

Prepare & Watch

Introduction

Last week we saw a picture worth more than a thousand words as we looked at the triumphal entry and spoke about death and glory. Today we see our second picture of the passion week and focus on this thought – Prepare and Watch...

Sometimes a person's whole life is gathered up into one moment.

During the Olympics, before an athlete competes in an event, commentators will talk about how the athlete spent years training for this exact moment. For example, you may see an ice skater preparing for her final program. The commentator talks about the kind of intense training that goes into this event. As the commentator talks, you see images of a young girl, holding her dad's hand as she struggles to stand in skates on the ice. You see a film clip of her practicing a jump and falling. Early morning training. Weekend competitions. The images pass by and then you are brought back to the present moment. The announcer says, "She has worked a lifetime for this moment," and the music begins.

A lifetime of preparation for just one moment.

The same thing can happen outside athletics too. It happens for people like you and me.

I heard a story about a couple, Eduardo and Maria. They had just received news from the doctor. The results were not conclusive, but the doctor strongly believed Maria had MS. They were now awaiting a schedule of further tests. As they sat there in the doctor's office, Maria felt Eduardo touch her hand. He said, "We'll handle it." His words brought a lifetime of memories rushing back. That's what he'd said when she needed to be on total bedrest during the last weeks of her pregnancy. That's what he'd said when they closed the factory. That's what he'd said when their second child was diagnosed with depression. Again and again, throughout all of those years, she had felt him place his hand on

hers and say, "We'll handle it." And, with God's grace and strength, they did.

Those words meant work. Hard work. A facing of facts. They led to a deeper reliance upon faith and prayer. And a daily commitment to doing what could be done and entrusting their days and burdens to the Lord.

Suddenly, Maria saw it. Those years of faith in the midst of hardship were training. Training for this present moment. And, although she was devastated by the news and afraid of what this might mean for her family, she knew that they would handle it. God had prepared them for a moment like this.

Getting to the Heart

Our theme for today is "Prepare and Watch." If you have been reading along in the *Crucified. Glorified.* prayer journal, you will remember last week's readings touched on the parables Jesus told during the last week of his life. Jesus was telling stories to touch the imagination of his disciples. He wanted them to prepare and watch. He spoke of bridesmaids waiting for the groom, of guests invited to a banquet and needing to be prepared, of people watching and waiting for trees to bear fruit. In story after story, Jesus was encouraging his disciples to watch. Prepare and watch for the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus wants you to know something, too—discipleship is not one day a week. Living in the Kingdom is not about one hour on a weekend. It is 24/7. Day in, day out—preparing and watching. Have you ever noticed how hard it is to keep watching? It is so easy to come to church on Sunday and think we have got God covered. For us, being a Christian can sometimes be reduced simply to going to church. Yet, there's more to it than that.

"I went to church," we say to God. Then God responds, "Yes. And now, you're going out into the world. I'll meet you there. Be prepared. Watch."

Jesus wants us to live in deep discipleship with him. He wants us to meet him in our daily lives in the world. But what does that look like?

Today, Jesus gives us an answer not in parables but in a person:

Mark 14:1-9 New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

14 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages^[a] and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you,^[b] and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Jesus was in the town of Bethany. It was a small village about two miles outside of Jerusalem. With the celebration of Passover, Jerusalem was crowded, and so Jesus was eating dinner outside Jerusalem in the home of Simon. I want you to also notice that Mark is careful to tell us that **Simon was a leper**... Isn't that just like Jesus... But I want you to keep that thought in mind for a little bit later this morning

While he is reclining at table, a woman comes in. She is carrying a bottle of ointment. Expensive ointment. It was a perfume that had been made from the roots of a plant grown in the mountains of northern India. It had come from halfway across the world and brought with it a fragrance that people had only heard about, never smelled.

Coming to Jesus, she broke the long neck of the jar and poured the ointment over his head. Fragrance filled the room.

They began to argue about this anointing. It was a waste of money. This ointment could have been sold. The proceeds could have been given to the poor. A whole year's salary—think of the good you could do with that! All of that money, wasted as it was poured out on Jesus.

The room quickly closed in as these men poured out their anger on the woman. They scolded her. They turned everyone's eyes away from Jesus and onto her. She suddenly looked foolish. Wasteful. Inconsiderate. Uncaring toward the poor.

But then Jesus spoke. He interrupts their hatred to speak love. He stops an argument in order to begin a conversation—a conversation that we can learn from today. Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:9).

Jesus connects what she did with the gospel. Why? Because she anointed Jesus for his burial. He would soon be beaten, spit on, scourged and flogged, nailed to a tree. But he was anointed for this work. His death and burial would be a royal act of love. This is how God will bring about the Kingdom. For her, for the disciples, for you. What she did was right—it was foolish, it was wasteful, but it was right. Why? Because it was connected to this wonderful, wasteful love of God.

Jesus is trying to train us. To help recognize love when we see it. Love sometimes looks foolish. Wasteful. Unwise.

That God would send his Son to die for sinners is foolish. That God would love those who do not love him back is a waste. That God would entrust his Kingdom to people who keep on failing him is unwise. And yet that is the wonderful love that brings you into the Kingdom of God. God sends his Son, Jesus, to do the foolish work of love. He dies for you and then rises to teach you what his death truly means. You are forgiven of your sins and you are made a child in God's Kingdom. Anointed with the Spirit,

you now bring to the world this foolishly fragrant, this wonderfully wasteful love of God.

As we think about the powerful truths of that song and the extravagant act of love performed by this woman let's consider how we can prepare and watch

1. Prepare by asking "What Can I Give?"

In 1960, **Dashrath Manjhi** was a common laborer from Gelhour Hills in Bihar, India. His community was somewhat remote, with limited access to vital services, because traveling involved going around a three hundred foot mountain that stood between the towns.

Dashrath decided that what his community most needed was a road through the mountain. Since no one else was going to do it, he decided he would.

He sold some goats to buy a hammer and chisel, and set out chipping away at the mountain each day after work.

Of course, people called his plan foolish and said the project could never be completed, but he just kept chipping away with his hammer and chisel.

1960, chipping away.

1961, chipping away.

Then 1962. 1963 ... let's fast forward a couple of decades ... 1980, still chipping away.

1981, chipping.

1982... **And the project is finished.** The road is 30 feet wide, cut 25 feet deep into the rock.

Now, instead of having to travel 55 kilometers for access to services, the people of his village need travel only 15 kilometers. And it was accomplished by one man with a couple of hand tools.

What an example of reaching for that which is beyond you. And what an example of making the most of each day.

Can you really carve a road through a three-hundred foot impasse of a mountain with just a hammer and a chisel, all by yourself?

Yes, you can. In twenty-two years you can do it, when you reach for it every day, and you keep chipping away.

To make your life what it can be, **make it your daily resolve to aim for that which is beyond you, and reach for that which is above you.**

2. Prepare to give lavishly

Just before Patrick turned 16 years of age, he and his family were at their holiday villa by the sea, located outside the town of Bannaventa Berniae when Irish pirates attacked it just before dawn. (Some say the villa was attacked during the day while Patrick played on the beach. Although Patrick's family escaped, Patrick and many of the family's workers did not; and soon they were en route to Ireland, where Patrick was sold as a slave to Miliuc of Slemich, a Druid tribal chieftain.

Patrick was given the task of a herdsman. **Though raised in a Christian home** (his father, Calpornius, was a civil magistrate and tax collector, as well as a church deacon), Patrick never made a decision to follow Christ until he was kidnapped and made a slave. In his autobiography called Confessions, Patrick wrote: "...'the Lord opened my senses to my unbelief,' so that though late in the day, I might remember my many sins; and accordingly 'I might turn to the Lord my God with all my heart.'" He also wrote about how his faith in God grew as he prayed to Him while he shepherded the flocks: "But after I had come to Ireland, it was then that I was made to shepherd the flocks day after day, and, as I did so, I would pray all the time, right through the day. More and more the love of God and fear of him grew strong within me, and as my faith grew, so the Spirit became more and more active... In snow, in frost, in rain, I

would hardly notice any discomfort, and I was never slack but always full of energy. It is clear to me now, that this was due to . . . the Spirit within me."

But Patrick's devotion to God did not go unnoticed. He soon earned the nickname "Holy Boy" among his fellow slaves.

One night Patrick had a dream, and in it he heard a voice saying to him, "You are right to fast, soon you will be returning to your own country

At the age of 22, Patrick escaped and traveled 200 miles to the coast of Ireland.

The journey by boat was long, including a stop on land where they journeyed for 28 days. After having run out of food, the captain turned to Patrick and challenged him to ask his God for food. Glad to oblige, Patrick responded: "Turn trustingly to the Lord who is my God and put your faith in him with all your heart, because nothing is impossible to him. On this day, he will send us food sufficient for our journey, because for him there is abundance everywhere."

According to Patrick's autobiography, when the men turned around, a herd of pigs was standing before them. They feasted for days and gave thanks to God.

Two years later Patrick finally made it to his beloved Britain and into the arms of his mother and father who pled with him never to leave them again. Patrick began to settle back into his life in Britain and studied to become a priest and bishop. But one night Patrick had a dream of a man who seemed to come from Ireland and was carrying a letter with the words "The Voice of the Irish." As Patrick began to read the words, he seemed to hear the voice of the same men he worked with as if they were shouting, "Holy brother of a boy, we beg you, come back and walk once more among us."

But Patrick's plans to return to Ireland—the land of his captivity—were fiercely opposed by both his parents and the church leaders who, by the way, did not think the Druids were worth saving. His family shuddered at the thought of him returning to barbaric Ireland with the gospel, as the Druids were known to weave criminals and

runaway slaves into giant wicker baskets and suspend them over a fire. Of this opposition Patrick later wrote; "So at last I came here to the Irish gentiles to preach the gospel. And now I had to endure insults from unbelievers, to 'hear criticism of my journeys' and suffer many persecutions 'even to the point of chains.' ...And should I prove worthy, I am ready and willing to give up my own life, without hesitation, for his name...There was always someone talking behind my back and whispering, 'Why does he want to put himself in such danger among his enemies who do not know God?'" Patrick had to sell his title of nobility in order to become the "slave of Christ serving the barbaric nation."

While Patrick was in Ireland, he shared the gospel with his former slave owner, Miliuc the Druid. But instead of turning his back on his pagan gods, Miliuc locked himself in his house and set it on fire while Patrick stood outside the house and pled with him to turn to Christ. It is said Miliuc drowned out Patrick's pleadings by crying out to his false gods.

But Miliuc's refusal to hear the gospel was just the beginning of Patrick's challenges with the Druids as he spread the gospel across Ireland and taught the people how to read and write.

Patrick continued his journey across Ireland. He preached at racetracks and other places of worldly indulgences, seeing many come to Christ. However, this was not without opposition. The Druids often tried to poison him. One time a barbarian warrior speared Patrick's chariot driver to death in an attempt to kill Patrick. He was often ambushed at his evangelistic events, and it is noted that he was enslaved again for a short time. He had to purchase safe passage through a hostile warlord's land in order to continue on his journey. Another time Patrick and his companions were taken as prisoners and were going to be killed, but they were later released. In Confessions, Patrick wrote, "As every day arrives, I expect either sudden death or deception or being taken back as a slave or some such other misfortune. But I fear none of these, since I look to the promise of heaven and have flung myself into the hands of the all-powerful God, who rules as Lord everywhere."

Patrick journeyed throughout Ireland, sharing Christ until his death on March 17th, around the year 461 A.D. Later Irish mythological creatures known as leprechauns would creep into the holiday celebrations, as well as the symbol of the shamrock, believed to have been used by Patrick to illustrate the Trinity as he preached and taught. Some legends have circulated stating Patrick drove all the snakes out of Ireland. Since there are no snakes in Ireland and snakes often symbolize the devil and evil, many believe the "snakes" were a metaphor representing his work of driving the idol-worshipping Druid cult out of the country.

Enslavement, torture, imprisonment and death for one's faith...

We may never be enslaved, imprisoned or beaten because of our faith in Christ, but many may make fun of us for believing in Jesus' promise of heaven and placing our faith in a God they do not see with their eyes and cannot touch with their hands. I pray this version of Patrick's courageous life will inspire you to stand firm in Christ and stand strong for Him as you tell others about the greatest gift we can ever be given—salvation through Jesus!

3. Prepare to be Misunderstood

4. Watch for opportunities to give

In the story of the woman who anointed Jesus, Jesus teaches us that God's love may appear foolish and wasteful in the world.

5. Watch for ways in which He wants to use you

6. Watch for people on whom you can pour out his love

What happens if we start believing that God came to save people who loved him and not those who were his enemies? What happens when we believe that God came to save his enemies?

Taking It Home

By giving us a picture of this woman, Jesus invites us to see the work of God. First in him and then in our lives.

Like this woman, Jesus takes that which is priceless and pours it out for us. The King of all creation pours out his royal blood on the cross. That death, however, is not the end. It is the beginning... It descends to the depths of hell with victory over sin, death, and the devil. It rises to the heights of heaven with power and glory. It crosses the mountains and travels over the seas. It goes from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. It is found even here. Today. In this place, where people sometimes think that faith means giving one day of the week to God. Here, Jesus comes to share with you the good news that he has given his life for you. You are forgiven.

And now, Jesus invites you to prepare for and watch the work of God in your lives. Today, he prepares you. He shows you what love looks like. And tomorrow he will meet you out in the world. Watch for him. Wherever an act of love is out of place, wherever a word of forgiveness is foolish, wherever a work of kindness is a waste, there you will find him. Waiting for you. God has prepared you for service in the world. He has forgiven your sins so that you will know his boundless love. He has given you his Spirit that you might be empowered to share that love with others. He now invites you to prepare and watch for opportunities in the week to come.

Isaiah 58:1-2; 6-12 New International Version (NIV)

58 “Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. ²For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

⁶ “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness^[a] will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. ¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.