

**THE RADICAL RABBI:
“A RADICAL PREPARATION”
(Luke 12:35-39)**

Description: *Jesus talks to his disciples and the crowd about being prepared for his eventual return, and also about their responsibilities as that time approaches.*

INTRODUCTION

About a month ago, I mentioned that, while Christ was teaching his disciples and the crowd during his ministry, his words were also meant for the presence that would be in place following his return to heaven: meaning, the church. So, by way of reminder, as his church, we need to view his teachings in the context of their foundation for how we do church today. We can never forget that, as a community of Christians that have come together under the guidance and direction of his Holy Spirit, as Paul said it so well, ***We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal [to the world] through us — Paul, II Corinthians 5:20a.*** In other words, we are how Jesus Christ is both present and presented in our world today.

So that’s why we talked at that time about three pillars, three foundational cornerstones, that needed to be in place for this or any church to be truly representative of the Lord: (1) the centrality of the Bible, of literally sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to and studying the word of God (2) the centrality of prayer to the God of that word, and (3) the centrality of obedience to God through that word. All three of those pillars connect us to our Heavenly Father through his Son; all three place us directly into his presence. And we also mentioned at that time that all three of those pillars work together to support the most core value of the church that begins with Jesus himself; as Peter so memorably said: ***“[Jesus of Nazareth] is the Messiah [the Christ], the Son of the living God” — Matthew 16:16.***

So what other pieces have we seen over the last month that have added to our foundation if in fact we are correctly representing Jesus Christ as his church? Well, we have seen that Jesus Christ, “the Son of the living God” as Peter said, is the greatest power in this universe — greater than any efforts of man, and greater than any efforts of Satan — making Jesus Christ the greatest cornerstone of all time. And experiencing Jesus through God’s word, experiencing Jesus through prayer, and experiencing Jesus through obedience all lead us to directly

experiencing that cornerstone — the insurmountable power of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. And as his ambassadors, we who are his church can claim that same power. Christ himself confirmed that kind of power; because he was in fact the Messiah, and because the church was going to be built upon that foundational rock that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, ***“the gates of Hades will not overcome it” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18b.***

We also saw the great need of our first pillar — sitting at the feet of Jesus, hearing and studying God’s word — as we talked about both the prevalence and danger of hypocrisy, meaning both false teachings and false lifestyles. The only way to impact our world for Jesus Christ is to represent the truth of Jesus Christ — in what we say and in how we live — also meaning that Jesus Christ is the filter through which all teachings are judged.

And then we saw the incredible blessings of belonging to One so powerful and true as Jesus Christ. We can trust him to provide for our needs. We can trust him in moving through this life and its issues here on earth. And we can trust him that we have a secure promise of eternity with him in heaven. And as a result, we can live with the excitement and joy and promise of heaven even now; as Paul reminds us: ***[O]ur citizenship is in heaven — Paul, Philippians 3:20a.*** Our eternity is sure if Jesus dwells in our hearts and in our lives. And it is actually expanding on that idea of heaven and its place in our moment-to-moment attitudes and actions in this world that is going to be front and center in our time together today. So as we begin that time, **let’s come together in a moment of prayer.**

TEXT

Jesus is still in full-on teaching mode, just as we’ve seen him over the last few weeks. So he continues his time with his disciples and the surrounding crowd, starting out today by creating an image that most, if not all, of everybody listening that day would have immediately recognized: ***“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:35-38.***

The imagery that Jesus brings to mind is that of Jewish weddings, which were traditionally performed and celebrated at night. Now while the bridegroom would be involved in the wedding ceremony with his bride, his servants would have been

back at his house, waiting for his arrival. Now obviously the bridegroom would not want to be kept waiting at the door with his new wife while the servants scurried about in the panic of a last-minute scramble to get ready for his arrival. So, to avoid that, faithful servants would make sure that they were ready to greet and attend to their master at a moment's notice, the moment he arrived. In fact, that is the whole point that Jesus is communicating — that his followers are to be alert, they are to be ready for their master's coming. They are not — repeat, not — to be caught by surprise.

Therefore the faithful servants maintain readiness at every moment, for the one thing they do not know is when their master will arrive. There will certainly be a countdown to his arrival — simply not a countdown of which the servants will be aware. So the simple counter to that unknown: Always be alert! Always be ready! And it was not a matter of what was convenient for the servants. It was whenever the master was ready to come. But then what joy both master and servants will share as everybody realizes they were fully prepared for this moment — his servants totally ready to treat his bride as a queen and himself as a king.

But then check out what happens in this particular story: The bridegroom, upon seeing the faithfulness of his servants, the joyful readiness with which they have welcomed him, begins to serve his servants! Whoa; how did that happen? More important, what is Jesus telling us?

Jesus is telling us that, unbelievable as it may seem, upon seeing his servants, his church, joyfully ready and waiting for his return, he will reward us for that kind of faithfulness — faithfulness to his word, faithfulness to his promises. And as a result of his joy in that moment, he will minister to us! And what makes that even more amazing is that it is Christ's Holy Spirit that has graciously enabled us to do all that makes our Master happy. It is the Holy Spirit that makes us faithful servants. And still, Jesus will minister to us. Wow!

Then Jesus continues: ***“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:39-40.***

It's almost cartoon funny, but for all the things I don't know — which is a whole lot — one of the things I do know is that Rule #1 for a thief is: Don't announce your intentions. It's likely people may prepare to get in your way. And getting caught for your efforts is never the result thieves are looking for.

The reality is, thieves hit when and where least expected. And the NT uses that imagery of the unexpected thief several times to convey two essentials of Christ's return: (1) It's not going to be announced, and (2) it's not going to be expected — by anybody. And the Bible must be serious about it: Paul (I Thessalonians 5:1-2), Peter (II Peter 3:3-4, 10) and John (Revelation 3:2-3, 16:15) all say the same thing: that Christ is going to come “like a thief.”

Peter interjects a question of clarification for Jesus, as Jesus continues: *Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions” — Luke 12:41-44.*

Peter wants to know who exactly Jesus is talking to. So, as he so often did, Jesus answers a question with a question, suggesting that these words are most especially for the apostles, as they will be the “managers” in the coming church. As such, they will have special responsibility to ensure that the Master's will is being carried out — in this case, ensuring that those under their care are being properly fed.

And yet he simultaneously speaks to his expectations of what all we are to be doing while we are waiting. He expects us, that is, the church, to be working, to continue to be fulfilling the words of the apostle Paul to the Ephesian church: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do — Paul, Ephesians 2:10.* In other words, the church is to work until God says, “OK; work's done; time to go home.” The church is to remain faithful to whatever work God has it doing, with all the gifts which God has so graciously given, and is to continue in that work for as long as God grants it. Since the timing of our Master's return is unknown, it is the Master's work that should maintain our undivided attention. Remember Christ's words: *“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” — Jesus Christ, John 15:8.* The task is to continue to be fruitful.

And then Jesus paints a picture of a very contrary response to waiting on our Master: *“But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.*

He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:45-46.

The first thing we hear Jesus saying is that there will be a definite interval of time before Christ’s return, during which, as we’ve seen, his servants are expected to keep working. In contrast to the faithful and wise manager, this particular servant gets tired of waiting for the arrival of his master, and instead abandons his responsibilities to live his life on his own terms, indulging in whatever he sees fit to do.

And then this becomes a very dark picture as this particular servant beats the other servants, and eats and drinks to his heart’s content, even getting drunk. We get a picture of what this might look like in the real world from the warning that Paul shared with the elders of the Ephesian church: ***“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” — Paul, Acts 20:28-31a.*** These unfaithful managers would ultimately be cut off from the church only to be included with other unbelievers in judgment.

These words could also arguably but rightly be applied to the religious leaders in place at the very time Christ is sharing these words. Instead of being the shepherds God intended them to be, they went off on their own, enriching themselves, living however they wanted, and doing nothing to relieve the burden of the people as they tried to understand God through the maze of all the “traditions of the elders.” They similarly distorted God’s truth merely to satisfy their own selfish demands. It is one reason Jesus so singularly attacked them: They had the truth and hid it.

And then Jesus presents a principle of divine judgment: ***“The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:47-48.*** Now, this should have been nothing new to a Jewish audience. God had spelled out different levels of justice for intentional versus unintentional sins ever since Israel’s days in the wilderness. And David wrote so eloquently about the personal side of this issue. After describing God’s commands as: ***The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous — David, Psalm 19:9b,*** he seeks God’s

graciousness in light of both levels of failure — intentional and unintentional: ***[W]ho can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression — David, Psalm 19:12-13.***

What is clear beyond question is that sin requires judgment. For those who know their master's will and consciously, intentionally go against that will, judgment will be severe. But even for those who do so unintentionally, there will still be judgment. There is always personal responsibility for sin. Even in the case of an unintentional error, it is the servant's business to make every effort to know his master's will. And when it comes to God, his existence, his sovereign rule, and the imprint of his law in our conscience senses of right and wrong, Paul made very clear: ***The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse — Paul, Romans 1:18-20.*** So particularly for the religious leaders in place at that time, those having the clearest direct access to God's word, their punishment would be appropriately severe. They knew the most — and did nothing with it!

And then Jesus shares his next words: ***“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:49-50.***

Christ's mission on earth was initially to be the Savior of the world; as he said in John's gospel: ***“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” — Jesus Christ, John 3:17.*** However, his bringing God's salvation to the world necessarily also brings eventual judgment to all those who do not surrender to that salvation. Eventually the entire world would be purified — both the planet and its inhabitants — by the fire of Christ's life, including, of course, God's chosen people of Israel. He is looking ahead to when his Father's victory over sin, death and the power of the devil is finally and completely won. But until then, there is a baptism to undergo — meaning the entirety of his suffering and death — and, due to his commitment of complete obedience to his Father's will and his Father's timing, the ultimate victorious outcome of his purifying death and resurrection must wait. But don't forget to look at the picture: This fire, and everything that results, is coming from a perfect heart of love.

And then Jesus continues: ***“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:51-53.***

Jesus said this so clearly in Matthew’s gospel: ***“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:34.*** And because Jesus is the only way to peace with God — said so clearly by him (John 14:6), Peter (Acts 4:12) and Paul (I Timothy 2:5), those unwilling to believe will instead be driven by any doctrinal statement that offers anything but that one and only way. Under those circumstances, it should come as no surprise that families and friends have separated over the truth that is Jesus Christ for over 2,000 years now — a reality he certainly knew from the initial response to him that even extended to his own brothers and hometown. Bottom line: There is a cost to the gospel; there is a cost to being a follower of Jesus Christ, which may mean the loss of relationships with family or friends, and maybe even beyond that. When it comes to how the world views Christians, maybe Peter said it best in his first letter when he referred to his brothers and sisters in Christ as ***aliens and strangers — I Peter 2:11a (NASB1995).*** We are literally resident foreigners in this world; this place is not our home. But neither can we expect to be welcomed by people driven to oppose the idea that there is only one way to peace with God. People sold out to Jesus Christ do not create peace with people who are not.

And then Jesus returns his comments to the crowd that has remained there to listen to him. ***He said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?” — Luke 12:54-56.***

Certainly in our day and age, we are no strangers to the meteorologists on the evening news who tell us what we can likely expect in the weather from day to day, often extending that forecast out a week, and sometimes even more. But there is something so much more important to be looking for — not the arrival of a cold front or a thunderstorm. It is the arrival of Jesus Christ that should be demanding our attention. It is prophesied in the scriptures; it is going to happen.

Which is the point of what Jesus is saying here. The arrival of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was standing right in front of them — in their present time. How is it that nobody seemed able to understand and interpret what the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth meant. That is the question with which he is challenging them. “What does it mean that the presence of God himself is standing right in front of you?”

And then Jesus ends with a very common-sense parable: ***“Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny” — Luke 12:57-59.***

An unfortunately common practice at this time and place in history was imprisonment for debt. A person would be dependent on others to come up with the necessary funds; if sent to prison, you could not be released until full satisfaction of the debt had occurred. Christ is implying a question: If you were on the way to debtors prison, wouldn’t you do everything available to you to make it right, to be reconciled instead of imprisoned? Apply that to seeking reconciliation with God to avoid the eternal, unpayable indebtedness of hell. Wouldn’t that outcome make you do anything and everything to make reconciliation with God your deepest desire?

APPLICATION

Despite the length of text, this is a relatively simple story. We have a master — Jesus of Nazareth. He is coming back; that much is sure — we just don’t know when. But he has two expectations in the meantime: (1) that he would find us ready when he comes, and (2) that while we are waiting, he would find us fully engaged in his work. Jesus has great expectations of us. Why? We live in a time and a place where we have been given much — access to the Scriptures, biblical resources almost without end, all in a nation where, at least at the moment, we are free to practice all the aspects of our faith. Therefore, with all that given to us, much will be required of us. We have been given much because he expects us to do much. But while we engage in his work, we shouldn’t be surprised by hostility to his message or even his name. Jesus told us that would be the case and, in fact, he experienced that hostility himself. And we are also challenged to understand the times in which we live — times of war and rumors of war, times of so many different kinds of division, times of drought and famine, times of disease, times of people only hearing what they want to hear, times of ***those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for***

sweet and sweet for bitter — Isaiah 5:20, times of living only for the moment (just like in the days of Noah) and not seeing the signs of what is about to happen.

CONCLUSION

As we close, a necessary story: You ever hear of a guy named Penn Jillette? He was actually one half — the larger, talking half — of the magician performance duo of “Penn and Teller.” They were magicians known all over the world; they even had a show called “Fool Us” where magicians would come on specifically to try and get them to ask, “How did you do that?” Now you should also know that Penn Jillette is a loud and proud atheist. That must be clearly understood for this story to have any impact.

A few years ago, someone came to talk to him after one of his magic shows. He said the guy was about his age and had even participated in one of the acts as an audience member. The man complimented Jillette on the show, then said, “I brought this for you.” The man held up a small book. It was a New Testament with the Psalms, something that could fit in a person’s pocket. “I wrote in the front of it,” the man said, “and I wanted you to have this.” The man explained he was a businessman and not crazy.

Jillette, moved by the man’s gesture, recalled: “He was kind, and nice, and sane, and looked me in the eyes, and talked to me, and then gave me this Bible.”

He then said this: “I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”

So what’s this all means? While I was home this past week, I saw a cat run out into the road and get killed. The sad thing was that it would have been safe had it kept running. But it stopped in the middle of the road, not sure where to go. And as it kept darting back and forth, it darted one time too many and got hit. But we know, we know, which way to turn. And praise God, because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we can know both our present — in his hands — and our future — in his home. And we know the alternative from which we have been saved: An eternity of separation from God in hell. So, that said, what is the work to which our Master expects his servants to be continually doing? This is the mandate the Scripture gives us: We are to bring good news, proclaim peace and

salvation, tell the world that “Our God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7). Incidentally, that is not from the NT. Those are the words of Isaiah 52:7. But that idea obviously is front and center for the church that Jesus was building and proclaiming:

- 1) We are to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Trinity, and teaching them Christ’s commands (Matthew 28:18-20).
- 2) We are to “go to all, preach to every” (Mark 16:15).
- 3) We are to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins — exactly what we have witnessed in ourselves (Luke 24:47-48).
- 4) We are to be Christ’s witnesses wherever we are, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). According to Paul, we have been given power, not fear. How can we let “awkward” get in the way of eternal destinations? You wanna guess what Christ thinks of us letting “awkward” get in the way of doing his work?

As the apostle Paul was sharing with the church in Rome, he wrote this: *[F]or, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” — Paul, Romans 10:13-14 (quoting Joel 2:32).*

Are we doing that task? Are we as servants busy with the work our Master has commanded us to be doing? When was the last time we shared the “good news” of Jesus Christ with somebody, with somebody outside of church? When was the last time we talked with a neighbor, a friend, a family member, a co-worker — anybody — about their absolute need for salvation? When the last time we gave away a tract, a testament, a Bible? That’s our task; that’s our work while waiting for our Master. When he returns, is that the work he will find us doing? Let’s pray!