BE PREPARED Matthew 25 v1-13 9am St Chad’s 3.7.16

Here is a letter from a Boy scout:

Dear Mom & Dad,

We are having a great time here at Camp CatchaCough. Our Scoutmaster is making us all write to our parents in case you saw the flood on TV and worried. We are OK. Only 1 of our tents and 2 sleeping bags got washed away. Luckily, none of us got drowned because we were all up on the mountain looking for Charlie when it happened. Oh yes, please call Charlie's mother and tell her he is OK. He can't write because of the cast. I got to ride in one of the search & rescue jeeps. It was neat. We never would have found him in the dark if it hadn't been for the lightning. Scoutmaster got mad at Charlie for going on a hike alone without telling anyone. Charlie said he did tell him, but it was during the fire so he probably didn't hear him. Did you know that if you put a gas cylinder on a fire, the gas could blow up? The wet wood still didn't burn, but one of our tents did. Also, some of our clothes. John is going to look weird until his hair grows back. We will be home on Saturday if Scoutmaster gets the car fixed. It wasn't his fault about the wreck. The brakes worked OK when we left. Scoutmaster said that a car that old you have to expect something to break down; that's probably why he can't get insurance on it. We think it's a neat car. He doesn't care if we get it dirty, and if it's hot, sometimes he lets us ride on the tailgate. It gets pretty hot with 10 people in a car. He let us take turns riding in the trailer until the policeman stopped and talked to us. Guess what? We have all passed our first aid merit badges. When David dove in the lake and cut his arm, we got to see how a tourniquet works. Also Raymond and I threw up. Scoutmaster said it probably was just food poisoning from the leftover chicken. I have to go now. We are going into town to mail our letters and buy bullets. Don't worry about anything. We are fine.

Love, Your son

P.S. How long has it been since I had a tetanus shot?

I wonder how many of us were in the Scouts or Guides? Who can remember not only their motto but the promises you made. On my honour, I promise that I will do my best, To do my duty to God and to the Queen, To help other people And to keep the Scout Law. The motto of course was Be Prepared.. "Be prepared for what?" someone once asked Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, ***"Why, for any old thing." said Baden-Powell. The training you receive in your troop will help you live up to the Scout motto. When someone has an accident, you are prepared because of your first aid instruction. Because of lifesaving practice, you might be able to save a nonswimmer who has fallen into deep water.***

But Baden-Powell wasn’t thinking just of being ready for emergencies. His idea was that all Scouts should prepare themselves to become productive citizens and to give happiness to other people. He wanted each Scout to be ready in mind, body and spirit for any struggles, and to meet with a strong heart whatever challenges might lie ahead. Be prepared for life - to live happily and without regret, knowing that you have done your best. That’s what the Scout motto means.

I wonder how many Christians can say they are prepared, prepared for what? The second coming of Christ. How many of us could say hand on heart “On my honour I promise to do my best, to do my duty to God, to help other and to keep God’s law”. Promises are a bit like babies, fun to make but hard and sometimes painful to deliver!

Why is it that so often most of us are unprepared, leaving things to the last minute! Roy Hodgeson the England manager, bless him, didn’t seem to have made plans or if he did they were wrong. Certainly he left it right to the last minute to bring on Marcus Rashford, to bring us a glorious victory, sadly to no avail. Even though Rashford did more good things in 4 minutes than the rest of the team put together.

One of my favourite tv programmes from years ago was Mash. It ran for 11 series and 256 episodes between 1972 to 1983. The show was based around key personnel in a United States Army Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in the Korean War (1950–1953). In one episode where Hawkeye played by Alan Alda, is called out to the front lines due to a shortage of doctors there. When he arrives, there are bombs and bullets flying all around. He suddenly realizes that his own life is in great danger. So in the few spare moments he has there, he takes time to write out his last will and testament. Eventually, another doctor arrives at the front and Hawkeye is able to return to the relatively more safe 4077 MASH his own base. He arrives late in the evening, enters the office, sits down at the desk and works on the conclusion of his will. Private Klinger, comes in and sees him and asks what he’s doing. Hawkeye tells him and Klinger responds by saying "No paper work is so important that it can’t wait until tomorrow." Hawkeye looks at him thoughtfully and says, "I used to think that way too, but not anymore." It was not until Hawkeye had experienced his close encounter with death on the front lines that he had come to realize the great importance of being prepared for death and living each day to the fullest.

Regardless of our age, death is a common denominator, we can’t buy an exit clause, few can plan for it, it can happen at anytime. I shall never forget nearly 32 years ago talking to the then curate of my local church in Collier Row as he tried to teach me about Christianity with the prospect of me becoming a Christian. He told me that regardless of my past God will forgive it all. Being only 37 at the time and in the police force where in those days you work and played hard, I replied well if that’s the case I will carry on living my ungodly lifestyle then when I’m really old I’ll repent, be forgiven and make my commitment and God will give me access to heaven. To which he replied that’s ok but do you really know when you will die. He then took out his Filofax, no ipads or ipods in those days and said, I would like to take your funeral do you want to book it now! Oh boy like Hawkeye that was for me a wake up call! Obviously I did eventually take that step of faith but as I prepared this talk, I have to ask the question am I really prepared for either my death or the second coming! Are there areas in my life that need the light of Jesus to shine more brightly and dispel the darkness. Appearances are deceiving. The foolish virgin bridesmaids in the Gospel reading .....looked, dressed and marched like bridesmaids. They were pretty, radiant and even charming on the outside, hence why they are referred to as virgin, but they were dreary, dim and dull on the inside. Just as Hawkeye faced a reality check do we! Jesus gave this parable to clarify what it means to be ready for his return and how to live until that moment. He teaches us that everyone of us is responsible for his or her own spiritual condition.

This parable is about a wedding. On the wedding day as was the custom, the bridegroom went to the bride’s house for the ceremony. Then the bride and groom along with a great parade of relatives and well wishers returned to the groom’s house where a great feast took place, often lasting up to a week. These bridesmaids were waiting for the parade and they hoped to take part in the banquet. But when the groom didn’t come at the expected time, five of them were out of lamp oil. By the time they purchased extra oil it was too late to join the feast.

When Jesus returns to take us his people, his bride to heaven, we must be ready. Spiritual preparation cannot be bought or borrowed at the last minute. Our relationship with God must be our own. I am convinced that unless you have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ whilst alive, it will be too late once we die. People often ask me the question, how would I describe heaven and hell. My answer to them is heaven is the continuation of being as one with God knowing his blessing, receiving his peace and comfort that passes all human understanding. Hell would be a total separation from God and his blessing.

A business executive had an emergency and needed his suit dry cleaned before he was called to go on a trouble shooting trip, as he had spilt a coffee over himself. He remembered one store with a huge sign, “One-Hour Dry Cleaners.” It was on the other side of town, so he drove out of his way to drop off his suit. After the shop assistant filled out the necessary information, he told her, “I have some errands to run and I’ll be back in an hour to pick it up.” She said, “I can’t get this back to you until Thursday.” “I thought you did dry cleaning in an hour,” he said. “Oh, no,” she replied, “That’s just the name of the store, we don’t actually do that.” There are many folks today who wear a sign saying they are a Christian, but they fail to deliver the goods. There are many churches who do not deliver on what the sign out front says either. If there is one thing you and I really must grasp, it would be this: Spiritual readiness, preparation and growth does not just happen. It comes as a result of intentional godly habits built into one’s life. You cannot depend on a Sunday morning service to provide all your spiritual needs including salvation. Like me you are probably sick to death with hearing the fear factor spread by Politians, who shall we say were less than economical with the truth.

One of the worst things we could ask or expect from God is give us what we deserve. Although who could deny God’s abundant Grace and Mercy, who could blame him if because we are only one day a week Christians, all he offered us was one day a week in heaven and six in hell! However the Biblical truth is not even that is up for grabs! This isn’t Roger telling porkies! Like some politician Hear the words from the lips of Jesus: ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”***

Hear what St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6  ***do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

***Hear what St. John says: Rev 21 v8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."***

However the hope factor the good news, is that Heaven will be full of such people, people like you and me who fall into those categories. However it will only be those who as St. Pauls puts it ***But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

Just as the business man’s suit needed stains removed, so do many of us. The good news is that we don’t have to wait till Thursday, not even an hour. Right now at this service as we prepare ourselves for communion we can receive the promise of eternal life by God’s Grace and Mercy if we truly repent, turn away from our wrong doings and like the five wise bridesmaids shine the light and love of Jesus in our lives. For Christians who truly do the will of Father God when we die or Jesus comes back will receive fresh clean clothes of righteous to equip us for heaven.

In early 1874 an inventor named Elisha Gray transmitted a few musical notes over a telegraph wire. He thought to himself, "If I can send music, perhaps I could send the human voice." The NEW YORK TIMES reported predictions of a "talking telegraph", and the public began to grow eager for it. Just one-year later Gray believed he had the answer. Tin can like voice chambers connected by a wire in a liquid that could turn vibrations into signals is what came into his mind. However, he did not put his idea on paper for two months. After finally making a sketch, he waited four more days before he went to the patent office. When he arrived, Mr. Gray was told that just two hours earlier a school teacher had come through that same door with his own sketch and had already applied for the patent. His name was Alexander Graham Bell.

When you compared the sketches, the voice chambers, the wire, and the liquid everything was identical. The reason we know the name Alexander Graham Bell and until today, never heard the name Elisah Gray is simply because one man seized the opportunity when he could. The other one waited until it was too late. ONE MOMENT’S DELAY MAY USHER IN AN ETERNITY OF REGRET.