

This morning, I'm going to start out by giving you a little glimpse at the “tricks of the trade” of a preacher – not tricks as in “traps”, but tricks as in “how do we best do the task that God's given us to do?”. And so a builder has tricks of the trade – he knows how to get things done. A mechanic has tricks – Stuff that might take me hours – they manage to achieve in a few minutes.

So, my job as a preacher and teacher, is to take God's word, and to open it up for you, in a way that helps you to: understand it; remember it; and apply it... OK – that's the job of the preacher and teacher: to take God's word, and to open it up, in a way that helps you to: understand it; remember it; and apply it...

And, one of the “tricks of the trade”, for a preacher, is stories. Most Sundays, I'll try to have one or two stories that I use, help us all to understand whatever the lesson is for the day.

Stories work – and not only with kids – stories are good for adults too.... And Jesus did a lot of **His** teaching, by using stories.... Only He did it for exactly the opposite reason. One day, when the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do you use so many parables?”, He basically said to them “Look, I use stories so most of this lot don't get it.”

You see, with the parables (a parable is an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning) – And with a parable, unless you listen to it, wrestle with it, think about it, dwell on it – you’re not going to get it... And with the parables of Jesus, only those who are truly seeking Him, and longing to hear from God – it’s only these people, who actually get anything out of them... and to the rest, it’s just a story – they’ll never scratch beneath the surface, and they’ll never get anything out of it.

But if you are one of those who are looking for God – if you are one of those who are wanting to **hear** from God, the stories of Jesus, are exactly for people just like you... They’re for you to listen to, to wrestle with, to think about, and to pray about...

And I don’t think I’m going to use too many of my stories today, because (to be quite frank) Jesus' stories are far better than mine, and we’ve got a few of them today, so let’s wrestle with them.

6 weeks ago, we very briefly touched on the topic that Jesus said, that He’d be a long time coming, but even so, make sure you **are** ready when He does return.... And we only touched on it very briefly, because I knew it wouldn’t be long, until we got to where we’re at today.

Multiple stories of “long time coming, but be ready”:

- The story of Noah and the flood – the people were “unaware”, and then all of a sudden, the flood was upon them.
- He told the story of 2 men working out in the field
- And the story of 2 women, grinding at the mill – one was ready and the other wasn’t
- He told the story of a thief, breaking in, and the home-owner being caught unawares.
- He told the story of the master of the house, who went away for a while, and one of the servants felt their master was delayed, and so he starts running amuck...
- He told the story of the wedding banquet with the 10 brides maids, and the bride groom was delayed, and he turned up when 5 of them weren’t ready, and they missed out.

Story after story, all driving home the point, that Jesus' return, will seem a long time coming, but make sure that you are ready.

1. And the first thing we learn, is when Jesus returns, there is an instant cut-off.

Just like in the flood of Noah, life was going on as normal. (well as normal as it can be when there’s some loon building a massive unpowered ship, miles from the

ocean)... 1 Peter tells us that God delayed the flood, while Noah did his thing. 2 Peter tells us that Noah was a herald – a preacher of righteousness... I’m pretty sure all those that came out for a bit of a gander at Noah’s folly, were told in no uncertain terms, to repent... and yet they were swept away, completely unaware.

Life just went on as normal. Good times – nothing wrong here. People starting out on a life together by getting married – good times – parties – nothing untoward – all good... **(CLAP!!!!)** and then there was a cut-off... Noah and his family entered the boat, the door was shut... and Jesus said that they were completely “unaware” until the flood came and swept them all away... **so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**

The day that Jesus comes back, is going to begin as a normal day, the same as any other....

In some parts of the world:

- it’ll be in the middle of the night, and they’ll be asleep.
- In some parts of the world, people will be getting their breakfast.
- Some people will be heading off to work, and some will be coming home.
- Some will be in the middle of prayer, and some will be in the toilet.

- Some will be laughing at something funny they've just seen on TV.
- Some will be in tears because someone they just love has just died
- Someone will be robbing a grocery shop
- and others will be visiting the frail at the local old people's home....
- Some will be in the midst of battle – being shot at, and shooting back...
- Some will be in the labour ward, cuddling for the first time, a new born infant....

The day that Jesus comes back, will be the same as any other day. It'll be when you least expect it – it'll be completely normal (**CLAP!!!!**) and then it happens.... For goodness sake – everyone getting worried about the year 2000, or the year 2001, depending on when you believe the millennium begins or ends... Jesus said, it'll be life as normal – you won't even know, and then it'll happen.

2. And when Jesus does come back, there is going to be an instant great division.

Just like when Noah and his family were safe in the boat, and the flood came and swept everyone else away, **so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**

40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be

taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

Now, I don't know whether one will be taken away to judgmentⁱ, or whether one will be taken away to glory – it doesn't actually say that here... The point is, that it is **when Jesus returns** when this happens. The point is, that there is an **instant, great division**...

And the division, is not between the rich and the poor. It's not between the educated or the uneducated... The division is not even between those who are alive and those who have died. The division – The great division is between those who are in Christ, and those who are not in Christ. The division is between those who are ready for the Lord's coming, and those who are not...

1 Thessalonians 4:¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

This is not a secret return of Christ. Christians are not going to be secretly whisked out of the world before the great tribulation... This all happens when???

39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

There's no second chances here – there is an instant, great division....

I told you a few weeks ago, there's a very popular modern, (but unbiblical) belief, of what is called the pre-tribulation rapture... That's a belief that Jesus will return secretly, and take the Christians out of the world, before the big trouble begins... and then during the big trouble, people get a second chance to turn to God...

Don't you believe that for a minute... there are no second chances here... Jesus returns – not secretly – but visibly to the whole world, and with plenty of noise.... And that point, is the cut-off...

V⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Not, “Gee, it would be nice if you are ready”.. Not, “It’d be good if you are ready”.. Or, “You’ll save yourself the pain of having to go through the great tribulation if you’re ready”....

- What did Jesus say???? **you also must be ready**

The story of the brides maids – 5 of them were wise – they had the oil – ready to go... but 5 of them were foolish – they didn’t have the oil – they weren’t ready to go... And when they realised the bride-groom was on his way, they hurried off, to make themselves ready, but it was too late...

the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was (left ajar???? No... the door was) **shut.**

¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, (sure... you’ve got another chance...No... Truly I say to you) I do not know you.'

There was an instant division, and an instant cut-off – the bridegroom returned, and the door was shut... No 2nd chances – when Jesus returns, that’s it.

So the lesson is, “You don’t know when Jesus is coming”. “There are no 2nd chances once He comes”...

So, it is critical – it is imperative – to get ready, right now....

3. The third point I'm going to make today, is that to "be ready", means 2 things – to **get** ready; **AND** to **stay** ready... Readiness is "getting right with God"; **AND** remaining faithful to Him...

So, what does it mean to "get ready"?

To get ready, is to become a Christian. And I want to tell you now, it is critical – it is imperative, for you to know if you are saved or not... Jesus said to Nicodemus, **John 3:³... "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

It is critical, that we have this rebirth, into Christ. God does not have any grandchildren. You are either a son or daughter of God / or you are a stranger.

- You can go to church all your life, and not be ready.
- You can live a splendid, good and moral life, and not be ready.
- You can be very religious, and not be ready.
- You could be a minister of a church, and not be ready

You must be born again.

To be born again, means to repent – to turn your back on your old way of life – a life you’ve tried to live, independent of God – you turn away from that, and begin to embrace a new life, where you are totally dependant on God.

Here’s the good news: All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God – every one of us, are in need of a saviour. And the free gift of salvation, is that Jesus Christ died, to take away our sin. To get right with God, we accept this gift of salvation. We turn away from sin, and we receive forgiveness, as we receive Christ as our Lord and saviour...

It is critical, to know that you are saved. Do not leave here today, if you are not sure that you are a Christian – if you are not sure that you are saved...

But we are not saved, to go on sinning. Jesus doesn’t only want converts – He wants disciples. Jesus doesn’t wash us clean, so we can go and roll in the mud again (if you know what I mean)...

We **get** ready, through repentance, and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. And God does the rest.... But to

“**be**” ready means to also “**stay**” ready... And here, I’ll probably tread on a few theological toes....

In Chapter 23, Jesus is addressing the crowds and the disciples. But as Chapter 24 begins, the crowds are gone, and the Disciples come to Him privately, and ask Him about the end of the age. And so, all these stories – this whole passage that we’re looking at this morning, is Jesus talking privately with His disciples... Are there any disciples of Jesus Christ here by the way? Well, do you think this is important – what He’s saying to us???

Well, this is what He says:, “**you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**” And in 25: ¹³ **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

4. To stay ready, means to stay faithful to Christ – don’t fall away...

And this is where we’re in danger of treading on some theological toes... Some people believe in the human phrase “once saved – always saved”ⁱⁱ... They believe that if you become a Christian, you can never turn your back on God again – you can never fall away.... I’m not sure how they can believe that, after reading all of these parables.

V42 says **stay awake**. It doesn't say "wake up" it says "stay awake". Now that implies something doesn't it? It implies that someone has begun being ready, and are in danger of losing their vigilance – of losing their readiness.

V45-51 are the story of the servant. Who are the servants of the master? Christians, of course...

45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?"

46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

A good servant – a wise servant of God, is faithful. They're faithful to God – they're faithful in their behaviour... You don't want to be caught out doing the wrong thing when Jesus returns, do you??? Of course you don't... But in this context, faithfulness means "Holding on to your Christian faith."

Back in V¹⁰ **And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.**

Jesus was talking about Christians, under the pressure of persecution, losing their faith, and betraying other Christians.... And now he talks about a faithful servant, continuing on – enduring to the end – being ready... and He continues:

⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, (He's describing a falling away, isn't He?) ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

How can this be, a picture of anything but Hell? It's not a picture of once saved, always saved, is it?????

What it's a picture of, is to endure in your faith. The brides maids – 10 of them started out with a lamp burning – that's a symbol – a light – ready for the wedding feast, with the groom...

5 of them had enough oil – they had enough staying power, to stay faithful until the bridegroom came... But

5 didn't, and the door was shut on them, and He said, **I do not know you.**

Friends, it's really important, that you don't lose your vigour for God.

Being ready for the return of Jesus, means , not only to become a Christian, but to hold on to that faith, and live by that faith...

So, my question for you this morning, is, "Are you ready?"

Have you repented of your sin, and received forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ?

And are you maintaining your readiness? Are you standing strong in your faith? Are you living, in a way that you will not be embarrassed when Jesus returns? Or do you have some major changes you need to make, to improve your readiness?

ⁱ Matthew 13:24–30 (ESV) **The Parable of the Weeds**

²⁴ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?'

²⁸ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ”

ⁱⁱ for helpful stuff on Once saved always saved fallacy, see

http://www.greatbiblestudy.com/once-saved_always-saved.php