

ARE YOU READY?

Mark 1:1-8

Basketball is in full swing. Teams like NC, Kansas, and Kentucky are picked to do well. But the greatest run of any college basketball team was the UCLA teams of the 60's and 70's. They were coached the legendary John Wooden, who was voted the greatest basketball coach of the 20th century. Wooden recently celebrated his 95th birthday with some of his former players. They talked about how he worked with them to get ready for games. The first day of practice he would spend a whole hour lecturing to them on how to put on their socks and shoes. Because of his thoroughness, no Wooden player ever got a blister. As he told them, "Failure to prepare is to prepare to fail."

This is a time to prepare—for finals, for Christmas, for the holidays. Papers and projects have to be finished, readings and lecture notes need to be reviewed, travel plans need to be made, children need to be taken to rehearsals, gifts need to be bought, house need to be cleaned, cookies need to be baked, and end of the year reports need to be completed. But will He be ready for finals, for holiday company, for Christmas?

John the Baptist came to make people prepare for something bigger than finals or Christmas—the coming of Jesus. John's "job description" was given hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah, "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way—a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" In our second lesson from 2 Peter we heard these words: "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. Since everything will be destroyed in this way what kind of people ought you to be?"

So are we ready for Jesus? How do we prepare for Him to come? Should I spend more time in devotion and prayer? Should I put more in the collection plate? Should I volunteer for some program at church? Should I work at stopping that sin which I keep on doing?

After 9-11 airport security increased. We want to be prepared to never let that happen again.

Then the hurricanes hit. We hope that the rebuilding will make us ready for the next round of hurricanes. Then there has been a rush to prepare for a possible flu pandemic. No matter how we prepare for a reoccurring disaster, something unexpected seems to come up.

So it is with our attempts to get our lives in order. We can spend more time in prayer and devotion. But how much time is enough for that? We can put more in the collection plate. But how much is enough? We can work to stop a reoccurring sin, but another sin crops up in our lives. It's like leaky plumbing. We plug one leak and another forms somewhere else. How can we ever be really prepared for Jesus?

Matt Campbell may be turning the football program into something at ISU. Bill Snyder did that at Kansas State University. He just retired for the 2nd time from that position. He took a perennial loser and turned it into a winner. Yet, when he announced his first retirement, he said that in his efforts to produce a winning football team, he had neglected his role as husband and father. The response from many was to underplay that. After all, he had been such a successful coach. But what then we are saying is that what matters in life is to be successful, not to be faithful to our responsibilities to our families. In such a messed up world, can we be prepared for Jesus?

John prepared people for when Jesus came. Did that mean that the people were perfect and had no problems? No, John called them to repent, to admit their weaknesses and need for a savior. The people weren't coming to God. God was coming to them, first in the ministry of John the Baptist, and then in His Son, Jesus. Jesus came not to people who had everything in order, but to those who needed forgiveness. To be ready is not to have everything in order, but to admit that our lives are messed up and that we need a Savior, who is Christ Jesus.

In the 1600's a simple man named Nicholas Herman lived in France. After serving as a footman and soldier, he became a monk and became known as "Brother Lawrence." He had a simple life, but

one that has inspired people since who have read the letters he sent to a Cardinal which are known as “The Practice of the Presence of God.” For Brother Lawrence being ready for God did not involve going to church more often or being in more church activities. It involved his everyday life as a cook. He prayed:

Lord of all pots and pans and things
Make me a saint by getting meals
And washing up plates!

He could say, “The time business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my life, while several persons eat at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees at Holy Communion.”

Being ready means letting Jesus enter into all of our lives. Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.” Jesus came not to be impressed by how well our lives are in order. He came to see the mess in our lives and to “clean it up” for us. And in doing that He becomes as much a part of studying for finals, changing diapers, and scooping snow as He is involved with reading a devotion or singing a hymn.

William Borden was a college student 100 years ago at Yale. He was heir to the Borden Dairy estate. As a graduation present after high school he was sent on a trip of the world. He saw many hurting and lost people. He decided to prepare his life for work as a missionary. After making this decision, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: “No Reserves.”

Borden went to Yale with a purpose and determination. During his first semester he began a campus wide student movement to meet regularly, read the Bible, and pray. By the end of the first year, 150 fellow freshmen were meeting each week. By the time he was a senior, 1,000 out of 1,300 Yale students were involved in there groups. They formed a mission society to help poor people in the community. All of this was to help prepare Borden for his goal of becoming a missionary. At graduation he turned down offers for high paying jobs. He wrote in his Bible, “No Retreats.”

Borden then went to Princeton Seminary and was ordained as a minister. He finished his studies and set sail for China through the China Inland Mission, studying first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there he contracted cerebrospinal meningitis. In less than a month, he was dead at the age of 26. Before he died, knowing that the steps of his life would take him no further, we wrote in his Bible beneath the words, “No Reserves,” and “No Retreats,” these words, “No Regrets.”

How could he say, “No Regrets”? All that time he had spent to prepare to be a missionary and he was never able to do it. But he was ready. It didn’t matter whether he lived to 100 or died the next minute. Borden held to his faith in Christ Jesus.

We too can be ready. That involves two things—sharing the good news of Jesus and loving others. That isn’t just something we do at church or in church activities. It is what our whole lives can be all about.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman
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