure that you'd be ready as soon as the master came to the door.

You couldn't just wait for him to ring the doorbell and then switch on the light. No. Being ready meant being dressed for action and always keeping the lamp burning, doing whatever it took to make sure that light didn't go out.

Well, I've been thinking about what that means for us as we wait for our master Jesus to return. And I think it means that we need to keep our lives free of stuff that will hinder us from running to greet him when he comes.

[12 : 20] And it means that we need to expend regular, consistent effort to make sure our lamps, if you like, our lives are burning brightly when he comes in obedience and holiness.

So I've been thinking, what could it be that would trip you up, that would get around your ankles and cause you not to be ready when the master comes?

Well, first of all, I think it could be your beliefs. It could be your kind of, your theology and the stuff that you understand about Jesus.

And particularly, whether you really think he's coming back or not. I know in my conversation with plenty of Christian people over the years that so many just say, I never think about it.

I just never think about Jesus coming back. It just doesn't kind of enter into my decisions. It doesn't really enter into my everyday life. I find it kind of hard to imagine.

[13 : 26] They just go about their daily life and they never really look beyond what they can see. They enjoy church, but there's not a sense of strong, that strong promise that Jesus is coming back.

And I think that's one of the things that we need to do to be prepared for his coming. We actually need to have it in our minds as consistently as we can.

And one of the reasons is because, well, the key reason, it's an amazing motivation for us to keep the faith and to keep living obedient lives. To keep the faith because he's coming again.

And we're actually going to see Jesus face to face. Our best friend. The one we long to know more of.

Our Lord. Our big brother. The earth will finally have her rightful king reigning over her visibly.

[14 : 31] It's so awesome. It's such an awesome motivation to keep on keeping on. Because we look forward to the day when we will see Jesus face to face when he comes.

But it's also an amazing motivation for us to keep living obedient lives. Because we know that if he's going to come back again, there will be consequences for disobedience.

There will be punishment for those who think he's never coming back. And so they just live it up. Live a life that abuses others. Live a life of sin.

Live a life of unbelief. And as I said, we're not going to have a deep look at the second part of the passage tonight. But that's the point of it, isn't it?

As you heard it read and as you can see it in front of you there, the master isn't going to let the bad slave go unpunished when he returns. The bad slave who beat his fellow slaves because he thought, well, the master's not coming back.

[15 : 37] He won't bust me. And in the same way, Jesus isn't going to let those who are doing bad stuff, who are ignoring his lordship, especially those who are behaving like that in the church of God, get away with it.

Jesus will come back. And those who have been taking advantage of the fact that we can't see him at the moment, they'll get a rude awakening.

They'll be punished severely. In fact, they'll be cast out of God's presence altogether. And they should have known better.

Because if they should have known better, that is, if they've had lots of teaching about Jesus, lots of opportunities to live for him, if much had been given to them spiritually, that's what that sentence means.

If much had been given to them in terms of gospel teaching and opportunities. If they should have known better, then they've got no excuse and they'll be punished even worse than for those who didn't hear about Jesus.

[16 : 42] And so the answer to Peter's little question there is that the message is for the disciples, for Christians as well as for everyone in the world.

So we've got to keep the promise of Jesus' return in our minds. We've got to keep it there. He's coming. We can't forget it. But a second thing I think that will help us be dressed, ready for action, ready to welcome the master, prepared, is to be always dealing with the sin in our life.

And again, I was kind of thinking about this for myself this week, thinking, what in this area would it be for me that would be like a heavy robe that would kind of get around my feet and stop me from running full pelt to Jesus if he returned right now?

What would it be? And I'm going to be honest with you. I'm going to tell you. It's three things, I think. They might be the same for you or they might be completely different. I reckon what keeps me less than ready for action is how I deal with being upset and hurt by people, how I spend my money, and how much time I spend in prayer.

I reckon they're the three things for me at the moment that could really hinder me from being ready when the master returns. And I don't mind being honest with you because I know that each of us will have stuff in our lives that will stop us being ready for action.

[18 : 21] That's what it means to be a fallen human being, even a human being who's been saved by the grace of Jesus. And Jesus knows that we'll all have stuff that can stop us from being ready for him when he comes, stop us from living that holy life, that obedient life.

But what he wants us to do is to be constantly expending energy to deal with it. Keep regular, consistent dealing with the sin in our life.

Keep trimming the wick. Keep putting oil in the lamp. Keep coming to God in prayer, asking for help, for forgiveness. It's part of being ready.

It's part of girding your loins. You don't have to be perfect. You just need to be vigilant. You say, God, I'm not very good at being wise and generous with my money.

Can you forgive me and help me? God, I'm struggling with my lustful thoughts about that person. Can you forgive me and help me?

[19 : 32] God, I don't really want to tell people about Jesus. Can you forgive me and help me? Keep reading the word whenever you can, even if that means that you'll have to turn off the TV sometimes and only watch one of your favourite programs and not two.

Keep hanging out with other Christians, even if it means you have to get your homework or other work done earlier or if your assignments aren't 100% perfect because you decided to go to church. Time with God's people helps keep the lamp burning and keeps you accountable for everyday actions so that you've really got yourself dressed, ready for action, ready for his return, being prepared.

And a third and final thing that I was thinking that we need to do to keep us ready, to help us be prepared, to not let us be distracted, is to always try and get our questions answered and our pain dealt with.

If you've had stuff happen to you in your life that is making you sad or angry and you know it's not even your fault or it's not because of some sin you did, it's not like you have to repent of it.

It can still stop you kind of from being really there waiting for God's return. It can really weigh you down. So I'd encourage you to talk to someone.

[21 : 06] Ask God to help you deal with that pain. Ask him to direct you to the right person to help. Ask him to heal you, to change you to whatever point he needs you to be healed.

It might not be all the way ever. You might always have some scars. So that you can be ready to obey him now and greet him with all the enthusiasm and energy he wants you to have.

When he returns. Waiting is hard. Especially if you've been waiting a long time. And Christians have now been waiting almost 2,000 years.

In the story, the slaves had been waiting, could have been waiting way past midnight, almost until dawn. And you know what it's like when you've been waiting a long time and you get really sleepy and you have to stay awake.

Maybe it's doing an essay or for some of the older ones here, maybe it's driving your car really late at night. And you know you're sleepy but you know you have to stay awake.

[22 : 09] So what do you do? You turn the radio on. You're whining down the window. You're like, have I got any chocolates? Have I got some chewing gum? If you've got a person there, talk to me. Talk to me. Come on. Come on.

Tell me a joke. Pinch me. Pinch me. Slap me. You know, you're doing whatever it takes. You're doing whatever it takes and you're working hard because you know it's so important to stay awake.

And that's what Jesus is saying to us tonight, friends. It is so important to stay awake. It is so important to keep loving him, to keep believing him, to not get discouraged at his tarrying, at his late arrival, if you like, at his waiting to come.

Not be discouraged but keep the faith. Because Jesus says, you must be ready, in verse 40, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Constant vigilance is like that man waiting to make sure a thief doesn't come into the house. He couldn't just lock the door in the ancient, in Jesus' day because the houses were made out of mud brick and thieves would actually dig through the wall.

[23 : 29] So the only way to stop them was to stay awake and be ready to be watching. It takes work. But it's so worth it, friends.

And the first picture, at the end of that first picture, that's what gives us the fact of why it's worth it. When the Master comes home and finds the servants waiting, ready, obedient, he doesn't just say, good on you, so you should have been, here I am, make me a cup of tea.

No. He does the most amazing thing. What does the text say? Verse 37. Blessed are those slaves whom the Master finds alert when he comes.

Truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. As I was studying this passage during the week, I went back to the Greek and I was using my dictionaries and stuff to get a little bit deeper into the text.

And when I got to this verse 37, and especially the bit about he will fasten his belt, I just did a double take. I'm reading along and I'm like, hang on, did I skip back a line?

[24 : 49] That's the same word as in verse 35, that girding your loins, being dressed for action. Is this talking about the slave or about the Master? And that's the amazing thing about this story, isn't it?

When the slaves dress themselves for action and welcome the Master, what does he do? He dresses himself for action.

He, as the NRSV puts it, puts on his belt. He gets ready to serve them. He has them sit down and he prepares a meal for them.

And he does all the work. That is why it's worth it, friends. That is the ultimate reward for being watchful and expectant, for being prepared when Jesus returns.

Jesus will be so excited that you've been waiting so well, even though it's hard, that he will serve you.

[25 : 53] He will have you sit down at his great banqueting table, at his very own royal celebration, and he will enjoy a meal with you.

He will serve you because that is his very nature. Jesus, our Master, the one for whom we must expectantly wait, the one for whom we must be prepared, is the Servant King, who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And friends, that's a king worth waiting for. Don't let yourself get cynical, slack, or sleepy.

Be dressed for action. Have your lamp lit. Because the Master comes to serve those who are found ready. And what a party that will be.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.