

FEAR and Fears-Part 7

The Fear of Being Unprepared

Luke 12:35-40

Death and taxes. According to Ben Franklin apparently the only two things about in which we can be absolutely certain. But I'm here this morning to tell you that in fact there is no absolute certainty about those two things. Matters of fact I can biblically argue from even our daily Bible reading this morning about mandatory taxation that it will not be an eternal reality for you. Not only that death, which you'll say, "Come on, death Pastor Mike, everyone dies" Well, I will concede that life as we know it for every individual on the planet will not continue on forever. No, I realize that everyone is going to have a point of real transition. But let me quote for you the sure and certain word of God. 1 Corinthians 15:51. It says, "We shall not all die" What? Not all die? No, not all die. What about those that don't die? But we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Listen to this carefully. It says, "At the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we who remain, we will be changed. And the perishable put on imperishable and the mortal put on immortality." so not everyone dies. The Bible is very clear about that.

Presented to us in scripture under many headings that point of transition, that cataclysmic change for every person where life as we know it, comes to an end instantaneously. That last generation not through death but through something the Bible calls the second coming of Jesus Christ. The arrival of Christ. The Day of the Lord it's often called. The parousia for you theologians. The arrival, the appearing of our Lord and Savior. The coming of the Son of Man. The Rapture. The revelation of Jesus Christ. I could go on. It's spoken of under a lot of headings because it's spoken of a lot in the Bible. Matter of fact if you open your Bibles and start looking through it you'll find that more is said about the second coming of Christ by far than about the first coming of Christ. And a lot was said about the first coming of Christ. Jesus, if you scan the red letters of your Bible, you'll find spoke of his own coming. He sat down and talked about his second return over twenty times in the Gospels. And the other 23 books of the New Testament almost 300 references in almost every single book even the little books of the New Testament keep talking about Christ is coming back. Christ will return. And when he does, in that moment, instantaneously life as we know it will be completely over.

That's why when others speak of the certainty of death you ought to in your own mind say, "Well maybe, maybe." But I understand that when the Bible speaks of the return of Christ and the end of life as we know it here on this planet, he says not only should you be certain about the arrival of Christ and the change of everything. But you ought to expect it, and you ought to expect it now. You ought to be expecting it everyday. Therefore, I'm going to say, well I don't know if I'm going to die or not. I suppose I might but really expecting Christ to come back. That's the biblical default position for Christians is that we're expecting his return, we're praying for his return, we're crying out as the early church did with that Aramaic word, "Maranatha" come quickly. We want him to come, he promised he would come.

Today we reach a passage in our study of Luke, Luke chapter 12 where Jesus in one of the many discussions he has about his second coming, tells us that he's coming back and he says this, "You can't really have an expectation, a joyful eager anticipation of the return of Christ unless you are prepared." As a matter of fact if you're not prepared you should be afraid. You should fear. Our whole chapter we've looked at fear, and I put that all in caps for you because there's one ultimate overarching fear, and then fears, a lot of fears we shouldn't have. There's a lot of fears that we ought to have biblically speaking and one of them would be if you are not prepared for the arrival of Christ. Take a look at this passage with me, open your Bibles and turn there if you haven't already, it's printed on your worksheet, Luke chapter 12 verses 35 through 40. Six verses this morning I want to walk through and just think about what Jesus says making sure you know, with certainty, not only is his promise sure, but you ought to be anticipating it and expecting it this week.

Take a look at this passage, I'll read it for you, verse 35 through 40, Luke chapter 12 he says this, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks." Verse 37, "Blessed are those



servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and he will have them recline at the table and then he will come and serve them. And if he comes in the second watch, or the third watch and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!" Verse 39, "But know this, if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. So also you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

If you glance up where we been in our study even last time we were together we looked at that great ending clause that we ought to be very careful where our treasure is. Because where ever our treasure is, our priority, our values our heart is going to be there. And vice versa, where ever our heart is, well there are treasure will be. Well he's talked about coming off that section we shouldn't be worried, we shouldn't be anxious, we shouldn't be fretting about our earthly retirement, we had that illustration about the foolish man who put all of his stuff in silos hoping he could kick back and relax for the rest of his life. And he says, "That's not what you should be concerned about. You want to be concerned about something, be concerned about your eternal retirement." And you may say, "I'm in perfect health, I'm going to live on." Listen, here's the thing, it's not just about you dying. As a matter of fact you ought to think more about his return then your own demise. The reality is it could be up this week. And the question for us is; are we prepared to walk into our eternal retirement? And the Bible says we ought to be ready. We ought to be expecting it.

Three things I want to point out this morning from this text. Let's start with the first two verses, verses 35 and 36. Make some observations that will help us think through this issue. Look at these first words, stay dressed for action, keep your lamps burning, like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. So here's the picture. Somebody apparently with a lot of money, the master, he goes to a wedding feast, which is not just like a reception after some wedding that's going to last a couple hours. We learn all the way back to the book of Judges that these wedding feasts, when you had a friend that had his children married, this was a big deal and the feast would last as much as a week. As a matter of fact the intertestamental writings in the book of Tobit here is a picture of a wedding feast lasting two weeks so about the time Jesus is telling this story people understand if you have a wedding and you're throwing this big party, especially if you're people of means, and inviting people like the guy in this parable. This wedding could last 5 days it could last 7 days, 10 days; it could be 14 days until the master comes back. And it's not like he's riding back in some Escalade with his air conditioning on. This is ancient travel. He's coming in on his caravans and his animals and he's coming in with his family and his extended family and he's got his entourage with him and there's certain servants that are there who are suppose to maintain the house and they're suppose to wait for when he comes back. Now, there's no ending to this feast. We don't when it'll end.

But when he comes it says, how great it would be for those servants to be waiting and anticipating him coming, because they don't know when he's coming back. And when he comes back, there's animals that need to be fed. There's feet that need to be washed. There's people that need meals, they're going to come in after a long journey, we better be ready to serve them. That's the picture that's painted here. And there's two phrases at the beginning that I think give us this sense of what we need to be. Let's look at the first one; it's translated here for us Americans. "Stay dressed for action." Now that's an odd phrase if you understand what's underlying it. And if you have your grandpa's Bible you might be able to see, well you know what? Here it says something really weird, gird your loins. What in the? That sounds inappropriate. What is that? Gird your loins. In the Greek it's literally, encircle your hips. What? That doesn't help. What are you talking about? Well you know the picture, you went to Sunday school, you had the flannel-graph stories and all the people in those Bible characters, they had these long robes on. And they had to take those robes, if they were going to do work, or they were going to do something that was strenuous. They would take those robes and pull it up and make a little diaper out of it basically and tuck it into their belt. That's encircling your hips with your robe. Stay dressed for action. That's the picture, you turn as I like to say, your robe into running shorts. That's what you do by girding your loins.

We had a work day here at this church yesterday as we often do; a lot of people come out to help us out. A lot of the men come and no one came in a suit. No one had a tux on. They came in their work clothes. That's the idea here. They're ready to serve; they are dressed with their robe ready to go. Jot this down if you would, number 1, this is a general statement I understand but we'll fill this in with some meaning. Number 1, we need to, and this passage, be ready for Christ's arrival.

1. Get Ready for Christ's Arrival



He's going to come back, and like servants waiting for the master who have to get to work, we're going to sit here as Christians saying, "I'm prepared, I'm prepared." Now the first time we ever see this concept of taking your robe and tucking it into your belt was the command of God in Exodus 12. In Exodus 12 if you know your Bibles this is a very important chapter in the Old Testament. It's the chapter where God starts the most important commemoration of a very significant historical event. It was called the Passover celebration. It was a wired thing when you looked at it because the instructions for the Passover were that you were to take your robe that you would have, this flowing robe, and you were to gird your loins. You were to tuck your robe into your belt. You were to make sure that you got your sandals, your travel shoes on, and you put them on. You had to then take your walking staff and you take that into your hand and you could eat the Passover meal. Now that's wired isn't it?

I mean this isn't sitting down for Thanksgiving and enjoying a meal at a table. You have to eat standing up, with a staff, with your shoes on and with your loins girded. You're dressed and ready for travel. What did the Passover commemorate? Thirty four hundred years ago here was the ceremony to commemorate something that would be very significant in Israel's history. It was found in the book of Exodus and they were exiting where? Egypt. And here's the picture, you need to eat this meal for all time in memorial as Jewish people thinking about how the Jewish people left Egypt. Eat the meal as you are about to go, ready to leave. I'm ready to leave, I'm ready to go. That's the picture here. And the question I suppose for you, Egypt lovers, Egypt dwellers, citizens of Egypt, are you ready to leave? That's the picture. Christ is going to come back and when he comes it's going to begin with, 1 Thessalonians 4, the taking of his church out of this world. Are you ready for that? Now here's the thing when he arrives. He's going to either arrive as your king and your rewarder, or he's going to arrive as your judge, jury and executioner. So I would suppose the most important way for me to be dressed for action is to make sure I'm on his team and when he comes back, I'm going to be his friend and not his foe.

And it wouldn't hurt us, especially after some good testimonies this morning, to ask you the question because Satan is so great at counterfeiting this. Are you absolutely sure you're ready for the arrival of the king? Do you know you're a card carrying citizen of the kingdom? Are you sure, it's kind of a mixed metaphors here for a minute that you're clothed in Christ as Paul like to say? Are you? Are you sure, that when Christ comes back, what he's going to see is a righteous person clothed in the righteousness of Christ because you by faith have been placed into Christ. Is he going to see that in you? Maybe like some people that have testified this morning you're in that stage where you think you're alright with God. You've got certain things in place that you think. Well clearly God would like me, I mean he's kind of like a grandpa that likes his grandkids, and He knows I make some mistakes and it's no big deal but I'm okay, I mean I'm an American, I'm a good person, I'm not a criminal. You need to ask yourself the question. Do you recognize the problem of not being clothed in the righteousness of Christ?

Do you see that the problem between you and a holy God is this thing called sin and you recognize that, that is your problem? Easy for us to look at other people and say his sin is a lot worse than my sin. The Bible says that's the kind of person that doesn't go home from that prayer meeting justified because they're always making lateral comparisons. See for you to be right when the king comes back clothed in Christ's righteousness is for you to recognize that you have a sin problem and you need to own it. There's a big difference between people saying, "Well no one is perfect, well I mean we're all sinners." No, see when you say, "We're all sinners" I already understand what you're saying. You're not owning this as your problem. You have to get to the place saying "we're all sinners" to "I am a sinner". You have to admit it. You have to see it and embrace it and say it is my problem. I accept this as my problem. The Bible says confession, that's such a great word. I'm agreeing with God that my problem is as bad as God sees it. Confession. And then there's this great word in the Bible, repentance. I need to see my problem being a part of the sinful human race and compounding my sin by the decisions that I've made in my life, I'm ready to turn from all of that. To turn from sin, that's the picture of repentance. And turning to God and now I'm going to trust in the fact that Jesus has solved the problem for me.

Repentance and Faith. Starts with admission and confession and a penitent heart saying I've got a problem and I embrace the mercy that is available to me that I do not deserve in Christ saying, "God would you take his righteousness and account that to my account and could you take my sin and pin it to his cross and cancel my sin because of what he's done." Therefore, when someone asks you about your entrance into the kingdom, and you say I'm a card carrying citizen of the kingdom not because I do good things, not because I go to church, not because I walked an aisle, not because I got baptized, because I'm trusting in the completed finished work of Christ on my behalf. There's a big difference there. And you're not clothed in Christ unless you're clothed in the humility and



penitence and admission and confession that we must all have to enter this thing called the family of God. Be dressed and ready for action. Be ready to leave Egypt. Are you really going to be passed over from the punishment? Well, we need to make sure you're right with God. Get ready for Christ's arrival. Be dressed and ready to go.

Here's an interesting passage for you to jot down, I won't take the time to have you turn there and look at this with me but for homework you might want to look this passage up. If you were in Women's Bible Study I know recently you just worked through this chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 29 through 31. That would be a great passage for you to jot down. When you are ready to leave Egypt and you say, I understand it - this really overlaps with where we've been - where we've been in our passage was then you're not going to be stressed about all these issues of life. If you know Thursday at 2:07 Christ is coming back you're going to look at all your problems, all the issues and stresses of this week. You're going to look at those differently. Are you not? I'm not going to see them the same way. You're going to have to now recognize that I'm ready to leave this place. Here's how it's put in 1 Corinthians 7, you need to - now don't take this wrong if you're in a marriage you're ready to give up on but listen to these words. Let those who have wives live as though they had none. Caution with that verse, what's he saying? What are you talking about? We'll read the next couple of phrases and we'll go back to that one. Let those who mourn be as though they were not mourning, let those who rejoice be as though they're not rejoicing. Let those who buy things be as though they had no good. What are you talking about now?

Some people think life consists in the abundance of their possessions. Some people think life consists in the abundance of their relationships. Some people think life consists of the quality of the things they have. Some people think life consists of the quality of my relationships. And Christianity is a lot to blame, modern iterations of Christianity, for us merging these two. We start to think of Christianity as a focus on the family. We start to think the ultimate expression of Christianity is a perfect family, a perfect marriage all these things. Listen I'm all for bettering your marriage but you understand life is not about your marriage. Life is not about your kids, it's not about whether they get into the right colleges, whether everyone is healthy in your family. Hey if you have a family life, fantastic but live as though you didn't. What does that mean? You're not going to be a good husband; you're not going to be a good father. No. You need to be those things, but your life is not there. And hey, by the way if you're mourning, I understand there's a lot to cry about in this world, but as though you're not mourning. Comparing it to the world's grief I don't grieve like they do because this is all there is for them, that's not all there is for us. Those who rejoice you happy about something? Fantastic got a new house, got some big promotion at work, fantastic, that's worth buying a cake and having a few friends over, fantastic. That's great let's celebrate that, but you know as if you're not celebrating because in the end it doesn't really matter much if Thursday we're all going to see Christ. Those who buy things as though they didn't have any goods at all. Okay, I'm going to get a few things, I need a new refrigerator, literally, my washer is on the fritz, what am I going to do? Go out and wash my clothes on the rocks in the backyard? No, let's buy a new wash machine, fantastic but it's not about that. I don't need the latest and the greatest, it doesn't have to be, whatever it doesn't really matter, why? Keep reading. For those who deal with the world as if they had no dealings, why? Because the present form of this world is passing away.

See when you're holding this staff in your hand and you've got your robe turned into running shorts and you've got your walking shoes on and you're eating this meal and you're looking around at your house knowing this, that God's going to pull us out of Egypt any day now. Any day now. You're looking a little differently about remodeling your house, you're thinking a little differently about your job here in Cairo. You're thinking, you know, okay, if we're not leaving today, I've got to deal with those things, but I'm not consumed with them. Be ready to leave, you're dressed.

Now, look at the next phrase, verse 35 and you keep your lamps burning. Keep your lamps burning. Of course if the servants are dressed and ready to work they've got to have their lamps on. And if it's nighttime and you think the master could come back tonight so they keep their lamps on because they may have to, you know, tuck the kids into bed, they may need to feed the animals and walk out with their lamp into the yard, they may have to cook a meal in the kitchen, you need those lamps burning. You need to be ready. Since that's such a rich metaphor in scripture and with the risk of stretching this metaphor too far, let me turn you to Ephesians chapter 5. Leave here if you would in Luke 12 and turn to Ephesians 5 and take a look at this passage with me. When it comes to light there's so many great expressions of this analogy in the Bible, but certainly this I can't even say keep your lamps burning or let your lamp shine without going back to summer camp. [singing] "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." Remember that? What are you talking about? Well, my mind first goes to the most basic statement Jesus ever made about letting my light shine and he equated that to what on the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5? Let your light



shine before men so that they might see your good works. Now here's the idea of your light. You are in this world to be light, shining and reflecting as we touched on last time we're together the values of the kingdom. Willing to stand alone in a culture that doesn't care about the values of the kingdom and I'm going to stand resolute fearless on the principles and values of the kingdom. Look at this passage, Ephesians chapter 5 beginning at verse 8. Once you were like everyone else, you were in darkness – Ephesians 5:8 – but now you are light in the Lord. He's changed you. Now walk – peripateo, he loves that Greek word, live a lifestyle as children of light. You're going to stand out. To be very clear just like Jesus did on the sermon on the mount, for the fruit of light is found in all that is – here's some things – good, all that is right and all that is true. My focus is on I'm going to good this week, I'm want to do what's right this week and I'm want to be about upholding the truth this week. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. You need to ask the question between now and Thursday if Christ coming back, how can I live the first part of this week pleasing God to the maximum and take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. You want to keep your lamp burning as you wait for the return of Christ you better be focused on your sanctification. You ought to be thinking how you can shine brightly in a dark world and I know it's going to cost you. I know you're going to be a stand out and people are going to say, look at this person he's not in sync. The present are going to tell you you're not on the right side of history. I understand that, you'll be ridiculed and mocked by the media. That's going to happen but you're going to say that Christ is coming back. That's the ultimate vindication, I'm going to stand and shine brightly for the king. I'm going to keep my lamps burning.

Middle of verse 11 something shifts here. I know a lot of people like to say, well okay, I can do that. I can muster the gumption to say I will do the right thing when the world is not doing the right thing. But don't make me talk about the gospel with anybody. But now it says, listen don't take part in their unfruitful deeds of darkness but instead – here's the gulper, ready? Expose them. [gulp], I don't want to do that. I know it's shameful to even speak of the things they do in secret but they're doing those things and you need to expose that. When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible. Oh, I don't like that, the cockroaches don't like that. Don't turn the lights on, for anything that becomes visible is light, now we can see it for what it is. You need to let people see sin for what it is. It gets worse if you think that's just theoretical, third person it's not. This is second person and personal. Verse 14 middle of the verse, therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." See that's what's happened to you. Back up to verse 8, you were in darkness now you're light in the Lord. Christ shined on you, he changed you, you want to see that in other people that you interact with and rub shoulders with in your sphere of influence every week of your Christian life. That's the part people struggle with today, because everyone's fighting back a visceral reaction. A push back in our culture saying listen you want to believe things, just keep those beliefs in the pew and in the home, don't bring them out here in the market place. Don't be trying to share your message of salvation with people at work. We don't want to hear it in the marketplace. And the Bible is saying this, to shine your light is not just living before men so they can see your good works, it's holding out the message of life. It's being willing to talk about the reality that the way you're living your life is sinful and the most loving thing I can do is not fold and adopt your values. It's to say these values will not stand the test of the shining light of God's truth and one day it will be punished. Aww man, that's the turn or burn stuff. That's, you know, scorched earth evangelism, I don't like that. We just need to be lovingly clear about letting people know the problem they're in and telling them they've got to come to the place of repentance. Let you light shine, I can't help but see the analogy that are so strong in scripture. My life, my sanctification and my proclamation of the gospel of light. I've got to talk about it. Want to get ready for Christ coming? You better keep those lamps burning.

And then verse 36, back to our passage, Luke 12, be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Now I'm going to have my lamp on if it's nighttime. And in verse 38, just to jump ahead and grab that little phrase there, it might happen in the second or third watch of the night but how great it will be if people are ready even if it's in the middle of the night. Now I want to wait for the coming of Christ, I want to be excited about the coming of Christ, it is hard in a day when we can look at 2000 years of church history and he hasn't come back yet. What's with this? We talk more about death than the rapture. We talk more about our own demise if we're even honest about the brevity of life than we are about him breaking through the skies and taking his church home. We don't like talking about that because it hasn't happened and it sounds pie in the sky, it sounds fanciful, I don't know, I don't know if it going to happen. Listen I don't care how long he delays, his delay according to 2 Peter 3 is patience because he wants us to shine the light a little brighter in the neighborhood and in our work places. But we've got to be ready and we have to be alert and we have to be expecting it. And we have to be in a place where we have that palpable sense of anticipation that he can come back. Are you getting ready for Christ's arrival? Do you have that sense that it could happen at any time?



I use to work at a desk in our Christian collage in downtown Chicago and I worked at this desk and I took the nightshift which was a mistake. I thought it would be great I'd be able to study because I didn't want to work part of the nights a bunch of days I worked a couple days and I'd take two shifts and I'd work from 11 o'clock at night till 7 in the morning. Now as a college student you think I can do this and at 1 o'clock in the morning I thought I could do it, by 3 o'clock I knew this is impossible. Part of the issue with working the front desk of a dormitory in downtown Chicago is you're part, you know, narc for your fellow student who are coming in late and you're part security guard. Because there's a lot of people want to get into these places that shouldn't be there so you got to stay vigilant and awake. It was hard in the second and third watch of the night. That got the more and more difficult the more drowsy I got. And when I gave up on studying, you know, at 12:30 and now its 3, and I'm just thinking I can take a little nap here behind my desk. No, stay alert, stay awake. Expect it when you don't expect it. It ends with that. Verse 40, he's coming in an hour you don't expect. How can I be ready for something that's going to come when I don't expect it? Always expect it, that's the only way you can do it. And so in this passage we clearly have to be dressed, lamps burning like men who are waiting to open the door. And you know He's not coming on a long journey as this illustration here that Jesus uses might suggest according to James chapter 5, he's already at the door, he's been at the door for two thousand years. All he's got to do is step through it. It should affect the way we live. In that passage, James chapter 5 verse 9, even the level of complaining that comes out of my mouth ought to be a source of conviction for me if I grumble because I know the judge is standing right there at the door, he's just got to step through it. According to his promise – 2 Peter 3 – we're waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells verse 14. Therefore beloved since you are waiting for these things, be diligent to be found in him without spot, or blemish and at peace. Get ready for Christ's arrival. Stay dressed, keep your lamps burning.

Verse 37 and 38. How good it'll be for those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. That word awake translates elsewhere in the New Testament to be alert, to be vigilant, to be ready. So I'm ready, I'm alert, I'm awake. That's the picture here, I'm watching. Truly I say to you, he the master, who comes in with his entourage and all of his money and all of his donkeys and camels and all that stuff. He's going to come in and it almost becomes a comical illustration. He comes in and he says hand me that apron. What? He dresses himself to serve and he says, "Hey, servants so great to see you ready to serve me when I came in, you guys sit down. Let me fix you up some food." What? That's craziness. And he will come and serve them. And if he comes in the second watch or the third watch and finds them awake, how blessed are those servants. There's that word again, blessed, happy, how great it will be. Number 2 on your outline let's jot this down and think about it. We need to ponder the benefits for the prepared.

2. Ponder the Benefits for the Prepared

If you just took to heart the first part of this message, and say I'm going to live that way this week and he comes back this week. Here's what the Bible says, "How great it will be for you. How blessed you'll be." My wife one of her first jobs was working at Del Taco of all places. She's not here in this service so you can make fun of her for that if you want. But it was great for me as her boyfriend back in high school because I go to Del Taco all the time. Now she was a good worker, always been a good worker. And I think to myself, you know she's such a stand out employee, diligent, good Christian work ethic, when she was noticed for her good work, there was some shift manager there that said, "You know Carlynn you're doing such a great job" I don't know what he'd do give her a free soda, Del Taco free taco coupon. I don't know, not much. But then we get married and she starts working in these temp jobs, she's finishing her education up, and she starts working for some high dollar people here in Orange County. And now it's different because now when she's a stand out employee it's not like why don't you take an extra 5 minutes on your break. These are people of means. Now let's just extrapolate a little, she had some very rich people she worked for in these companies here in South Orange County. But let's just say she worked for Donald Bren. Do you know who that is? The Chairman of the Irvine Company, one of the riches billionaires in the world. Now, let's say Carlynn is a stand out employee there and Donald Bren walks in. I just noticed what a great servant you are to this company, I want to throw a party in your honor. I want you to sit back and I want to use my resources to bless you. Now that's not an extra 5 minutes for break and it ain't going to be a coupon for a taco. Donald Bren can make this one heck of a party. You understand that what we're saying is that you in your preparedness and your alertness and your anticipation of the return of Christ is going to make the CEO of the universe very happy and he's going to say, let me bless you now. Let me serve you now. You understand what a huge deal that is?

One passage I'd like to show you and I wish we could spend a lot of time there. Revelation chapter 21 and 22. This



is how it all ends. It ends with God dressing himself to serve you. Now that's the turn of the tables that is almost unthinkable but he says, "You serve me, now it's my time to serve you." I know there's a lot of prosperity gospel preachers that think that's suppose to happen now, we call that an over realized eschatology. The end times stuff they want it now. That's not what God promised, in this world, tribulation. In this world we're servants. In this world we're going to be ridiculed. But then when the kingdom comes, at the arrival of Christ, the one who can bless us beyond anything we can imagine is going to gird himself to serve. He's going to put on the apron and say, "Now let me make your life great." That's coming. Revelation chapter 21 and 22 tells us about it and I wish I could go through the whole passage and I can't. If you were at our Encore luncheon the other week I preached on this, and I don't know, I had some puritan sermon. I had like 15 points or something. I got no time for that but let me summarize what I told them across the parking lot.

Let me give you 3 sub-points here. Let me just give you the first few verses here let's start in verse 1 of Revelation 21. I saw a new heaven and a new – what's that next word? Earth. A new earth. Jot this down if you would, you're going to get a perfect home. A perfect home. You get a new planet, first heaven and first earth, they're gone. And there's no sea anymore. Aww, I wanted a beach house. Well, there's going to be plenty of water, but there's no sea. What's that? That maybe a poetic way and I wish I had time to prove this to you, of speaking of the curse. You go all the way back to Genesis 3 and the reiteration of the Genesis 6 there's something about the sea that reminds of God's judgment and here's the thing none of that, God judgment is no longer on the earth. What does that mean? I got the planet without the thorns. I got all the things that happen in a perfect environment without the dust without the thorns without the problems without the hassles without the sweat of your brow. I got a perfect place to live now. A perfect home. And I saw the holy city, now here's the center of this new earth. The New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

You spend a lot of money on those pictures at your wedding, to snap those pictures, why? Because that girl will never look better than that right there. I mean that's it. She is looking good that day and all her regalia of her nuptials she's coming down the aisle, sometimes I don't even recognize her. I get to be the pastor and watch as this girl comes down. I look at the guy often make sure he recognizes her, is that her? That's her. Stunningly beautiful walking out of a magazine, here she comes, flawless. The Bible says your new home and its new city is going to come out of heaven and God is going to serve you first of all with a perfect home. Here it is. One of the reasons you suburbanites a lot of you don't want to live in some down town big city. You don't want to move to Manhattan or Chicago or downtown LA. Oh it urban, I know it comes with that picture the perfect urban setting where there's not a single flaw. Here it comes. Place for you to live and community with people, it's perfect. A perfect home.

Drop down to verse 4. He'll wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, or crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. That's pretty personal now. I've got water going down my cheek here, let's wipe that away. No more crying. Hey death, the thing that makes us cry the most. No more of that. No more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. The former things have passed away. Now if I remove all those things, I better be in a brand new body because all those things my current body is subject to. Let's just make that now, not only do I have a perfect home, let's make this second observation we're going to have perfect health. That works maybe in Orange County, perfect health. You spend a lot of money trying to get that. You want to be in perfect health. You know what, you're going to, so much so that there will be nothing in your body that has anymore problems. There will be no pain in it, there will be no issues that make you cry or mourn, there will be no disease. There's nothing in your body now that will any longer cause you any problems. Matter fact all the things that were designed to be a certain way that are no longer that way in your body, speaking of those old wedding photos, when my kids say, "Who's that with Mom in the tux?" Thanks kids. I'm going to look like that again and even better. That will be the restoration of my DNA the way it's suppose to be. Here it is in perfection, flawless. Perfect home and now perfect health without any problems at all. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15, not only will it no longer be perishable it will be doxah. And that picture there in that passage is glory, beautiful. It'll be non-disease ridden, it will not be subject to death, it'll be beautiful. The next word is dunamis in Greek. The idea, energetic. I mean it'll be I'll never be tired. And then the last one speaks of the godliness of the body. One of the problems with our bodies is that their fallen and with fallen they have fallen appetites and no more any of that. You're not going to have that anymore. Wow, that's pretty good. Perfect health and I mean that in the most extreme way you can ever think about it.

Now verse 3, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold the dwelling place of God is with man." Where is God now? According to 1 Timothy chapter 6 he dwells in unapproachable light in a place called heaven. Christ is



seated at his right hand. Oh but he's omnipresent, now I understand that but the focalized presence of God in his glory and majesty is not here. Jesus came I understand that, God with us, Emanuel, he came here and then he left. Well he sent his Spirit. He did send his Spirit. So that we wouldn't be orphans but he dwells there. And the glory and majesty and greatness of God is there. Now it comes here, the dwelling place of God is with man. We could theologially debate this but I believe in the unmitigated glory of the second person of the godhead. We'll have Christ the God-man dwelling in all of his glory like in the transfiguration, there it will be in perfection the dwelling of God is with man, he will dwell with them, you can see the emphasis here like we didn't get it, no, no, he'll be with them. And they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

Drop down to verse 5, the one seated on that throne is going to say, "Behold, I'm making all things new" Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Verse 6, and he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment." That's a lot to boil down into one phrase but let's put it this way I got a perfect home, I got perfect health. Let's put it this way, I'll be perfectly happy. Why? Because all of the blessings of God will draw near to me. It's the opposite of hell. You understand what hell is? Hell starts with a passive punishment which is removed from the presence of God and the glory of his power. That's a problem when God leaves and takes all of his goodies with him. Now he comes near to us and serves us and all of his blessings and gifts come with him. Wow, perfect home, perfect health, perfectly happy. More can be said but that's worth getting excited about and that could start Tuesday. That could start before you eat dinner tonight. You should be praying that it starts before lunch today. You ought to be anticipating it, you ought to be expecting it, you ought to have your loins girded up, your robe into running shorts and your lamp burning, your sandals on and your staff in your hand and you're ready to leave this place because the next place is coming and it's going to be great. You ought to ponder that regularly.

Verse 39, Luke chapter 12, but know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, [sound effect] na na na na, this was a good sermon now we're talking about thieves. I thought this was about the master coming back putting on his apron saying, "How can I serve you?" and now you're comparing the master to a thief? Yeah it gets negative here, I'm sorry. Now the analogy is listen it's like the master can come back at anytime, it's like the thief. You never know when the thief is coming. If you knew when he was coming, well then you'd protect your house. You wouldn't let your house be broken into. You'd be ready with your shotgun. But you know what, Christ is coming back and for some it will be like a thief you must be ready. The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. We've instantly got a chill running up our spine because we've gone from this great picture, look how great it will be if you're ready and now what if you're not ready? He'll come and it'll be like a thief. I told you he'll either come as your savior, your king and your rewarder or he'll come as your judge, your jury and your executioner. If you're not ready that's the latter. The Bible is very clear on this. If we're not ready we ought to be afraid because your time could be up right now. And just like we heard in the baptismal tank this morning is perfect. I mean this is what I'm preaching about right now. And that is you cannot delay your preparation. Number 3, let's put it down that way, never delay your preparation.

3. Never Delay Your Preparation

You better be ready for the return of Christ today. Today. You better be dressed in the righteousness of Christ today, because he'll come like a thief and that's never a good thing. There are over 32,000 property crimes in Orange County every year. Have you ever been the victim of theft? Frown at me if you've been the victim of theft before. It started with me, I got my car in high school, 16 years old, living in Long Beach. I parked my car so proud; I would just look out the window of the classes I had that face that direction. I just shine my car, you know how teenage 16 year old guys, there it is, love my car. After school I walk out one day and the door is cracked open. I don't remember doing that. Der, no I didn't, my car was ransacked. All the stuff pried out, electronics ripped out. Thanks Long Beach thieves. I wasn't happy. Then I go to college by this time I had a better car and a better stereo and I'm parking outside the dorm at the University of Arizona and I walk out one morning. Hey, I don't remember leaving my door open. Der, that one cleaned out. Don't like that. Now, had I had a note when I parked the car that was there in the parking space saying whoever parks here will be ripped off at 2:30 this morning. Well, then I'd be ready. I wouldn't let it happen. There are a lot of people that think that the return of Christ will be a good thing and it'll be a bad thing. There will be that feeling of, "Oh, No" That feeling of I was just violated. You'll feel that way. I'll give you two passages on the back of the worksheet, on the first question for you to discuss in your Home Fellowship Groups this week and I hope you'll get in small groups and discuss these questions. And the first two passages I make you look up are very similar. They're corresponding passages, one from the Old Testament in Amos and one



from the New Testament in Matthew and it makes us think about the fact that so many people are anticipating the arrival of Christ they're reveling in the second point of this sermon, but for them it will not be good news. They think it's going to be good news but it will not be good news. That is the ultimate frustration to think it'll be great when God gets here and when he shows up it'll be a nightmare. You do understand that's what happens in the book of Revelation. We just read chapters 21 and we alluded to at least in my own thinking chapter 22, those great two chapters of how good it'll be when God serves his people. But before that how did it work out in chapter 19? You know the book of Revelation?

Chapter 18 he says one last time to the world, the kingdom of the world, he says, "Come out from her my people. Come out and be separate. Don't be like them lest you share in her plagues." and then in chapter 19 battle of Armageddon. God judges people. God shows up, as my old pastor use to say, and he's real mad and it doesn't work out well for people. You better make sure you're on the right side of this and you better make sure today. Paul quoted a passage from Isaiah to the Corinthians. It says, "In a favorable time I responded to you in a day of salvation I came and I answered you." And he says look at the Old Testament when God was so gracious to people and their penitent heart to respond with salvation. And then he turns to the Corinthians and he says, "Today is the day of salvation. Today is that favorable time." That clock is clicking down and the buzzer is going to go off or should I say the trumpet is going to sound and when that happens it is over for your opportunities. This sounds like a sermon from your grandpa's church? Praise God, that's awesome. We use to preach this from the pulpits in America. Get right with God, you never know that door of mercy is going to close. Be ready, are you ready to meet your maker? If that sounds like sandwich board theology and too much of doom and gloom for you, too much pressure, don't want to scare people into the kingdom? Well then you better find a new religion because it's all over the pages of Christianity. He's coming back, are you ready? Are you ready today? Don't delay your repentance.

Well, I'm a Christian Mike, I know I am. I'm bearing fruit, I see it, I responded biblically. Fantastic. Jot this reference down if you would, then it's time for us to get to work, whatever good you intended to do in your Christian life? Now is the time to do it. John chapter 9 verse 4, Jesus himself said this. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is still day for the night is coming when no one can work. Now Jesus of course had no fear of the wrath of God but you know what he did concern himself with? Times running out, I better do all the work he's called me to do. How about you? Are you putting off the good thing that you're suppose to do? Even the call this morning from Pastor Elliot for you to get baptized if you haven't been, that would surely be a good thing to do. It would be good for you to sign up for the next baptism if you have not been obedient in responding to that simple call for you to express your baptism into Christ with baptism into water. That would be a great thing. Ahh, I'll get around to that. Any good that you intend to do for the Lord, you better do it now. As James says, to anyone who knows the right thing and doesn't do it that's sin. Don't put it off.

Romans chapter 13 verse 11 and 12, Paul writes the Romans and says, "You know the time is now for you to awake from your sleep." He's talking to Christians. "For salvation is nearer to us now than when it was when we first believed." That's a statement we can say to all of us in every generation. And right now we're closer to seeing Christ today than when you first became a Christian. Do you know that? We're running out of time. The night is far gone, we're well into the night and the day is at hand. And let us – what? – cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. You picture someone in your future who's more godly, you picture someone in your future who's more giving, you picture someone in your future who grows in Christ and is more compassionate and more engaged in ministry and more focused on kingdom priorities and more evangelistic. You picture that person? Let's be that person now, because the night is coming when no one can work. The trumpet is going to sound and your opportunity to serve him is going to be gone. Never delay your preparation, never.

Since 1440 BC the Israelites in the great feast at Passover have been taking their robes and tucking it into their belts and putting on their walking shoes and putting a staff in their hand and eating their meal in haste, commemorating the exit from Egypt. The first person to do that was Moses himself and it commemorated exactly what Moses was leading those people to do in his generation and the New Testament commentates on it this way. Hebrews 11:24, by faith Moses, when he had grown up, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Even before they physically left he had already left in his own heart. How about you? Not going to be called a part of this world. I'm just passing through. This earth is not my home. It's going to cost and it was choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. You can fit in and compromise this week and it'll be more pleasurable for you than it will for the Christians in this room that are deciding to stand with Christ and let their light shine, proclaiming a message of light. It'll go better for you this week, enjoy that, or don't. Stand with



Moses and say I'd rather be counted with the people of God and be mistreated than to have all those things because they don't last. He considered the reproach of Christ, there's an anachronistic statement, if it was 1400 years before Christ would show up, I understand that, but he understood that to stand with God, I'm ready to stand with God just like Christ stood with God and said to his Father, "I'm willing, let this cup pass, but if not, your will not mine." He was ready to stand with the reproach of Christ rather than to enjoy the treasures of Egypt for he was looking forward to his reward. The first five words of the next verse, by faith he left Egypt. One day we're going to leave. The day after we leave we're going to look back at this life, it's as sure as any promise God has ever made, he spent more time, spilled more ink on the second coming than the first coming. This is a surety, it is coming, and the day after it happens, I just wonder if you'll look back at the weeks and months prior to that and think, you know what, I was living with my heart in the kingdom. My focus clear, my heart was set on things above not on things of earth. I know you got to pay your mortgage, I know you got to do that thing at work; I realize we got issues here to save for and things to build and stuff to do. But as it says in 1 Corinthians 7, don't put your heart there. For where your heart is your treasure is going to be, and where your treasure is where your heart is going to be. What does it profit a man, Jesus said, to gain the whole world - we studied this in Luke 9 - and forfeit his soul. That's the ultimate preparation. How about the second tier preparation? "Are you ashamed of me and my words?" he said. The Son of Man is going to be ashamed of you, when he comes in his glory and the glory of his Father and of the holy angels. He's coming, I hope you're ready. If not, let's get ready right now. Pray with me please.

God, there are people here that need to repent of their sins and put their trust in you the way these came today, and gave their testimonies have done. They need to respond with a real contrite heart owning their sin. It's not hey we're all sinners I understand that, it's no, I'm a sinner. I need to repent of my sin. I need to confess it for what it is. I need to turn to the only solution, the only payment for my sin, the person and the finished work of Jesus Christ. For those in the room that need to do that, I pray you drag some of them right now, across the line, as C.S. Lewis said, he said I was the one God had to drag, kicking and screaming into Christianity and for some that's how it's going to feel. But pull them across the line this morning. Let them willingly say that it's time for me with all my mental reservations all the costly price tags that hang off this that my imagination can sketch out, I'm ready to walk across that line. And God for those that are already there, for those of us making decisions this week about our lives, remind us please of Romans chapter 8 verse 18. That our problems our suffering our persecution our purchases our priorities all of these things are not worth comparing to the glory that's to be revealed to us. So help us not to make such a big deal about the things that we cry about, the things we rejoice about, the things we buy, the relationships we have. Let us realize that life does not consist of these things here. And then fan into flame a real anticipation for the return of Christ. One day it'll happen and every person hearing my words right now will be on the other side of that. We will sit there a day afterwards and I pray that everyone who hears my voice right now will be embraced and accepted in the kingdom because you were not their judge, their jury and their executioner; you are instead their king, their savior and their rewarder. And then God I pray that we be able to look back without shame at the final months, weeks of our Christian life here on earth. Prepare us; make us resolute to follow you this week, gladly bearing the reproach of Christ, valuing that far more than all the treasures of America. In Jesus Name, Amen.