

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 18. Being Ready for the Coming of Christ

by Zac Poonen

To be ready for Christ's return, we must focus on having an inner life of purity and faithfulness, using our talents for the glory of God, and serving others as unto the Lord.

Scripture: Matthew 6:3, Matthew 7:22-23, Matthew 24:42, Matthew 24:44, Matthew 25, Luke 17:28, Romans 12:2, 1 John 3:3

Topics: "Readiness for Christ's Return", "Faithfulness in Service"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of being spiritually ready for the return of Christ rather than focusing on the exact timing of His coming. He highlights that many believers fail to purify themselves daily, indicating that their hope in Christ's return is not alive. Poonen discusses three key areas of faithfulness: maintaining a hidden life of purity, using God-given talents for His glory, and serving fellow believers with genuine love and concern. He warns against self-deception, urging believers to cultivate an inner life that reflects true readiness for Christ's return. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a reorientation of priorities towards God and others, rather than self-centeredness.

Transcript

When we think of the return of Christ to this earth, the important thing is not to know the exact date, but to be spiritually ready for His return. Many who are familiar with the prophecies concerning His coming, are not purifying themselves daily to His standard of purity. Thereby they prove that the hope of Christ's coming is a dead hope in them and not a living hope (1 John 3:3). On the other hand, even though we may not understand all the details of Biblical prophecies or the interpretation of the symbols in the book of Revelation, yet it is possible for us to be 100% prepared and ready for His coming, if we concentrate on what Jesus told us to concentrate on.

When Jesus told His disciples about His return in Matthew 24, He emphasised more than once that they should be on the alert (Matthew 24:42, 44; 25:13). To be spiritually alert and ready at all times is then the all important thing - not the knowledge of prophetic facts.

In Matthew 25 (which follows on from the prophecies of Matthew 24), Jesus deals with three areas where we are called to be alert and faithful in order to be ready for His coming.

Faithfulness in the Hidden Life

(Matthew 25:1-13) - In this parable, Jesus spoke of ten virgins. Notice that none of them were harlots (See James 4:4 for a definition of spiritual harlotry). They were all virgins. In other words, they had a good testimony before men. Their lights were all burning (Matthew 5:16). Their good works were seen by others. Yet among all these virgins, only five were wise. But this was not obvious to everyone at the beginning. Only five had taken oil with them in their flasks (verse 4).

That oil in the flask was not visible in the night, like the light was, and speaks of our hidden life before God that men cannot see in the darkness of this world. All of us have a flask. The question is whether we have any oil in it or not.

Oil is used throughout the Scriptures as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and refers here to that life of God that the Holy Spirit communicates to our spirit. The outward manifestation of that life is the light (John 1:4). The inner content is the oil. Many are taken up with their outward testimony alone. This is their folly. It is in times of trial and testing that we find that the outward light alone is insufficient. One needs an inner content of the divine life to carry us through triumphantly.

"If you are weak in a crisis, you are weak in reality" (Proverbs 24:16). The crises of life show us how strong or weak we are. In this parable, the crisis was that the bridegroom delayed his coming. It is time that proves the reality of our spirituality.

He who has faith endures until the end and is saved. It is time also that proves who has an inner content in his life and who does not. Many are like the seed that sprouted up immediately, but have no inner life. There is no depth of soil in their hearts (Mark 4:5).

This is why it is difficult to assess new believers concerning their spirituality, or their wholeheartedness. Time will reveal everything, if we have the patience to wait. The way to be ready for Christ's coming, then, is to have an inner life of purity and faithfulness before God's face - in our thoughts, attitudes and motives, that people around us cannot see. If we do not have this, we are deceiving ourselves if we think we are ready for Christ's coming.

Faithfulness in Our Ministry

(Matthew 25:14-30) - In the second parable, the emphasis is on the faithful use of the talents that God has given us. These talents represent material possessions, money, natural abilities, opportunities in life, spiritual gifts, etc.

Not all are equal in this area - for we see in the parable that one got five, another two and another only one. But all had equal time to be faithful with what they had received. To whom more is given, from him more is required. Therefore the one who multiplied his two into four got the same reward as the one who multiplied his five into ten.

Judgment however fell on the one who buried his talent 'in the ground' (verse 18) - that is the one who used his God-given talents for this world and not for God.

No one can say that he has received nothing - for all have received some talent or other from God. The question is what we use these talents for. What we use for ourselves is equivalent to the talent buried in the ground. What we use for the glory of God alone is what will be counted as eternal riches. By this

standard we can see the poverty of the vast majority of believers.

Our motto should be "All for God and nothing for self". Then we will be ready for Christ's return. We cannot be Jesus' disciples if we have not forsaken all that we have.

One who is not using all his God-given possessions and gifts for the Lord is only deceiving himself if he claims to be ready for Christ's return.

Faithfulness in Serving Our Fellow Believers

(Matthew 25:31-46) - In the last section, it is our attitude towards our fellow believers in need that Jesus deals with. That need may be spiritual or physical.

Here we see that some inherit the kingdom because they served their fellow believers as unto the Lord. Their service was so much in secret that their left hand did not know what their right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3). So much so, that when the Lord reminds them of the good that they did, they do not even remember it! (Matthew 25:38).

Jesus also taught here that any service that we do to the least of His brothers is considered as service done to Him (Matthew 25:40). It is significant that He speaks of the least here, for our tendency is to serve the most important believers and to ignore the poor and the despised! Those who are occupied with eating and drinking, buying and selling, and building and planting for themselves alone, will certainly be left behind when Jesus returns (Luke 17:28, 34).

Only those whose service for the Lord involved a loving concern to serve their fellow believers, will be taken up. In another passage, Jesus spoke of another group of people - who are a contrast to this group. These are the ones who remember all the good things that they have done in the name of the Lord. They are also at the judgment seat, and they remind the Lord that they have expelled demons, preached, healed the sick in Jesus' name, etc. But they are rejected by the Lord, even though they did all these things, because they lacked the very first requirement, of a hidden life of holiness before God. They were taken up with the greatness of their gifts.

It is interesting to see the contrast.

Those who healed the sick are cast out (Matthew 7:22, 23). But those who merely visited the sick inherit the kingdom! (Matthew 25:34, 36). God does not ask us to heal the sick if we have not been given the 'talent' of the gift of healing. But we can visit the sick and encourage them and bless them in the name of the Lord. We shall then find that we are ready for Christ's return, while many who healed the sick are left behind! To serve others in this way, we have to be willing to be inconvenienced.

Those who never want their daily plans to be disturbed by interruption from needy people, will certainly be left behind when Jesus comes. We have to sacrifice time, money, and above all, our own plans and our will, if we are to serve others in the name of the Lord.

Selfishness is so rooted in our flesh that even when we have cleansed ourselves of the sins of lusting with our eyes, anger and covetousness, it is still possible to live just for ourselves. There can be a holiness, like the holiness of the Pharisees, which is occupied only with ourselves, and which does not deliver us from self-centredness. This is a counterfeit of the true holiness; yet it is easy to be deceived by it.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give usForgive usDeliver us (Matthew 6:11-13). A sanctification that does not give us a concern for others who are still in their sins and need, is a worthless counterfeit that is fit for only being thrown into the garbage bin.

We need to re-orient our way of thinking ('renew our mind' Romans 12:2) so that we put ourselves 'in the shoes of others' and try and understand what they are going through. This is Christ-like thoughtfulness that prepares us to inherit the coming kingdom. One who thinks only of his own and his family's need, however 'holy' he may be, is only deceiving himself if he thinks that he is ready for Christ's coming.

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