

Ready to Go – Matthew 25:31-46

Introduction: In high school, one day we were in our science class when the teacher, Mr. Hartis announced that he was going to have to step out for about 30 minutes. Before I go any further, you need to know that Mr. Hartis was a no-nonsense kind of guy. He was an assistant football coach and didn't have a lot of patience. And he had this spot on his head that turned red whenever he was getting mad. We called it the angry red spot of Mars. Anyway, before he left, he said, "*A substitute is going to be here and I expect you to be on your best behavior. I expect you to do whatever the substitute tells you, and I'll be back in about 30 minutes.*"

But no sooner had he left when about half the class forgot all about what Mr. Hartis said. They ran around the room. They yelled. They threw paper wads. The substitute teacher was losing control of the class.

After about 5 minutes, Mr. Hartis came back! He had been standing outside the door listening, so when he came back, that spot was blood red. He pointed toward the kids who were acting up. He said "*Come with me!*" He took them out and they never came back.

Now, I wasn't one of those kids that time. I was glad to see him come back. I was ready for him to come back and restore order to the classroom. But the kids who were acting up were not ready. In fact, they wished he had not come back at all.

That's a little sampling of what it's going to be like when Jesus comes back. Some of us are going to be glad. We'll say thank Him for coming back and wonder what took Him so long. We'll praise Him for coming back to restore order. But some people won't be ready. Most don't even know He's coming back, so many folks won't be ready for Jesus' return.

So how can we be ready for Jesus' return? How can we be sure we're living the way God wants us to live in preparation for His return?

That's what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about how to live our lives in preparation for the Lord's return.

We've been in the book of Matthew for about two years now and as we come to the close of Chapter 25, we're actually coming down the home stretch. Jesus had talked in Matthew 24 about His return to a world in chaos - a world where people are not ready for His return.

Then in Matthew 25, Jesus teaches us three parables about what it means to be ready for His return. In verses 1-13, he talks about the ten virgins who are supposed to be ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. Five of them have their lamps lit in preparation. Five of them don't.

In verses 14-30, three servants are supposed to be using their talents for the Master while He is away on business. Two of them are using their talents wisely. One of them is not.

And here in verses 31-46, we have the clearest parable of them all! Let's read Matthew 25: 31-40.

Tonight, I want to make a couple of points about what we should be doing and how we should be living in preparation for the return of Christ. It all has to do with being involved in doing the Lord's Word of ministry to others. First, let's observe:

1. The Ulterior Motive of Ministry

Jesus lives in the heart of every Christian. So when you go on a Mission Trip to the Children's Home or prepare an Operation Christmas shoebox filled with goodies to be sent overseas to a child in need, you're not just ministering to the children, you're ministering to the Christ who lives inside them.

Or when you visit someone after surgery, and you let them know you're praying for them and offering to help them, you're not just ministering to the patient; you're ministering to the Christ who lives inside them.

When you teach a class or prepare a meal for a grieving family or volunteer in ministry, you're not just doing those things for the people, you're also doing them for Christ. Jesus says "*whatever you do for the least of these brothers of mine, you're doing it for Me.*"

We need to let our kids know that too. We need to tell them that whenever they give grandma a hug, or color you a picture to hang on the refrigerator, or say "I love you," they are not just doing it for the person, they are doing it for Christ as well.

This leads me to the second point I want to make: I call it:

2. The Alternative Mindset of Ministry

Some folks look at this passage and say, "Wait a minute! I thought we were saved by grace through faith. But when you read this story in Matthew, it sounds like we're saved by doing good works! What's going on?"

Well, we are saved by grace through faith. In fact the greatest doctrinal passage on this fact is found in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV). It says "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*"

But the next verse speaks to the importance of works. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) says, "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" It's true that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. But the good works we do for others is evidence that we really have been saved by grace through faith in Christ! Good works won't get you into heaven, but good works are evidence that you are already a child of heaven.

On the other hand, not doing good works could be a sign that a person was never saved to begin with. Listen to what Jesus says to the people on His left. READ Matthew 25: 41-46.

Now here is where I get what I call the alternative mindset of ministry. Notice that both groups of people call Jesus "*Lord*" (vs. 37 & 44). Both groups of people hear the same speech about Jesus being hungry and thirsty. But here's the difference: The first group ministered the love of God to the hurting people in their lives. The second group ignored the hurting people in their lives. They stood by and did nothing.

This reminds me of a story I heard about a man who was driving down a country road. He spotted a farmer standing in the middle of this huge field. There were no cows or tractors or horses around, so he thought it was a little strange. So he pulls the car over to the side of the road and for about 10 minutes, the man never moves. So, the passer-by got concerned, so he went out to the field to talk to the man and see if he was alright. The man says to the farmer, *"Excuse me old-timer, are you alright?"* The farmer said, *"Well yes, I'm fine"* So the passer-by says, *"Well, what are you doing out here?"* The farmer replies, *"I'm trying to win the Nobel Prize."* The man says *"Trying to win the Nobel Prize! How are you going to do that?"* The farmer says *"Well, I hear they give the Nobel Prize to people who are out standing in their field."*

That's a funny story, but it describes how sadly mistaken people are for thinking they should be rewarded for doing nothing. That's the trouble with the goats in what we read from the Scriptures. They thought that as long as they call Christ *"Lord,"* then they don't have to do anything. But Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 (NIV), *"Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* We are saved by grace through faith, but the reason why we're saved by grace through faith is to do good works!

Conclusion: If you're a Christian, ask yourself this question: What can I do this week to help the hurting people in my life? What can I do to encourage someone or be an good example to them, or equip them? When we do that, we are living in preparation for Jesus' return. And we're living out the command of Galatians 6:10 (NIV) which says *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."*

So mission trip goers, Committee members, Sunday School teachers, Deacons, Musicians, Age group workers, keep ministering to your people and know that you are also ministering to Christ. Keep doing the good works and helping the hurting. Keep spreading the good news and you'll not only be ready for the Lord's return, you will also be helping others get ready to go. Are you ready!