

Only Those Prepared Here

by Thomas Shepard

Only those who are prepared and ready for Christ will enjoy eternal and immediate communion with Him.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 12:14, Psalm 10:17, Malachi 1:14, Luke 1:17, Romans 9:23, 1 Corinthians 15:50, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 12:14, Revelation 21:27

Topics: "Eternal Preparation", "Christian Readiness"

Description

Thomas Shepard preaches about the importance of being ready and prepared in this life for Christ to enjoy eternal communion with Him. He emphasizes that men are naturally unfit for heaven and must be prepared by God's grace to partake in fellowship with Christ. The honor of the Lord Jesus is highlighted, as believers owe it to Him to be in readiness for His return. The sermon concludes with a call to self-reflection and repentance for those who are unready, emphasizing the urgency of being prepared to meet the Lord.

Transcript

Observe: Those only who are ready and prepared in this life for Christ, shall enjoy eternal and immediate communion with Christ; those only who are fitted shall partake of his fellowship; for of all these virgins (though many of them were otherwise very well qualified) only those which were ready did enter in with the bridegroom, which readiness in these wise virgins was not, nor is not, any Popish preparation, either meritorious, or congruous or wrought by the power of corrupted or adorned nature; but divine and glorious, wrought by the power of Christ, out of his eternal love to the vessels of glory, as an antecedent, not moving cause of this eternal fellowship; it is the first degree of our resurrection with Christ. Rom. ix. 23, "Vessels of glory prepared unto glory;" the same word which is used here, there are two ends God hath appointed all men to, either to be vessels of wrath; who are those? verse 22, "Those that are fitted for destruction;" others of glory; who are those? "Prepared unto glory." 2 Cor. v. 5, with 8. How comes Paul and all the saints to know, and groan for to be out of the body, and to break the cage, and to be with the Lord? one reason is, they are wrought and moulded, and fashioned for that condition by the hand of a merciful God, even as one may know what vessels are for especial use, by their metal, and curious engravings upon them.

Reason 1-- Men are Unfit for Heaven

Because all men's souls are naturally unfit and unprepared to enjoy communion with Christ; it is said, (Rev. xxi.) unclean "Nothing enters into the new Jerusalem on earth, which is unclean, and defileth;" and,

(Heb. xii. 14,) "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Now, naturally all men are defiled, and unclean vessels, and under the power of their sins, loathing angels' food, the grace of Christ, and weary of the fellowship of Christ; and, therefore, they must be prepared for the Lord first; this is one reason why preparation to every holy duty is needful, and so needful, that let men perform any holy duty, wherein they draw near to Christ without a heart prepared, (Ps. x. 17,) their performances are rejected, or not blessed; and hence Rehoboam, though he did maintain the worship of God at Jerusalem, "yet he prepared not his heart," (2 Chron. xii. 14;) and hence Hezekiah mourns, and begs pardon for this, "that he is so purified according to the purification of the sanctuary." Now, to a holy duty, and communion with Christ here, this is needful; sore eyes can not behold the sun without grief; sick bodies loathe the best food; if the Lord should let a carnal heart into heaven with that heart he hath, and not change his nature, he would not stay there if he could escape; but having his swinish nature, he would be in his mire again; and the government of Christ being a bondage to him, he would break bonds, and break his prison, if he knew where to fly from the presence of the Lord; and hence, no work so wearisome as Christ's now, no time so uncomfortable and tedious as abiding under Christ's wings in his ordinances now. 1 Cor. xv. 50, "If flesh and blood can not enter into the kingdom of heaven, much less corruption."

Reason 2-- Preparation is a Work of Grace

In regard of the rich grace and wisdom of his love toward his people; for who sees not, but that it is a curse to be unready as these foolish virgins, who were therefore shut out? O, therefore, it is grace and mercy to make ready, and indeed an answer to prayers, and a comfort against all fears of the saints, who are then desirous to be with the Lord when they are indeed ready; readiness for Christ doth not destroy grace, but being a fruit of God's grace, advanceth it. Rom. ix. 23, the apostle makes it the first fruit of glory, that the saints are "prepared unto glory;" glory of mercy is the end, preparedness thereto is the means, or way leading to that end; if God appoints the end, his wisdom leads also first to the means which lead at Last to the end; if out of his rich grace he appoints the end, out of the same grace, by this other, he leads to this end; and though you think it not now grace, you shall say it is so another day, when, with these foolish virgins, you shall say, "O that I were ready !" I know not almost which is greatest love, to prepare for glory, or to bring into the possession of it; to make a vessel of poisonous dross a vessel of gold, or when it is so, to fill it; for the Lord to look upon a man when he is in his blood, and then to wash him; when a man is as water spilt upon the ground, and a broken vessel of no use, now for the Lord to pity, and fit for use, it is exceeding rich grace.

Reason 3-- The Bridegroom Prepares the Bride

In regard of the honor of the Lord Jesus, it was one part of the honor of Christ to have John go before him, and (Luke i. 17) "to prepare a people ready for the Lord." As it is part of a prince's honor to have his bride ready, and attired to welcome and entertain him, when he shall return to her, she owes this honor to him, and he expects this honor from her; so the Lord Jesus deserves this honor from all his people to be in readiness for him. Suppose these virgins had turned harlots, and gone a-whoring from him till his very coming, and then had been taken in, what might the world think? Doth he love the fellowship of harlots? for a man's heart to go a-whoring from the Lord, after the world, or lusts, to die so, is to disgrace the Lord Jesus; and hence (Phil. iii. 17 to the end) there are two sorts of men professing godliness; some mind "earthly things," others look and mind "a Saviour from heaven;" the one disgrace Christ, and are enemies to him; and hence Paul weeps for them; the other are his friends. And are princes so far respected as all things are ready for them? and is the Lord worthy of no such respect, so as that his people should be unready? No, know it as he said, (Mal. i.) "He is a great King."

The particulars wherein this readiness consists I have spoken of in the first part of the parable, and shall now only speak of them in the subsequent uses.

Application

Terror and astonishment of heart to all those that are wholly unready, that have no readiness at all to meet, or to have fellowship with the Lord Jesus; if those that are ready be received in, then those that be unready shall be shut out.

There is a number among us, young and old, of all sorts almost among us, that swarm up and down towns, and woods, and fields, whose care and work hitherto hath been like bees, only to get honey to their own hive, only to live here comfortably with their houses, and lots, and victuals, and fine clothes, etc., but not to live hereafter eternally. Suppose the Lord should stop thy breath, and cut thee off, what would become of thee? I trust to God's mercy, I hope I should go to Christ, though I am not assured; but are you ready for Christ? Yes, I hope I am; O, poor wretch ! why cost hope so? if thou never hadst one hour's serious thoughts, What will become of me? or, How shall I be ready? feeling thy unreadiness and unfitness thereunto. Or if thou hast had any thoughts, never wost possessed with any strong fears of eternity, and separation from the Lord Jesus, which hath damped thy mirth, and sunk thy heart, and perplexed thy thoughts, and made thee think with terror upon thy conscience, What will become of me? nor made thee desirous to ask others that question, as it is commonly one of the first, though but a common work, to think of dying presently: I have lived long without God and Christ in the world, and die I must shortly, and what will become of me then?

But you have slept quietly enough in the night, and sung care away and cast fear away in the day, and thy heart never had one hour's fit of shaking and trembling at eternity to come, when it is the nature of true fear ever to have the eye upon what it fears, till it is taken away; and if difficulty attend the same, to remove it; it can not be quiet, but will cry for help, if possibly help may be had; this you never did: no, thou never hadst so much as these foolish virgins, viz., to be awakened at all, but a spirit of slumber hath been upon thee; God hath given thee eyes, but thou canst not see; ears, and thou canst not hear; thou sayest (it may be) that thou cost hope thou art prepared; alas! thou hast not a virgin's name, much less nature, nor cost thou not deserve it neither; thou hast not forsaken thy loose company, nor yet come to the company of the wise, neither cost thou desire it, or think thyself unworthy of it; thy lamp is out; nay, thou never hadst any light at all, never madest profession at all, as if one ready for Christ; but O, poor wretch, all is yet to do with thee! if so, then remember that if thou diest now, thou shalt never have communion with Jesus Christ in glory.

Objection: What if I have not yet received Christ?

Answer: I know it is the misery of men, they can make nothing of this till they feel it: but two things I will say:-

1. Do but consider, what if thou shouldst be deprived of the light of the sun; nay, only of bread, only that one creature, and have clothes, sun, friends, all other blessings but that, would it not be a woe with a witness? would it not cut a man's heart to hear him cry bread, bread, a little bread, for the Lord's sake, to save my life! there is but a drop of the sweetness of Christ in that. O, what a misery will it be to pine away, and famish under wrath in chains of darkness, and to cry, O, a little refreshing from the presence of Christ, and canst not get it, but to live ever tormented without that, when thy soul shall cry, Lord, thus long have I been tormented without thee, till my spirits are weary, and my heart faint; now, O, now a little mercy,-O,

no.

2. That though thou seest it no great matter to be separated from Christ now, yet when the heavens shall be in a flaming fire, and the earth shall give up the dead that be in it, and Christ shall appear in infinite glory, admired of angels, blessed of saints, crowned of God, comforting his-elect, "Come, O, come, ye blessed;" then you shall think this separation something. O that you would now go home and mourn, and look up to the Lord, that he would make thee ready a vessel of honor, and acknowledge it is righteous with him if he should never do it!

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