

“PREPARATION TIME”

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25, Psalm 78:1-7, Matthew 25:1-13  
November 7 & 8, 2020

“What if you read in the newspaper about a new airline? The ‘Old World Airline’ let’s call it. They’ve been in business eight days. You pick up the phone and call. The girl that answers is in a hurry because she’s also the stewardess on the next flight. She says, ‘I you want to know about us, come on over. Our fares are half-price, you know.’

“So you go over. And out on the runways is a 1944 B-17. A nineteen-year-old pilot is getting on, and you ask him, ‘What are you doing?’

“Well, we’re sort of in a hurry. We’re running behind.’

“How is it you’re able to provide half-rate fares?’

“Well, we don’t worry about unnecessary things like maintenance and checking gasoline. And, we serve leftovers on the flight over.’ Then you notice he’s got a parachute on.

“No person in their right mind would get on that airplane! At least not without their own parachute. Why? Insufficient preparation!”<sup>1</sup>

Friends, we laugh at this example because it seems so ridiculous to us. Who would want to fly with a company that doesn’t do maintenance on their planes? Who would want to get on an airplane that might not have enough gasoline to get from point A to point B? We say to ourselves, “How foolish not to take care of the details?” But, **when we look at our lives**, we see that many of us are just as unprepared for our journey as anyone who would step aboard an antique airplane that is not maintained or fueled up.

Like anyone preparing for a trip, we like to make sure that the details are taken care of before we head off into the unknown. Even if the trip is just across the state, most of us would look at the fuel gauge to see if we have enough gas to get there. Some of us would check the tire pressure, or give the car a wash, or even check the oil level. That’s just what we do when we get ready for a trip. We

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<sup>1</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Stories and Illustrations*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 462-3)

prepare. We make the arrangements, we follow the route laid out for us, and we call ahead to make sure we have some place to sleep when the day is over.

But **what about your spiritual journey?** Are you preparing for that as you go along in life? Have you made your reservations? Have you plotted out your path? Have you made all the arrangements so that you don't miss anything? Are you prepared for that day?

That's what we find is happening in Israel at the final days of Joshua in our Old Testament lesson of Joshua 24. The people have followed God's commands. They have occupied the land of Israel between the East side of the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. They have eliminated the people whom God directed them to, and they have reclaimed all of the Land that God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To this point they had followed God's commands under the leadership of Joshua and had taken care of business in gaining the Promised Land. And as the people rest in the security that the Lord God gave Israel from all their enemies, Joshua seeks to take care of the details before he dies.

So he gathers all the people to him at Shechem, "*the elders, the leaders, the judges, and the officers of Israel, and they came into the presence of God*" (Joshua 24:1). Joshua reminds them of all that the Lord God had done for them so that they could possess the abundance of the land that they did not plant nor build, in order to help them firmly implant in their minds the benefits of following the Lord God Almighty, and Him alone.

Having reminded them of the blessings that the Lord had given to them, Joshua begins to take care of the tremendously important details that will insure that the people will be able to endure in the land. He says, "*Now then...honor the Lord and serve Him sincerely and faithfully. Get rid of the gods which your ancestors used to worship in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and serve ONLY the Lord. If you are not willing to serve Him, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors worshiped in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living. As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord*" (Josh. 24:14-15).

You see, it was one thing to gain the land that God had given them, but it was another to hold on to it against all of their enemies around them. And the one key detail in the whole mix was that the people were to give up seeking and worshiping other pagan gods, and worship the Lord God Almighty only.

Since it was God who had supplied them with the victory over the people to gain the land, it would be ONLY God who would be able to protect them and direct them into the future where they would not need to have any worries. If they would seek out the Lord God, and worship Him only, and be faithful to Him alone, He would continue to bless them and keep them free from their enemies. BUT if they would not follow the Lord, if they would seek other “deities” to worship, then God would release them from His blessings and allow hardship and turmoil to come upon them once more. The choice was theirs to make. And right there, in the presence of God, in front of Joshua, the people proclaim that they would be faithful to the Lord.

So Joshua helps them to prepare – “*Then get rid of those foreign gods that you have...and pledge your loyalty to the Lord, the God of Israel!*” (Josh. 24:23) Plain and simple – get rid of anything else to worship, and let the Lord God be the ONLY ONE to follow. And the people did what Joshua told them to do, for “*...as long as those leaders were alive who had seen for themselves everything that the Lord had done for Israel*” (Josh. 24:31). But unfortunately, as those who had seen it for themselves of what God had done for them died out, the people once more forgot their promise, and began to turn to other things to worship, not the Lord God Almighty.

Sound familiar? Back in 2001 when our country was attacked by terrorists at the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and on another flight headed back toward the east coast, people returned to the Lord God by the droves! They were under attack and they were scared. Once more they were reminded of the promise that when we follow the Lord, we will be saved from our enemies. But it only took about two months before it all went back to normal, and people were once more worshiping whatever they wanted here in the US. And we can see that steadily after that time, God has begun to remove His hand of favor

over us, and we have begun to experience God's lack of support which has brought us to the point where our country is very divided and teachings are common that we no longer need the Lord, but can do whatever we want, whenever we want, to whomever we want, for as long as we want, and it doesn't really matter one bit. BUT WE HAVE BEEN DECIEVED! We have forgotten the book of Judges in the Bible that gives us first-hand evidence of the results of either living in honor of the Lord our God, or living according to the ways of the world. And it is showing up in our own society, having very real examples of the consequences of both paths.

So the question comes back to us, "Are you making preparations for today, and for your future in a way that is going to guarantee the results that you are desiring?"

The lesson of Psalm 78 calls us to get ready, AND to pass that preparation along to future generations so that they, too, might be prepared. Verses 5-7 are so important, but ones that we often neglect to do ourselves. God "*gave laws to the people of Israel and commandments to the descendants of Jacob. He instructed our ancestors to teach His laws to their children, so that the next generation might learn them and in turn should tell their children. In this way they also will put their trust in God and not forget what He has done, but always obey His commandments*" (Ps. 78:5-7).

Unless we pass on the laws and commandments of the Lord God to our children, they will not know them in order to pass them on to their children. And then the ways and commands of the Lord are forgotten and we turn to whatever we want to do. We see it in the young people of the United States today, many turning away from whatever, if any, training they've had in their lives in the Ways of the Lord, to blatantly do whatever satisfies their hearts' desires. And when confronted by their reckless and dangerous ways, they belligerently ball up their fists and get into our faces and loudly proclaim, "You Can't Make Me!" We have failed to pass along the information about the consequences of the decision to turn away from the Lord our God and we leave them unprepared for the life they are now living.

So we have riots in the streets, we have mass shootings, we have abortion on demand up until the day of birth, we have rejection of common decency, we have the threat of socialism and anarchy, we

have corruption in government, we have astounding murder and domestic abuse rates, we have gender confusion, we have ethnic oppression and occupation, we have divorce rates that are skyrocketing, and we have a rapid decline in church attendance. When the attitude is “Who needs God?” there is little focus on the value of having His ways and commands active in our lives. When we forget God and turn to our own ways, God removes His blessings from us and we are left to our own ways, which usually leads us into our own demise and destruction.

Psalm 78 reminds us of the importance of preparing the future generations by teaching them all that God has already done for us, AND the value of having Him in our lives, worshiping and following only Him.

And believe it or not, we see that in today’s Gospel lesson of Matthew 25:1-13. Listen to how Jesus invites us to be ready. Listen to what He says. (READ Matthew 25:1-13)

Like Joshua, Jesus wants us to be prepared for the future. We have rest from our international enemies, for the most part, but there is trouble within as I mentioned before. So Jesus gives us a very vivid example of how to be ready. There’s a lot of similarities in this parable with the reality of today.

First, we have a bridegroom who has invited us to join Him at the wedding feast. Jesus has already called us to Him, and has announced to us, “*Keep watch, for you do not know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will return*” (Matt. 24:44). And in the parables in Matthew 24, we see that Jesus is calling us to give up on other things that we might put our trust and faith in outside of the Lord our God, and to begin to prepare ourselves so that we are ready for the future. We must get ready, for we do not know when Jesus will return.

Now, the 10 girls that got ready prepared in two different ways. All ten prepared for the bridegroom, they took their lamps with them so that they could be a part of the bridal procession into the house of the groom to celebrate the wedding feast with Him. But only ½ of them prepared for the long haul, bringing extra oil for their lamps with them. And as the bridegroom delayed coming, they all fell asleep while waiting for Him. They all had lamps; they all were ready for Jesus; but only half of them

thought beyond the present to prepare for the future. They must have thought, ‘What if He doesn’t come right away? How will I stay ready for Him?’ So they planned ahead and brought extra oil for their lamps. And obviously, there was enough time between them falling asleep and upon being awakened by the call that the bridegroom had arrived, that the oil lamps burned the oil out of the lamps that the girls had brought with them.

At the arrival of the bridegroom, all the girls awoke and made themselves ready, but since the delay of the bridegroom had been so long, 5 of the girls saw that their lamps were running out of oil, and they begged the others for more oil. Their lack of preparation had caught up with them and they were caught short of the necessary oil for their lamps that would keep them going. So they were in a pinch. They requested oil from the others, but there was not enough oil for all of them, so the ones who were running out had to go and look for more oil from the merchants in the village.

Now at 12 midnight, I don’t think there were too many oil venders awake and active. Though they may have looked long and hard, I don’t think the 5 girls would have found anyone with oil at that time of night to help them in their plight. They may have spent the rest of the night hunting for more oil. Or they may have simply run home to get more oil from their own homes in order to refill their lamps. Whatever way they took, by the time the girls returned, the door for the bridegroom’s home was already shut and locked up. They had missed their chance to join the celebration.

But why couldn’t they just have waited with the other 5 girls and tagged along with them to the bridegroom’s house? Well, according to the tradition of the time, “everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch (lamp). Those without a torch (lamp) would be assumed to be party crashers or even brigands. The festivities, which might last several days, would formally get under way at the groom’s house.”<sup>2</sup>

You see, each person was expected to prepare for the festivities on their own. Each was expected to have made the proper arrangements, and none of the others could help out at the time of the

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<sup>2</sup> (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 8, (D. A. Carson) [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] pg. 513)

bridegroom's arrival. We could chastise the 5 girls who had extra oil for not sharing with those who had run out, but the point is that the 5 who only came with their lamps without planning ahead had not planned for the future in the event that "*the bridegroom was delayed*" (Matt. 25:5). Their lack of preparation excluded them from the wedding festivities.

However, the 5 girls that had planned ahead were prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. They were ready when the procession passed by and they were able to join in and become welcomed into the house of the bridegroom. They had taken care of the details necessary to be ready and they were rewarded with entrance into the house and participation in the wedding feast. Their whole focus was on the bridegroom, and they made the proper preparations in order to obtain acceptance into the house of the bridegroom. The whole parable is about being ready, prepared for the coming of the Lord.

So what does this have to do with us? What is the significance of this parable for us who live almost 2000 years after Jesus first told it? It ties in with Joshua's preparing the people of Israel occupying the Promised Land, because whenever there is a time delay between the promise, and the fulfillment of that promise, there is always the danger of us getting sloppy and getting out of readiness for the future event. Unless we remain in a constant state of readiness, there is the possibility that we will be caught off-guard, unprepared for the future event of Jesus' return.

But how do we stay ready? What must we do to make sure that that day or hour will not catch us unaware? Charles Swindoll tells it like this. He says, "While I served my apprenticeship as a machinist in Houston years ago, I worked just behind a man named Tex on a row of turret lathes. Tex chewed tobacco. He'd stick the pouch in his back pocket and leave the pouch open. We were working second shift one night and a little cricket hopped in the door of the shop. I watched the cricket since my lathe was running and I didn't have to give attention to it for the next five or six minutes. I thought, 'That cricket is the same color as Tex's tobacco – I wonder if he would ever know?'

"So I grabbed this cricket, pulled its head off, and dropped it in the top of his tobacco pouch and waited. After a while, he shoved a couple callused fingers back into the pouch and jammed a big wad of

tobacco into his mouth. He spit wings and body parts throughout the evening. It was a delight to watch him. I don't think Tex ever knew that he chewed up a cricket – which proves, if you chew tobacco, you don't know what you've got in your mouth.

“Anyway, Tex had a saying I'll never forget. He was always washed up when it was time for the final whistle. When you work in a machine shop, a whistle blows at the beginning of your day shift, then you punch the clock, and then there's another whistle for lunch, and then the day stops with a whistle and you punch out. Tex was always washed up, ready to go. And, you know, he was every employer's nightmare, ready to leave before time was up. One day I said, 'Tex, how do you do it?' I'll never forget what he said: 'Let me tell you something, Sonny. I just stay ready to keep from getting' ready.'”<sup>3</sup>

Well, there's your answer – just stay ready to keep from getting' ready. That means following the laws and commands of the Lord God Almighty. It means regularly seeking His forgiveness of our sins. It means constantly evaluating our lives to make sure that there is no one of no thing greater in our lives than the Lord God. It means that we learn and hold the commands of the Lord in our lives each and every day, and that we refrain from wandering away from them or making up our own. It means giving up the stuff of this world remembering the greater things that the Lord has in store for us BEYOND this life that will come to us only when we seek the Lord's ways and follow Jesus' teachings. It means that we profess Jesus as our Savior, confess our own foolish ways and keep our eyes focused on allowing Him be the Lord of our life. It means putting away any gods that we might have in our own lives and profess Jesus as the One and Only Savior for us. And it means that we teach our children and those around us of the importance of having God's ways in us so that we don't miss out on His invitation to join Him in the wedding feast. It means we prepare ourselves for what could come at any moment – the return of Jesus Christ. Don't get caught lacking the necessary oil for your own lamp. Stay ready for the Lord our God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let's Pray...

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<sup>3</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 464-465)

Father, thank You for the warning to be ready for the return of Jesus. Help us to learn the signs of His coming, and to be ready, each and every day, for His call to join Him in the procession to eternal life. Don't let us wander away from You. Challenge us to remain faithful to You no matter what the world gives to us, both good or bad. Never let us get so comfortable that we turn away from You. Keep calling us into Your service and into Your family. This we pray in the powerful Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.