

Be ready

Was there a time in your life, when you prepared for something important? Perhaps it was studying? Perhaps your wedding? Perhaps a holiday? Perhaps a project? It took time and commitment but when the day arrived, you were prepared for you had done the hard work.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to be prepared. He said...

⁵ “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ 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.”

Jesus tells his disciples that they must be prepared for his second coming. They must be ready!

What is Jesus inviting them to do?

He clearly invites them to look after his house.

That’s what the parable of the unfaithful servant is all about. That’s what Jesus says in response to his question, from Peter, “Does this parable apply to us or is it for everyone?” and Jesus then asks a question, “Who is the faithful and wise servant?” and he responds, “He is the one that the master puts in charge to run the household.”

We are called to look after his house and keep it in order.

What does this involve?

Firstly....Looking after the world that he created?

From an early age, I believed in a Creator. Now, that may have been something to do with my upbringing. But somehow, when I looked out at the spectacular scenery in Kintyre, something deep inside said, someone - something created this.

It wasn’t until years later, that I began to piece it together and the penny dropped, when I read the words in the first book of the Bible which begins “In the beginning God created...”

But we all know that this statement is greatly challenged today by atheists, people like Richard Dawkins, who think we who are people of faith are deluded, and that life can be simply explained by evolution.

On Thursday morning at our early fellowship, we read about this. We were informed, "The theory of evolution is not without its problems. One scientist says this about life starting on its own; "Amino acids would have to be arranged in an exact sequence to form a protein...just like the letters in science. Mere laws of chemistry and physics cannot do that. The probability of a protein forming by chance is 10 to the power of 64. (10 with 64 zeros after it to 1).

Many people assume the theory of evolution to be true. But can it be scientifically proven? Something is considered scientifically true only if it can be repeatedly verified under laboratory conditions. The claim that life sprang up on its own out of a long impersonal process cannot pass this test of truth. That is why evolution remains only a theory.

So, if you are ever tempted to doubt that God is the Creator, consider the alternative. The odds against even a simple protein creating itself is astronomical. How much more reasonable to believe in a Creator God and His Word." By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things visible." Hebrews 11v3.

Isn't it more reasonable to believe that God designed and created the universe? So, if we believe this, he has entrusted us to look after his house. To look after his amazing creation. This world is where God has placed us and he expects his servants to be faithful in their stewardship of it.

We look after his creation – his house, because God loves his world.

The Gospel of John begins with Creation, and it looks at it through the prism of Jesus being the Word made flesh and bringing all things into life.

"The word became a human being and full of grace and truth lived among us." John 1v14. This is central to our Christian faith that God stepped into our world and literally took our flesh, died our death, and rose to eternal life.

He has already come to us, and if this is true, then he will come back.

In the interim, we are to look after what he created. Jesus changed this world and he invites us to join him and continue the task.

Jesus is by far the most controversial person in history. Nobody has attracted such adoration or opposition, devotion or criticism, and nobody else's teaching has ever been more fervently received or fiercely rejected.

Even the most dyed-in-the-wool sceptics must acknowledge that this man was something special, and any open mind of human history, should agree that he deserves meticulous attention.

Jesus called us to make a choice, to follow or reject, there was no option of sitting on the wall. If we follow him, we are walking in God's light.

So, this world is special to God for it came about through Him and he entered it through Jesus.

But he didn't just come for a visit, he came to change it and he did so by laying down his own life.

The gospels, Jesus' story, centres on the last few days of his life. 40% of Matthew's gospel – 60% of Mark, 30% of Luke and 50% of John are given over to the events leading up to the crucifixion. This in itself shows that the cross is hugely important for the Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul who wrote much of the New Testament following the gospels, summed it up with the words, "We preach Christ crucified." And this was Paul's central message that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the central focus of God entering our world.

Paul writes, *if Jesus had not been resurrected then we are still in our sin and faith is useless.*

It is obvious that Jesus saw his death as being the consummation of his life. He said, "It was for this very reason that I came to this hour".

On the cross as he was dying, the Roman centurion said, "Surely, this is the Son of God."

This explains why 2000 years later the universally recognised symbol of the movement that Jesus started is a cross. A replica of the cruellest instrument of death of the world at that time.

But the significance of the cross is that this is God's way of dealing with the human problem of our fallen natures which consist of selfishness and greed. It was God's way of bringing this fallen world back to himself. Jesus was completely innocent, he had committed no sin, and yet he became the spotless lamb of God offered for the sins of the world.

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us back to God." Jesus spoke of his death as being for the forgiveness of sin.

The death of Jesus reveals God's amazing love for the world. For this planet that he created, he entered and suffered and died, for no other reason, than he loves us all. God demonstrates his love for us, while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

Prof Alister McGrath puts it, "God suffered in Christ. He knows what it is like to experience pain. He has travelled down the road of pain, abandonment, suffering and death...God is not like some alleged hero with feet of clay, who demands that others suffer, while remaining aloof from the world of pain himself. He has passed through the shadow of suffering himself....and, by doing so, transfigures the suffering of his people."

So, the cross is central and so is the resurrection, in God's plan for this world.

If God is our Creator? If he entered this world in human flesh? and if His Son Jesus died on a cross and rose again to eternal life? Is it not conceivable to believe, that he will return to this world?

That's what our reading is about today in Luke's gospel.

Jesus challenges his listeners with these words. Be ready... for whatever comes...dressed for action....keep your lamps lit.

His warning of his return is not to give us precise details of when this will happen but to prepare us to serve God faithfully today.

I had a rather strict school teacher, who like to catch the class out. He would leave the class door open, and he would disappear for 5-10 mins, I didn't realise then but he was probably nipping off for a cup of tea, nobody knew when he would come back, and more often than not, he caught us misbehaving.

Jesus knew he was leaving, and so he is encouraging the disciples to be faithful and to be prepared for his return.

The consequences are that if they do these things, when the Master returns, the Master will serve them. They will be happy and blessed. Can you imagine that! Jesus serving us! God serving us – what for? For simply being faithful, remaining faithful until the end.

Live in such a way as to honour the Lord and be ready for his return.

The measure of evaluation said Jesus, is how we serve others in the community.

Not only are we to look after God's world but we are to look after his Church.

This is a word primarily for leaders in the community, however it involves us all, as we all have communities to look after and that might be at home or in your neighbourhood.

Jesus said, "If that servant says to himself, the Master is taking a long time to come back and if he begins to beat the other servants, both the men and the women, and eats and gets drunk, then the Master will come back one day when servant does not expect him and at a time he does not know and the Master will throw him out.

So, it's how we act in God's house, in God's church that is our evaluation and we are called to treat everyone with respect, love and grace.

So, the question is: are we people who build up or do we knock down?

Unity is central to Jesus' ministry – John 17 – he prays for unity. Paul's letter to Ephesians 4 v1-16 emphasises it so highly.

Jesus calls for faithfulness in how we care for each other while the Master is away. One of the things that the Lord wants the most is that his followers treat each other with care. Jesus called them to love one another – John 13 v34-35; 15 v9-17.

So, while the Master is away, we are called to be good stewards of God's house – handling his affairs well – making good judgement in how we handle his resources.

For we will be held accountable. So the application of the message today is, concentrate on being faithful the whole time he is gone and look forward to the day when the Master come's home.

The two mistakes that the unfaithful servant made.

1. I will do what I like when the Master is away.
2. I have plenty of time to put things right before the Master returns.

Then Jesus finishes with the words, "Much is required from the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom much more is given."

Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!

It is a message reminding us to live in God's ways as God's people in God's house, whether that is looking after his creation, his church or our homes; for one day Jesus will return and what will he find, or one day he will call us to be before him; what will he say to us.

If you are that faithful servant, then you will hear him say, "Well done good and faithful servant."