

Greenhills Community Church, Presbyterian

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Be Prepared

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Matthew 24:36-44

The Day and Hour Unknown

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

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

This passage tells us that the hour of Christ’s Second Coming is known by God and God alone. There have been people trying to predict this timing all through history. It is our job not to speculate, but simply to be prepared, to not become so immersed in things of the world that we forget God and forget that everything is in God’s hands. The coming of Christ will be a time of separation and of judgement, when Jesus Christ will gather to Himself all who are His own. Therefore, we’re told to be watchful. Verse 37 compares this time with the time of Noah when people had been going about their daily lives before the waters came. One difference is that God had told Noah to build the ark and Noah knew the waters were coming. Only God knows when Jesus will return, and we are simply instructed to be prepared.

There are other verses also in Matthew instructing us to be awake and prepared for Christ’s second coming. The parable of the ten virgins who were preparing to meet the bridegroom to join in the wedding banquet. Five of them took extra oil for their lamps for the unknown length of time to wait, the other five took no extra oil. The five who were prepared were allowed into the wedding banquet, the five who had to go away and buy more oil were afterward told at the door to the banquet: “I don’t know you.”

Also, in Matthew we learn about the Sheep and the Goats. That the Son of Man will sit on His throne in heavenly glory, all the nations will be gathered together, and Christ will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Those on His right will receive their inheritance of eternal life because they’d followed Christ’s commandments to take care of the least of their brothers as Christ had done. Those on His left, had not taken care of the least of their brothers so those went away to eternal punishment.

These verses in Matthew are some of a number of passages throughout scripture instructing us to be ready for the coming of Christ in final judgement. For example:

Luke 12:35-40; "Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning..."

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; "for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

James 5:7-11; scripture begins with analogy of the farmer preparing and waiting for the land to yield its valuable crop and we're told: "be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near...The Judge is standing at the door!"

2 Peter 3:10; "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

Revelations 3:3; "...if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."

Revelations 16:15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake...."

An aspect of "staying awake" is keeping God in your life every day. Some years ago, Tom Shuman had shared "**Ten Steps to God**" by Herb Miller with this congregation, a list of scripture to read to prepare for prayer. I have been using it since I received it, I even wrote out all the scripture verses as an exercise some time ago. I have some copies of it available for anyone who is interested, but the steps read:

Most people feel they should pray, but few know how. The following steps, if used fifteen minutes daily, will enable you to experience God's peace, joy, and power in a way you have never known before.

As you begin this adventure, remember that prayer is an experience, not an idea. In some ways, prayer is like riding a bicycle. You only learn by doing it, never by thinking about doing it.

Commit yourself to methodically following these ten steps for fourteen consecutive days. Most people report that they do not as fully experience God's presence during their first three or four days as they do after several days of practice. Persist in your reaching out to God, and he will come to you. Like falling in love, the experience of God's presence is impossible to define. But when it happens, you will understand why great Christian leaders of every century have so enthusiastically recommended and practiced prayer. And you will understand what Jeremiah meant when he said, "You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart..." (Jeremiah 29:13)

1. In preparation, set aside fifteen minutes in a location where you can be physically relaxed and there is little likelihood of interruption. Read one or two chapters from the Bible, listening for what God says to you. This helps to erase distracting thoughts from the blackboard of your mind. The following passages are especially helpful in preparing for prayer: John 14, Psalm 23, Matthew 5:1-12, Romans 8:35-39, 1 Corinthians 13, Psalm 91, Matthew 6, John 3:1-17, Psalm 46, Romans 12, John 15, Psalm 27, Psalm 103,

Psalm 121, Isaiah 55, Luke 15, Psalm 84, John 1:1-18, Psalm 90, Psalm 19, 1 John 4:7-21, Psalm 139, Luke 24, Psalm 130, Luke 18:1-17.

2. Close your eyes and give thanks for three personal blessings of which you are especially conscious today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from a sense of your own self-sufficiency.

3. Ask God to help three other persons who you feel need his help today. Ask God to help your pastor(s). This helps you move toward God by moving away from self-centeredness.

4. Ask God to forgive your mistakes and sins and give you the strength to forgive others.

5. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like. Ask God to give that person insights into his/her personal problems and that God will give you the power to let his love flow through you to him/her.

6. Ask that you will be sensitive to the needs of one person today with whom God may want you to share his love in word or deed.

7. Ask for insights into your personal problems.

8. Ask for help in achieving your personal goals.

9. Ask that God will tell you the most important thing you need to do today in order to “seek first his kingdom.” (Matthew 6:33a)

10. Conclude by listening intently for three minutes to what God may say to you.

If God has called, you to do something be sure to do it. One of our own church members told me that, a number of years ago, and I’ve never forgotten it. One of the worst temptations is to put duty or work off until tomorrow.

To God be the Glory, Praise the Lord!