

I arrived to church late. Everybody was already waiting in the rows, but no way to tell how long. I hustled to the front past everyone staring at me. Even as late as I was, I tried to get my robe on as fast as I could. But something was slowing me down. It was painful knowing the rows were filled with people waiting to start and I was holding things up. Finally I finished and when I stepped out all eyes were glued on me. Now minutes past the normal start time I felt the sweat and redness in my face. I went into the pulpit only to find my notes weren't there. I think I had prepared a sermon, I just didn't have it memorized or in front of me. The whole thing was a disaster. People started to leave. I watched them walk out. I was helpless to do anything. That's when I woke up.

You've maybe had that dream before. One where you have a presentation to make, you get called on and come to the front. It's then you realize you haven't written the speech. Or you have a paper due but when the teacher comes around to collect it, you can't find it, you panic, and you're going to get a failing grade. Or you have a project to complete but you realize your computer won't print. These work or school related nightmares can be painful. Thankfully they're only dreams. Hopefully the reality has never happened to you.

Most people don't like being unprepared. It's an uneasy feeling. Nerves are hardly ever higher than if you're finishing a school project or a work presentation the night before. You can rush to get it complete. But you also know night before work often is only half quality. Being unprepared can be incredibly challenging to recover from. Many just take the bad grade, bad evaluation, or bad reaction.

Noah is best known for building the ark. His reason for building the ark was more important than the feat of building it. God had looked down on all the people of the time where most didn't care one bit about him. They just went about their days without acknowledging the creator of all things. It was something God would not tolerate. So he promised a giant worldwide flood to destroy them all. Eight would be saved. Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives all would survive by living in an ark. Noah was given time to prepare for something unexpected by everyone else.

Don't feel too bad for all those people doomed to die. It wasn't that they didn't have opportunity to notice and get prepared. **"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."** Up to the very day Noah entered they watch him build, they maybe talked with him, and they still didn't know anything. Then suddenly it was too late. By the time the first rain started falling it was too late. Noah was inside, the door was sealed, and they were dead. The time for preparation had come and gone.

People are still too busy to notice and get prepared. Just days ago we were stuffing our faces with turkey and all the fixings. Quickly after that we were stuffing our shopping carts with the best buys. A couple of weeks from now we'll be stuffing colorfully wrapped gifts underneath the tree. In between people will go to work and school. They'll have parties and sleepovers. Some will take trips and do housework. All of it normal stuff. The actions themselves aren't sinful. But remember how easy it is to become distracted. Hearts dulled by sin show a lack of concern, a lack of preparation. Without preparing for what's coming leaves people in dangerous positions where suddenly it's too late. Jesus will come and the time for preparation will have come and gone.

Just how sudden will the coming of the Son of Man be? So quick and sudden that it will be like two teenagers both running on the soccer field, both trying hard, but one will be prepared and the other not. Two adults walking through the halls in the office. Both dressed well, both have families at home, both trying to get ahead. But one will be prepared and the other not. Two relatives gathered for Christmas dinner. Both eating, laughing, enjoying each other's company. But one will be prepared and the other not. Jesus points out that you wouldn't know preparation by looking at the outside. **"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."** Outside they look the same but inside their hearts are vastly different. That's how decisively and quickly what's coming will happen. Once the Son of Man comes there's no more preparation.

For the most part alarm systems and security cameras are just set up in order to catch someone after they do something. If someone breaks into my home, even with the alarm system blaring, they'll likely be gone long before the time the police get there. Even with security cameras set up it would only help identify the criminal after they've broken in. The best defense would be if I knew when the thief was coming. Then I'd check that the security cameras were on. I'd have the alarm set. But most importantly I'd have the police waiting inside my house to greet the thief. Jesus said we can think of his coming the same way. **"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."** Only a foolish person leaves the house unattended and unprepared for a thief he knows is coming.

Jesus is returning to this world someday. Over and over again the Bible states that he is coming back to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. He even gave signs. Earlier in chapter twenty four of Matthew's gospel Jesus listed off the signs signaling the end. When you review that list you find that everyone has been fulfilled. There are no more signs left to be completed. Any idea that some sign hasn't yet been fulfilled so we don't have to be watching is sinful foolishness that leads to false security. It's like turning off the alarm system and shutting down the cameras when you know the thief is right outside your house. The consequences of such action are extremely harmful. After the thief breaks in is too late to prepare. To think that Jesus isn't coming or that it's a long way off will result in extremely harmful consequences. After Jesus returns the harmful consequences will be reality. Too late to prepare then.

Not knowing the exact date and time of Jesus' return isn't a reason to give up being prepared. Jesus' own encouragement is to know that we'll never know the exact time and date. This means we are to be prepared always. **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** Christ Jesus isn't keeping this information from you to punish you or make you unnecessarily anxious. He means to turn it into preparedness. Why else would Jesus tell you he's coming back? He wants you to be ready. This is his grace to tell you ahead of time. His second coming isn't unexpected, just unknown.

So under his plan of grace you can and will be prepared at all times. So long as you are still taking in breath and your heart is pumping you are still experiencing God's grace. Now is the time to renew for yourself the promise God has made to you in Christ. Reestablish the connection to Christ through Word and Sacrament. Hear again of his wonderful and amazing love shown to you in the cross. Live as he has commanded in his Word. **"Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ."** The person who is prepared for Christ's return will be connected to him by faith. Clothed in Christ one who is prepared will avoid sin and live recognizing we need to be prepared for our Savior's return at all times.

Whether you've dreamt about it before or not, you've probably known that unprepared feeling. It isn't fun. It's enough to make you sweat. God certainly doesn't want you sweating it out until the Lord Jesus returns unsure of everything. His coming is expected. His purpose for returning is given. Your status before him is guaranteed. In Christ you are forgiven. In Christ you are a saint. In Christ you prepare for an expected coming.