

MESSAGE 11/29/2020 – *Ready or Not...*

Let us pray - Dear Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.

How many of you enjoyed playing the game “Hide and Seek” when you were younger?

You remember how the game went: The seeker would cover their eyes and count out loud up to the agreed upon number, maybe 50 or 100 (sometimes they would cheat a bit by counting really fast, or by skipping numbers - 1...2...3...5...10...20).

While they were counting, everyone else tried to find a really good hiding place. When the seeker reached the magic number, he or she would shout: “*Ready or not, here I come!*”

At that point, four things were always certain: (1) The seeker was surely coming, (2) The seeker was coming when he or she got ready, (3) The seeker was coming whether you were ready or not, and (4) If you were not ready, then you would pay the consequences.

Who would have thought that this fun childhood game would so closely parallel the Second Coming of Jesus?

Just like the game of “Hide and Seek”, four things are always certain about the Second Coming: (1) Jesus is surely coming, (2) Jesus is coming when he gets ready, (3) Jesus is coming whether you are ready or not, and (4) If you are not ready when Jesus comes, then you will pay the consequences.

In the childhood game, the players who are hiding can usually hear the seeker's counting.

Even if they get distracted while they are searching for that perfect hiding spot, they can still listen for the seeker's count and know when they must be out sight and "ready".

But, when it comes to the certainty of Jesus' Second Coming, the scripture lesson that Alison just read warns us, "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come."

In 1st Thessalonians chapter 5, Paul warned that the day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night. Then people who had been emphasizing "peace and safety" will experience sudden destruction. He advises, "so then let's not sleep, as the rest do, but let's watch and be sober."

The Bible makes it very clear that listening for Jesus's voice and anticipating His return at a fixed time will not be an option. There is no way to know where we are in the "countdown" to the Second Coming of Jesus. As such, we must remain vigilant and be prepared for the Master to return at a time of His choosing. And when He does, we must be ready.

There are many verses in the bible where Jesus emphasizes the danger of failing to be ready for his Second Coming. Of course, he is referring to spiritual readiness as opposed to physical readiness.

So how do we remain spiritually prepared and “ready” as God has instructed?

Today’s culture is filled with countless temptations and distractions. When we give in to them, we refuse to honor God and follow His wisdom in our decisions. This behavior causes a decline in our moral standards and attitudes and we (and our family and friends) suffer the consequences.

So, to truly evaluate our spiritual readiness, we must ask ourselves this question.....

How many of the things that occupy our time, our money, our thoughts and our attention have taken the place where God is supposed to be?

Each day, we are overwhelmed with advertising, convincing us that material possessions are a direct reflection of our success in life. How could we possibly be happy if we do not have the latest iPhone? Or the newest clothing? Or a car that can park itself?

Luke 12 verse 15 provides us with that answer: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

But what about the movies, music and video games that glamorize violence, drugs and a thousand other temptations? They are everywhere! Those can certainly jeopardize our spiritual readiness!

Again, if we look to the Bible, we are assured in 1st Corinthians 10 verse 13, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

Or from Ephesians 6 verses 10-11 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

When we are at our weakest, we must only remember Romans 8 verse 31 - “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Without question, materialism and earthly temptations are dangerous distractions that affect our spiritual “readiness”.

However, I believe the most serious threat is one most easily overlooked - *allowing our daily schedules to become so full that we fail to make time for God.* We claim that we love the Lord...yet we do not want God and His truth to interfere with our lives and routines. We are just too busy. Too busy to attend church regularly, too busy to volunteer in our communities, *too busy to pray.*

Our lives have become so rushed and filled with activities that we allow them to displace what is truly important - doing what Christ has called us to do. Ephesians 2 verse 10 says “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

To be spiritually “ready”, we must slow down and listen for God’s voice, then establish our priorities and choices according to His will *and not our own*. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6 verse 33).

When it comes to being prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus, the Bible is a how-to manual for living a spiritually ready life. It is very clear what we need to do.

But are we actually doing it?

If not, can we really afford to put it off to another day?

The end of this morning’s scripture lesson from Mark 13 says “Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (v. 36).

The point of the parable is that we must be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man at a time of His choosing.

That reminds me of a story...a married couple and their young daughter were together in their home one afternoon. The husband and wife were frantically running around the house, vacuuming, dusting, doing dishes, and picking up toys. The daughter looked up at her parents and asked “who is coming to visit?”

You see, the little girl knew that the clutter and “lived in” condition of their home had somehow become acceptable for their family, but not for guests. Her parents’ hurried cleaning must be a sign that visitors were coming very soon. Had they been keeping their home “guest ready” every day, it would have taken far less effort (and panic) to welcome a visitor with little or no advance notice.

Such is the way with the Second Coming of Jesus. If the Master appeared at your door right now, would you (and He) be pleased with the appearance of your spiritual “house”? Or would you be embarrassed and ashamed of its condition? Would you be forced to explain that you would have straightened up had you known when He was coming?

Getting (and keeping) our spiritual house in order requires shifting our perspective from “all about me” to “all about God.”

It means freely dedicating our gifts, time and talents to others, remembering that they are all blessings from our loving God.

It means being obedient to God’s commandments wherever you are: work, school, home, church, with people or alone.

It means always considering what is pleasing to God in thought, word, and action.

It means having all “rooms” or areas of your life open to God, His judgment, and His help.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Ready or Not... Amen