

Prepared and Ready
Matthew 25:13

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We begin today with a conversation Jesus had with his disciples shortly before his arrest.

Matt. 26:31-35, "Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." 33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." 34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples."

Of course, what Jesus says would happen, did happen. All the disciples forsook Jesus and when the pressure got on, **Peter** denied him.

Now go with me to Acts 3 where Peter & John had healed lame man at Gate Beautiful. Incident happened on their way to prayer—on their way to prayer—on their way to prayer. That was their lifestyle. The healing stirred up a crowd and Peter preached Jesus. All of this upset the religious rulers and they & arrested Peter and John.

Acts 4:5-14 "And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it."

I read those two passages to show a CONTRAST:

In the Matthew text Peter *thought* he was prepared for what was coming.

In the Acts text Peter *was* prepared.

What was the difference? The difference is found in Acts 2 where Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, Acts 4:8 points that out that crucial difference: "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...*" Without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit the story would have been much different. In Matt. 26:33 Peter had said to Jesus, "*Even if all are made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble.*" Was Peter sincere? I'm sure he was. But he was relying on his own strength to stand up for Jesus; he was thinking wrong about how that could happen. Peter was a man's man. In the natural, he would have taken on anybody. But he overlooked the spiritual dynamics that would be in play. It's seldom a sunny day when a person has to make a stand like that. There was a big difference between Peter thinking he was ready and really being

ready. My subject this morning is: Prepared & Ready. Are you prepared and ready for what you will be called upon to do tomorrow?

When **David** walked into the camp of Israel in 1 Samuel 17, he was ready for the opportunity God had arranged for him. There were hundreds of Israelite soldiers there that had the same opportunity as he did. Anyone of them could have volunteered to fight Goliath. None did; because none were ready for the fight.

On the surface, they looked more ready than David. They had spears, and swords, and armor. They had been through Saul's training as a soldier. In contrast, David walks in with shepherd's cloths on and a bag of food. He didn't even look like a warrior—a young, ruddy-faced kid.

David's preparations had occurred at a deep level in his heart. He had not been working on outward appearances. He had not done a lot of the physical things that you would think a warrior should do in order to win a battle against a giant. God Himself had designed David's boot camp experience. David had willingly received the preparations God offered him. What were some of the preparations David had gone through?

1) Submission.

David had not really been treated right by his father, Jesse. Normally the baby of the family would be the one pampered the most. But that is not the case here. Jesse was focused on the older sons and their potential.¹ When the Prophet Samuel came to his house, all the sons got in on the event except the youngest, David. Instead David was left out in the field tending the sheep. You have to understand, Samuel's visit was the most exciting event the whole town had ever experienced, let alone the house of Jesse. It's like Dad taking all the kids to the circus or the concert, except you. Yet there is not even a trace of resentment in David's heart toward his family. He submits himself to his father's wishes and watches the sheep.

2) Humility.

After his anointing by Samuel, David went back to his duties with the sheep. Later, King Saul needed a musician and David was invited to come to the palace and minister to the king: another opportunity that he was prepared for. There David's music brought peace to the troubled King. So David would alternate between his duties on the hillside with the sheep and his duties in the palace with the king. He was faithful in both assignments. The quality that stands out to me is the way he seemed to move back and forth with such ease. He did not become self-important because of his place in the palace. He does not seem to resent the very lowly work of shepherding either. Whatever needed to be done he did it with grace. Eccl 9:10 says, "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might...*"² It might not be the job you would choose; but put yourself into it and do the best you can anyway. Joseph worked hard as a prisoner and one day became ruler in Egypt. David was a shepherd boy who became king. When the time is right, God can turn it all around for you.

3) Worship.

David got a lot of time sitting alone on the hillside watching the sheep. He communed with God in prayer. He worshipped God on his stringed instrument. All that time he is

¹ When Samuel saw Eliab, David's oldest brother, his immediate reaction was, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!" (1 Sam 16:6). No doubt Jesse was seeing him in a similar way.

² All Scripture quotes in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

getting to know the Lord and developing a keen ability to hear His voice. Little did he know he was being equipped to minister in the king's palace. It was not just his playing skill that brought peace and relief to King Saul, it was the anointing that was nurtured as he spent that time with God. Jesus said, *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* (Matt 6:5-6). That's exactly what happened to David. He was not practicing on the hillside with an eye toward being in the limelight. He was simply enjoying his relationship with God. But the development of that relationship was the foundation for everything else God had in mind for his life. Do you have time for God when nobody is looking? Will you spend time with God to simply commune with Him—no other agenda, no ulterior motive--just you and God loving one another?

I'm talking this morning about how God will prepare you for tomorrow. His priority will always be your heart condition. *"Above all else,"* Prov 4:23 say, *"guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"* (NIV). Everything else flows from that. David was a great musician, he was a mighty warrior, and he was an effective king. But none of that would have been true had he not first and foremost been a man after God's own heart. Our society puts a lot of emphasis on information and skill training; God puts the emphasis on heart condition. Skills can be learned; but if the heart is wrong, the skills can actually be detrimental. Goliath was skilled in war, but he was using those skills against the purposes of God. I have a brother-in-law who uses his vast computer knowledge to program security systems that protect people's privacy. There are some people with similar abilities who use their skills to hack into data bases, steal identities, and commit extortion. The motive of the heart, the condition of the heart, is the primary issue. No other preparation will substitute for that.

4) War.

David fought some private battles that equipped him to fight the public ones. When he faced Goliath he remembered the lion and the bear that he had previously fought. He learned in those battles the key to victory. What key? Faith in God! David had been faithful over a few things and God made him ruler over many. Faithfulness is a quality that does not measure the size of the assignment. It does not care who knows what was done. It is motivated by loyalty in the heart. David was given the assignment to guard a few stinky sheep. He put his life on the line to fulfill that assignment. Later, when the stakes were much higher, the quality of his heart was the same. He later put his life on the line to fight Goliath. It brought salvation to the army of Israel. But that was not David's primary motivation. What really stirred David for the battle was Goliath's assault on the honor of God. *"For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* (1 Sam 17:26). These are the armies of the living God, my God. To cow them down is to dishonor the name of the Lord. That is something I cannot and will not tolerate. What value do you place on the honor of God? Would you put your life on the line to defend that honor? David would and David did.

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna. He had been a pupil of Apostle John. At 86 years old he was facing martyrdom. The Roman proconsul offered to set him free if he would deny Christ. Listen to his answer. “Eighty six years have I served Him and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”³ His loyalty to the person—to Christ his King—fortified him to stand up in the hour of temptation.

Unwavering loyalty to Jesus was the preparation that empowered him at that moment.

The Romans burned him at the stake; but they could not get him to compromise Christ.

God does these two things for His people. He goes ahead of us and prepares opportunities for service and he offers us the preparations that will equip us to make the most of those opportunities. If we will give ourselves to the preparations, then the Goliaths will come down in due time. If not, we are like the Israelite soldiers in the story. They’re there; they’re Israelites; but they are unable to meet the sudden challenge that Goliath presents.

We are in a season of preparation. There are some very big events just over the horizon. There may be some Goliath’s appearing on the scene. David could have never met that challenge in his own strength. It is the anointing that breaks the yokes. By faith he overcame the obstacle. Faith is something that issues out of our relationship with God. It’s not ten easy steps that you do on your own initiative. “. . . *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). Hearing the *rhema*⁴ of God—revelation released in your spirit by the Spirit of God, produces faith. But the seed of that word has to find good, receptive ground in the heart. So God dropped the word in David’s heart that Goliath would come down. David declared what he heard in his inner man from the Lord.

As David faced off with Goliath, the pagan giant tried to declare his curse over David. David declared the word of the Lord that was in his heart. 1 Sam 17:45 *"You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47 Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands."*

Now let me give you an additional lesson in spiritual warfare. You know all those Israelite soldiers who wouldn’t move a muscle to deal with the problem of Goliath and the Philistine army. When David destroyed Goliath, and the Philistine army began to run—all of a sudden all the Israelite soldiers wanted to get involved. They jumped into the battle once David had already won it. They shouted and pursued the enemy. They were very courageous to pursue an enemy that was already defeated. You bring down the obstacles and get the break through and there are plenty of nominal Christians who will then jump on board.

Jesus had a lot to say about preparation.

He gave the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Parables are stories designed to drive home one key point. The key message Jesus makes here is the importance of preparation and readiness.

³ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*, 9th printing (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1985) p. 787.

⁴ The Greek word translated word in Romans 10:17

Ten virgins: five were wise and five were foolish. The two groups had a lot in common.

(1) They were all virgins; they were the bridesmaids for the wedding.

The parable does not contrast virgins with harlots. It does not contrast righteous people with wicked people. All ten were virgins.

(2) They were all members of the wedding party. They were all there by invitation.

(3) They all had taken the time to be at this wedding.

(4) They all slept when the bridegroom was delayed. Nothing different there.

(5) They all had the same intent. They all wanted to attend the festivities.

(6) They all responded to the call when the Bridegroom arrived.

(7) They all got up and trimmed their lamps.

But there was one crucial difference. The foolish virgins had not made adequate preparation and the wise virgins did. The foolish virgins did not bring extra oil for their lamps and the wise virgins did. So when the Bridegroom came the foolish virgins were not ready. As a result they missed out on the opportunity that came their way.

They attempted to make up for their negligence, trying to get some oil at the last minute. But the hour of opportunity had already passed.⁵ Oil is usually symbolic of the Holy Spirit. We are to be continually filled with the Spirit according to Eph. 5:18.⁶

Jesus concludes the story with these words, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming*” (verse 13). That is profoundly true concerning the coming of the Lord-- for no man knows the day nor hour of that event except the Father. But in principle it’s true concerning the opportunities we may have tomorrow. Are you ready to walk into God’s plan as it unfolds ahead of you? When David was sent by Jesse to bring some provisions to his brothers who were in Saul’s army, he had no idea what he was about to step into. He was just faithfully doing what he was supposed to be doing and suddenly we have the story of David and Goliath.

This year my son-in-law was working in Kansas City and suddenly opportunity opened for him to become a vice-president of a lucrative corporation with significant ownership. His salary suddenly skyrocketed. The good news is he was ready to step into the opportunity.

In 1975 I was working at Bell Helicopter as a janitor making a little more than minimum wage. Suddenly I was offered a position as an accountant. That change led to one promotion after another. Suddenlies do happen.

In 1995 an Assemblies of God church in Pensacola, FL was having a Father’s Day service. Suddenly the Holy Spirit swept through the congregation. Over the next five years 4 million people came to the revival and 200,000 were saved. But they were prepared. Two years earlier the church had begun praying for revival.⁷ Revivals tend to break out among people who are hungry and have positioned themselves to receive it.

When I look into the future of America I see opportunity. Yes, there are winds blowing in adverse directions. There is moral decline. There is disregard for human life. There is

⁵ Isa 55:6 “*Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.*” Compare to Proverbs 1:23-28; Luke 19:41-44 and Hebrews 12:16-17.

⁶ The Greek word, *plerooo*, translated “be filled” is in the present tense which indicates continuous action.

⁷ These numbers are estimates; regardless of the exact calculations, Father’s Day 1995 marked a major point of change for that congregation with amazing results. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownsville_Revival accessed 10/10/15.

mounting national debt. But there is God! And He is a very present help in time of trouble.⁸ Troubled times can be opportune times for evangelism. Will I be ready to reap the harvest? Will I be prepared and available for what God is about to do? I don't see a lot of Christians getting spiritually prepared. They go to church on Sunday morning and God is a part of their lives. But on the whole they are occupied with the cares of this life. They are busy doing a lot of things. Everybody is busy. Being busy is not a sign that you're busy at the right thing. Even the wicked are busy. Am I occupied with what God wants me occupied with? Am I working the priorities He has for me or am I just doing what everybody else is doing?

In the days of Noah, everybody was busy. They were busy eating and drinking. They were busy marrying and giving in marriage. They were busy living life. But they missed the message God had sent. They overlooked the one thing that made all the difference.⁹ And when it became evident that they had missed it; then it was too late. The door to the ark was shut.

People tend to think they can put God on hold. Then when they need him, reach up on the shelf, grab Him and take care of the problems. It won't work that way. It has never worked that way. It didn't work that way in the days of Noah and Jesus said (as in the days of Noah) it won't work that way in the day of His coming. God's not a Jeannie in the Bottle. When He calls we answer. When He offers opportunity to prepare, we seize the opportunity.

What should we prepare for? Persecution and Revival: all at the same time! Get anchored in your commitment to Christ. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said the seed that fell on stony ground is the person who "*hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away*" (Matt 13:19-22 NIV). The Bible says that in the last days there will come a great falling away.¹⁰ Persecution tends to separate the wheat from the tares. Nominal Christians may not stick it out when it gets costly to do so.

The best preparation for persecution is to get wholehearted and fully committed to Christ NOW. Likewise, the best preparation for revival is to get wholehearted and fully committed to Christ NOW. Likewise, the best preparation for the coming of the Lord is to get wholehearted and fully committed to Christ NOW.

The best thing you can do to prepare for tomorrow is to get wholehearted and fully committed to Christ NOW.

⁸ Psalm 46:1; 107.

⁹ Matthew 24:37-39.

¹⁰ 2 Thess. 2:3; Matt. 24:12.