

## Are You Ready for the Big Date?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 & Matthew 25:1-13  
Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church  
1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616  
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### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words.

### Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

<sup>6</sup> "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

<sup>10</sup> "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup> But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' <sup>13</sup> Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

## Are You Ready for the Big Date?

A young woman busied herself getting ready for a blind date. She was to have dinner at an exclusive restaurant with live music and dancing. She was excited. She went out to have her hair done, spent time getting her makeup just right, put on her best dress and was ready for her date's arrival. However, his expected arrival time came and went.

After waiting an hour, she decided she had been stood up. Disheartened, she took off her dress, let down her hair, put on her pajamas, gathered a box of chocolates around her and sat down to watch TV.

About an hour later the doorbell rang. It was her date. He looked at her with a surprised expression and said, “What? I gave you an extra two hours and you’re still not ready?”

Her trial will be next Tuesday. Some of you ladies are probably thinking, “It was justifiable homicide.”

Jesus told a parable about ten young women who were invited to a wedding party. This was a very festive occasion and they were probably excited about being chosen to participate. They knew that one of their responsibilities was to greet the groom and light his path to the banquet hall with lamps held aloft. So it was very important for them to take lamps with them to fulfill this responsibility. However, five of them, said Jesus, were foolish and five were wise. The wise ones carried some extra oil in jars along with their lamps just in case the bridegroom was delayed. The foolish ones took their lamps, but did not take along any extra oil.

Well, as fate would have it, the bridegroom was delayed. He was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. Suddenly, at midnight, the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”

At that, all the young women woke up and trimmed their lamps. However, those who did not bring extra oil discovered that they didn’t have enough oil to exercise their duties. And so the foolish ones said to the wise ones, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” A little selfishly the wiser girls replied, “No, there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”

Well, what choice did they have? And so these neglectful young women headed out into the night to buy oil. But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The young women who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. Then Jesus uses these ominous words. “And [then] the door was shut.”

Later the five foolish young women also came to the door. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!” But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.” Jesus follows this parable with this admonition: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

The question for the morning then is this: Are you prepared? Do you have oil for your lamp? Who knows what tomorrow may bring for any of us? Who knows what kind of severe test we might confront? On the other hand, who knows what door of opportunity might also open? None of us knows what tomorrow may bring. No wonder the Boy Scouts have the motto, “Be prepared.”

WE CAN ALL THINK OF SITUATIONS IN WHICH PREPARATION WAS THE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS OR FAILURE, EVEN LIFE OR DEATH.

One of the most famous tragedies in history happened on April 10, 1912. On that date the great ocean liner the Titanic set sail from Southampton, England on its maiden voyage to New York City. Everybody thought the Titanic was a floating fortress. Even the ship's captain, Captain John Smith, believed the ship was unsinkable. So he wasn't worried a single bit when the Titanic received six warnings that there was ice in the sea ahead. This was on April 14, just four days into the trip.

Consequently, the ship was traveling near its maximum speed when the ship's navigation officer, Fredrick Fleet, sighted an iceberg floating right in the path of the big ship. Fleet contacted the ship's First Officer William Murdoch who maneuvered desperately to avoid the impending collision.

Unable to turn quickly enough, however, the ship suffered a glancing blow from the iceberg that buckled the ship's starboard side and opened five of her sixteen compartments to the sea. The Titanic had been designed to stay afloat with four of her forward compartments flooded but no more, and the crew soon realized that the ship would sink. Officer Murdoch immediately informed Captain Smith, who, remarkably continued to dine with distinguished passengers and finish a second cigar. In just over 2 hours the "unsinkable" Titanic was gone with a loss of 1,490 lives.

Captain Smith had already planned that the Titanic's first voyage would be his last. At the age of 59, he was ready to retire. He never got that chance.

Why such a terrible loss of lives? Part of the reason was that the crew — from the captain on down — was unprepared. For example, the Titanic had been outfitted with 20 lifeboats, enough to hold only half of the passengers. Even worse, many of the lifeboats were mismanaged. In some of the lifeboats that could hold 40, some contained only 12 passengers when they fled the sinking ship.

Why were they unprepared for a tragedy at sea? Because everybody believed the Titanic couldn't be sunk. It was one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history. We need to understand that life is like that. Nobody knows what the future may bring. Numerous tragedies have taken place throughout history because people were not prepared.

Jesus was giving us sage advice when He said, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Even though we may think we have everything under control, life can throw us some nasty curves. Be prepared.

**HISTORY IS ON THE SIDE OF THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED. OF COURSE, THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN SO.**

Let's move ahead a few years, from 1912, to the year 1940. Europe, and indeed the entire world have been thrown into a panic. Germany, under the leadership of Adolph Hitler has defeated France and Holland. Any nation standing in the way of the German army has been crushed. Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of England, had been duped by Hitler and thoroughly discredited and so has resigned.

Subsequently on May 10, 1940, King George VI of England invited Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, to his Palace. When Churchill arrived at the palace, the King wasted no time in instructing Churchill to form a new government.

Churchill was by no means the obvious choice for this position. He was regarded by many politicians as unreliable and impetuous for, among other things, his unrelenting opposition to the appeasement of Germany. Despite this, the outbreak of war with Germany in 1939 proved Churchill right. He was made prime minister on the same day that Germany invaded Belgium and Luxembourg.

Churchill swiftly went to work after receiving this commission. He immediately arranged a meeting with advisors, government officials and military officers with the goal of forming a coalition government.

This would have been a daunting task for most people, but afterwards Churchill wrote: “As I went to bed at about 3 A.M., I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.... My warnings over the last six years had been so numerous, so detailed, and were now so terribly vindicated, that no one could [contradict] me. I could not be reproached either for making the war or with want of preparation for it. I thought I knew a good deal about it all, and I was sure I should not fail . . .”

Winston Churchill was prepared when his time came. History is on the side of people who are prepared.

Rev. Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral fame once told of traveling with an associate, Mike Nason, who had been on their staff for nearly forty years. On the plane they were studying their itinerary — about three pages detailing several events in upcoming cities. When Schuller had finished reviewing a page of the itinerary that he thought summarized that day’s events, he took the sheet of paper and crumpled it up to throw it away. Mike said, “That’s tomorrow’s page! Don’t throw away tomorrow.”

“Wow!” said Robert Schuller, “A light went on. I discovered a universal principle: Don’t throw away tomorrow. That’s so easy to do. Crumple the paper. Throw it away. Move to the next subject.

“We throw away tomorrow when ideas come and we are not ready for them, so we move on. ‘I’ll pass on this one,’ we say, not really knowing what doors to opportunity we’re closing. We don’t even give the idea serious attention.

“We throw away tomorrow when challenges come or when problems hit us. We throw away tomorrow when we get our priorities all mixed up and lose our vision. When you get overwhelmed, don’t throw away tomorrow.” I would add, don’t throw away tomorrow by not preparing yourself as much as possible.

OF COURSE, THE MOST IMPORTANT PREPARATION WE CAN MAKE CONCERNS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Our Scripture passage is about being prepared for Christ's return. And the only possible preparation we could make for that final day would be our spiritual readiness. Like those ominous billboards we used to see along the highways, "Are you ready to meet your Maker?" But that's true of all of life.

We ought to be spiritually prepared for going off to college, or taking a new job or marrying a spouse, or having an operation, etc. Our spiritual preparation will determine how we will handle the ups and downs of life, the successes and failures, the heartaches and the celebrations. That is why weekly worship is necessary to our lives. That is why daily reading of the Scripture and time spent in prayer is required of us. We are preparing ourselves for whatever may come our way.

We need God to help us carry the burdens of every day. As Max Lucado once wrote: "When you are confused about the future, go to your Jehovah-raah, your caring shepherd. When you are anxious about provision, talk to Jehovah-jireh, the Lord who provides. Are your challenges too great? Seek the help of Jehovah-shalom, the Lord is peace. Is your body sick? Are your emotions weak? Jehovah-ropeh, the Lord heals you, will see you now. Do you feel like a soldier stranded behind enemy lines? Take refuge in Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner. The best preparation for all of life is to be spiritually prepared.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Years ago a young man named Bobby Fischer brought great pride to our country when he defeated a chess champion from the Soviet Union named Boris Spassky in a world championship chess match.

It may surprise you to know that Fischer prepared for this contest by swimming laps underwater every day. He knew that as the chess matches wore on into the late hours, the player with the most oxygen going to his brain would have the mental advantage. So he built his chess game by building his lungs.

When he defeated Spassky, many were surprised by his astonishing wit and mental staying power, especially late in the matches when both players should've been weary and burned out. But Fischer was prepared for the test.

Are you in training spiritually? Are you drawing closer to God each day? Don't be foolish about life. Victory comes to the man or the woman who is prepared.

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