

Women & More

Live to Leave

October 10, 2013

God has the very hairs of our heads numbered (**Matthew 10:30**), and he has the days of our lives measured out (**Psalm 139:16**). We have no idea how many days we have, but God knows down to the millisecond. We must live wisely, redeeming the time by preparing to meet the Lord—buying back the days we may otherwise spend foolishly. That’s what our key verse for this lesson, Psalm 90:12, means: *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*

One week after completing our last lesson and enjoying our final *Keepers at Home* in the Spring of 2009, we learned that one of our women—just 41 years young—had laid down on her couch to rest from a headache, and did not live to rise from it. Thankfully she was a believer, but I don’t imagine she expected—in the least—to lie down and breathe her last on that day. Soon after burial, I visited her gravesite and thought again how very brief life really is and how unexpected death can be.

God knows that when a person leaves this world they have made the decision that will follow them into eternity—they have given their final answer on earth. So we must not neglect salvation! Charles Spurgeon says of salvation: “Its ease leaves those without excuse who neglect it.” 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 *“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. ²For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, **now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.**”*

In the *Parable of the Rich Fool*—one who’d neglected God—in Luke 12:13-21 when someone in the crowd asked Jesus to *“tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me,”* He related to them how a man had experienced a bumper crop, and amassed great wealth to the point of preparing to build bigger and better barns to store all his grain and goods. The man made further plans to *“Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”* There’s no crime in his preparations, **except that his plans did not include preparation for his eternal soul**—he failed to be ready for God—so Jesus said to him in verses 20-21 *“... ‘**You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’** ²¹This is how it will be with anyone who **stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.**”* Remember that the “fool” is the one who says there is no God!

► **First**, there is an appointed day for us to die. And **second**, the Lord promises that he will return for believers at *“an unexpected day or hour”*—leaving the any-day to His knowing alone. **In view of this we must prepare—above every other preparation—to meet God!** Then we need to live out our days in that prepared—ready state. Philippians 1:21: *“...to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

In the first 13 verses of Matthew 25 we see 10 women: five who were ready—prepared—and five who were not, as described by the Lord Jesus:

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

*⁶“At midnight the cry came out: **Here’s the bridegroom!** Come out to meet him!”*

⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹“No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

*¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. **And the door was shut.***

*¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘**Open the door for us!**’*

¹²“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

*¹³“**Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**”*

Both John the Baptist (**John 3:27-30**), and Jesus himself (**Matthew 9:15** and **Mark 2:19-20**) had already outlined the equation: **Jesus = Messiah = Bridegroom**. Using the marriage customs of the day, Jesus tells this *Parable of Ten Virgins*—very probably bridesmaids who were to assist the bride—and how they were instructed to be ready to meet the bridegroom as he came from the bride’s house to return to his own. They were expected to bring their own light source, so those without lighted lamps were assumed to be gate- or wedding-crashers.

The time of the coming of the bridegroom was to be unexpected, and there had already been long delay. When the midnight cry came, the foolish virgins did not have enough oil, so they appealed to the “wise” in verse 8, *“Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”*—the need for preparedness had been neglected. **A still sobering truth today is that** readiness for the Lord’s return can neither be transferred nor shared—each individual must be prepared!

The two earlier parables in Matthew 24 concerning Christ’s return focused on the following: 1) warning of its unexpectedness, and 2) requiring more than passive watchfulness. So this third parable stresses **the absolute need for preparedness in view of an unexpectedly long delay!** The “wise” virgins are called so because of their preparation. Notice that both the “wise” and the “foolish” fell asleep, and no blame or shame seems to be attached to either for that. So the distinction in the two groups—the “wise” and the “foolish”—has to do with being ready at a-moment’s-notice by having plenty of oil...or not!

The “foolish” virgins were not admitted—the door was shut! It was not shut on them because they’d not had any interest in ever meeting the bridegroom. They would not have been among those waiting had they not planned to one day meet the bridegroom. They were rejected because, despite appearances, they had never gotten around to actually preparing for his coming in the way they’d been instructed. Some, today, are waiting but have neglected salvation! The passage ends with: *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”*

Today, many people will say, “O they’ve been saying that Jesus will return any time for hundreds of years...so surely we still have time.” That stated thought should sound the shrill alarm that we are advancing on time. If and because we have waited for hundreds of years, we are certainly much nearer today than we were yesterday! We must get ready—our purpose is to be prepared!

Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, said in an interview with Paul Bradshaw: “People ask me, ‘What is the purpose of life?’ And I respond: ‘In a nutshell, **life is preparation for eternity.**’ We were made to last forever, and God wants us to be with Him in heaven. One day my heart is going to stop, and that will be the end of my body—but not the end of me. I may live 60 to 100 years on earth, but I am going to spend trillions of years in eternity. This is the warm-up act—the dress rehearsal. God wants us to practice on earth what we will do forever in eternity.”

How are we to “occupy” as Luke 19:13 says? What are we to do **as we live and before we leave**? Matthew 25:3 says we’re to “keep watch,” and John 12:25-26 exhorts us to work (serve): *“The man (or woman) who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life **in this world** will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and **where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.**”* We are **to work and to watch!**

Jesus admonishes us concerning watchfulness: Luke 12:37a-38, 40, 43 *“**It will be good** for those servants whose master finds them **watching** when he comes.*

*³⁸“**It will be good** for those servants whose master finds them **ready**, even if he comes at the second or third watch of the night.*

*⁴⁰“You also must **be ready**, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

*⁴³“**It will be good** for that servant whom the master finds **doing so when he returns.**”* Three times the phrase “it will be good” appears in this passage.

Not only are we to work and to be watchful, and therefore ready for our own imminent day of death, but we are to be ready and watching for the Lord’s coming in the air to gather believers to himself.

♥What will the Lord's coming for us be like? **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18:**

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words."

Those who have died believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will be raised first. Their souls have been in heaven, but now their bodies will be raised as glorified bodies. Verse 17 says that we who are alive will be caught up—suddenly taken! It's important to notice that believers are *caught up* rather than advancing on their own to meet the Lord in the air. A meeting in the air is unnecessary unless they continue on to heaven with the Lord who has descended to meet them. The passage concludes by stating: *"And so we will be with the Lord forever...."* And we're to encourage each other with these words.

Other examples in Scripture of being *suddenly taken, caught up or snatched up*:

- Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch—**Acts 8:39** *"When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **suddenly took** Philip away and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing."*

- Paul recounts his vision—**2 Corinthians 12:2-4** *"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was **caught up** to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—⁴was **caught up** to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."*

- John describes the woman (Israel), and her child—**Revelation 12:5** *"She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was **snatched up** to God and to his throne."*

Great preparation is being made for us in the Father's house—John 14:1-3—*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. **I am going there to prepare a place for you.** ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**"* So Jesus' parting instructions in this passage fixes the immediate destination for the believer leaving earth as the Father's house. No HGTV designer could ever compete with Jesus' preparations for us!

The bottom line is to be ready to go home—the home that Jesus has prepared for us! John 14:4-6: *"You know the way to the place where I am going.*

⁵*"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so **how can we know the way?**'"*

⁶*"Jesus answered, '**I am the way** and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**'"*

When Jesus comes in the clouds, he wants to take everyone—he died for the sins of the whole world—but only believers will go. Because they have followed his instructions for readiness, only believers will be caught up.

Matthew 24:39b-42, 44: *“That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40Two men will be in the field; **one will be taken and the other left.** 41Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; **one will be taken and the other left.** 42Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*

44*“So you also must **be ready,** because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

There is nothing remaining prophetically that needs to happen before Christ’s return for believers. It is because of God’s great love and compassion for the *lost* of this world that he delays his return. He wants lost people to be counted in the believing number—and when that last person who will receive Christ as Savior does so, the Lord will come for us! **2 Peter 3:8-9**—*“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**”*

●WHAT THEN after believers are caught up—gone? What about people left on the earth? Sin will reign—unrestrained—and the Antichrist will appear on the world scene. One famous preacher describes Antichrist as “a Nebuchadnezzar-Cyrus-Caesar-Alexander with some Hitler-Mao-Stalin thrown in and bound together.” The great tribulation period will culminate in the Lord’s second coming to earth. His first was to Mary’s womb in preparation to be the *Lamb of God* who takes away the sins of the world. The second time, the *Lion of the Tribe of Judah* will touch down on the Mount of Olives during the great battle of Armageddon to defend and deliver Israel, and destroy her enemies forever!

We can read about it in Zechariah 14! And in Revelation—some admit they’re not often in that book, but blessing is promised to those who read, hear and take it to heart. Revelation 1:3: *“**Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.**”* And in 22:7 it says, *“Behold, I am coming soon! **Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.**”* The world is spiraling toward a destination foreordained by God. And **God will not be the one taken by surprise!**

◆Prophetic Scripture outlines how the ‘end’ of all things will shake out.

◆It says believers are to occupy—to *work* and *watch*—until Christ returns, and we’re to have faith while we do it.

◆But we must not get too comfortable, because we will be leaving very soon!