

Are You Preparing or Procrastinating?

A sermon based on Matthew 24:36-44 - ***“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.***

⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

If your credit card is like mine, the bill normally comes in the mail about three weeks before the due date. Do you know why they do that? It allows procrastinators like me three weeks to walk past the bill on the fridge or your desk. It's so we can look at the due date every day and then say to ourselves the procrastinator's pledge: "Ah, I still have plenty of time. I'll do it tomorrow!"

There are people who have all of their Christmas shopping done before Thanksgiving, and then there's estimated over 50% of Americans fighting for the last toys on the shelf at Fred's on December 23. Taxes are due on or around April 15 every year, but the Post Office has a line a mile long that night, because lots of people like to procrastinate.

Often, a person who's a procrastinator knows it, and sometimes it even becomes a joke with their family or friends. I have a pastor friend who thrives on writing sermons last minute, to the point where he calls them "Saturday night specials." You see, as long as the procrastination doesn't hurt other people and still able to meet deadlines, I suppose procrastinating isn't always necessarily a bad thing.

Today, God poses a question for us. It's a question asked, not of families or groups, but of individuals. You can't answer for anyone but yourself. Today as we listen to Jesus speak, we hear him question, "Are you preparing or procrastinating?"

Now, when you know exactly when an event is taking place, it's much easier to prepare for it right? If a friend is coming to town from Outside to stay with you for a few days, it's not terribly difficult to prepare for that visit, right? Clean the house; prepare the guest bedroom, a few other odds and ends. It's not that bad. But what if your friend said, "I'm coming to visit and I'll be there sometime in 2020"? If you were serious about having the house ready for them, it would take a lot of work, wouldn't it? You'd have to have the house in a constant state of readiness for the entire year. You would need persistence

and dedication to the cause of always keeping the house clean. I can tell you now, it would drive Becky insane...and probably you, too!

Fast forward to Jesus' return. God never promises it'll be easy to be prepared for his Son's return! One of the reasons preparing for Christ is a challenge is we don't know when that is...when he'll come. And it's not just us. Jesus said, **"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** God doesn't tell us when Christ will be back, but that's ok. Do you know what? What do you think this world would be like if we knew Jesus wasn't coming back for another 10 years? Satan would love tempting with that piece of knowledge, "Live for yourself for 9 ½ years, and then the last six months, you can clean up your act, repent, live for Jesus, and you'll be golden." And there are many sinful natures who would take him up on that advice!

The truth is, even without knowing, there are still a lot of people who are procrastinating and not preparing. There are many who are not ready for Christ to return and will be very surprised and deeply disappointed when he does. Jesus used a Bible history story to make that point: **"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away."**

Did you notice how Jesus didn't mention acts that are blatantly sinful as the caricatures of the people in the days of the flood? Eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage are not wrong or sinful, unless they become the thing a person is living for. If any of that prevents a person from having a relationship with God, then there's a problem. That's was the case for many in Noah's day. Many of them heard Noah's words of warning, saw him building the ark, but still didn't have an ounce of concern...not until the rain started to fall. Then those same people came and pounded on the door, begging for Noah to let them in, but it was too late. Their judgment had already arrived.

Sadly, Jesus tell us in the last days the world will react like that. People may have heard of Christ, but they aren't willing to live for him. Many will know Christians but not have any interest in being one themselves. Some may have even been a believer at some time but lost patience – and their faith - in the wait. You see, the world is distracted with its eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. The world is distracted with its self-promotion and greedy gain. The world is so full of itself, there's no room for things like humility, patience, and self-control. The world's preaching is so full of "me," there's no room for "Jesus." Life is too much about "this life" to waste any of it preparing for the future.

There's this fable told about 3 demons in hell who are applying to be Satan's #1 assistant. They're each running their campaigns on different ideas of how best to destroy humanity. The first suggested they could destroy the human race if they convinced people there's no God. The devil rejected that idea, because he knew too many know there's a God. The second ran his campaign with the idea they could spread the rumor there's no hell. The devil rejected that idea as well, and for the same reason – too many people know there is a hell. The third had a different idea. He suggested they convince the world there is no hurry to think about that! He's the one who got the job.

You've heard that lie, haven't you? There's plenty of time between now and Judgment Day. And, not only have you heard it, but, at times, you've even bought into it. When God looks at your life, does he see you prepared or procrastinating? Does he see a person who is excited to live for him today, or one who is thinking about living for him tomorrow...or even further down the road? Does God see someone

who busies themselves with spiritual things and then lives life here in that spiritual light? Or does he see one whose schedule is so full of fluff that, to be frank, there's no room for what truly matters? Does he see one who knows the importance of preparing, yet just can't manage to put that knowledge into practice?

It's rather embarrassing when we consider what God sees, isn't it? When all our excuses and rationales are stripped away. God's full body scanner of us shows more than the TSA's, doesn't it? It shows our failures. It leaves us without excuse. God's law exposes our sins and speaks clear threats of eternal punishment when that Judgment Day comes and Jesus returns.

Oddly enough, during Advent we look forward to that...and we also look back at the first arrival of Jesus. We look forward to his eminent return on Judgment Day. We strive to put procrastination aside and to be always preparing ourselves more and more for his coming, but inevitably we fail. We slip in our efforts, and those are exactly the times we can be thankful for Advent being about the two arrivals of Jesus. For the times we consider our lack of preparation for his second coming we can be thankful our merciful God points us back to his first arrival here. We can look back to the baby who was born our Savior. We can rejoice Christmas means forgiveness and peace. That Christchild wipes away our spiritual procrastination - our lack of readiness - along with all our sins. He washes us clean in the blood he shed on the cross. He came to life so he could give that life for us. And he rose so we, too, could rise to live a glorious life with him in heaven forever.

But until the day he calls us home, Jesus urges us, ***"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*** But even though this is a command he gives us, he doesn't leave us on our own to carry it out. He equips us to keep watch. He makes us strong enough to be ready for him. That means we don't have to stop our lives in order to be prepared. We don't have to follow a cult leader and quit our jobs and sell our homes and go live in the desert. But God makes it possible to live our normal lives in a special way.

Living a life "preparing for Christ to come" means making Christ a priority. It means putting value on Bible study – whether at church or in the home. It means living with Jesus on your tongue and being willing to put yourself out there to tell others about Jesus' love. It means prayer is something you'll give some real thought to, not just 5 seconds before you eat. It means Christ is a part of all your decisions – the way you budget your money, the way you spend your time, the way you act towards those who are around you, even the ones who make you mad.

You know, preparing for Christ's return is an on-going activity. Jesus even says, "Keep on preparing." But as we labor here on earth, as we struggle to prepare for Christ's coming, we take heart in knowing Jesus is preparing, too. He's preparing for our coming to be with him. He is preparing for you, a guest in his home for eternity.

So, what will this Advent be for you? My prayer...that it'll be a time to recommit yourself to being ready and watchful. You see, as joyful as our Christmas celebrations always are, we can look forward with that same anticipation to Judgment Day, when we will inherit the best gift of all, everlasting life. Since we don't know when that'll be, we pray that God will help us to always be ready. Let's close with that prayer today!

Lord God, make us faithful, strong, and true. Give us faithful hearts, like you gave Noah, and make us always ready and watchful, eager for you to return. Curb all temptation for us to put our guard down and forgive us for the times that we fail. Prop us up with your forgiveness and grace. Come quickly to take us from this vale of tears to your side in glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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