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Readiness for Death.

SERMON PREACHED AT ALBERTON, ONT., BY REV. WM. M. REID, ONONDAGA, IN CONNECTION WITH THE VERY SUDDEN DEATH OF MRS. THOMAS ARMOUR, A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH THERE.

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TEXT.—Matt. xxiv., 44: "Be ye also ready." Much of the teaching of Jesus Christ is in words of solemn warning and entreaty to men to be ready for His coming. In this and the following chapters the fact of His sudden and unexpected advent and the great importance of being ready for it, are brought before us in parable and simile, most impressive and significant. In these sayings of Christ regarding His second coming there is much mystery, and many things hard to be understood. He here speaks in words of withering plainness and severity against the Jewish nation for that unfaithfulness which was to bring upon them such awful suffering and desolation. Much that was then foretold is now part of the great events of history. What Christ said regarding the final judgment, future rewards and punishments concerns us. When He comes to us at death our doom is then fixed for ever. Of that day and hour, and the manner of His coming, no one can tell. Only God Himself knows this awful secret. It is kept hid with divine wisdom and profound reserve. It is well for us that it is so. In this uncertainty is our safety and usefulness. That Christ will come and call us to our account is certain. When and how He will come is not revealed. What He urges here is that we, as wise and faithful servants, should be ready at His coming. To know clearly what this readiness means is to all of the very first importance.

I.—There is readiness of STATE. When a man sees himself to be a sinner, weak, undone, and unworthy, and by faith accepts Jesus Christ as his righteousness and strength, that man is at that moment saved from the penalty of sin. He is in a saved state, and in actual though elementary sense ready to die. He is justified by faith, as Abraham was, and his faith is counted or reckoned to him for righteousness. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life." When the jailer at Philippi drew his sword to kill himself, he was not in a state of readiness to die. A very short time after, he by faith passed from death unto life. In the space of one hour he was converted, and is now in love bathing the wounds which he mercilessly inflicted. None of us are so careless and hardened as this man, yet we must be saved and made ready for death and judgment in the same way. This readiness does not consist in being born in a Christian land, or being brought up in a Christian home, or in making a vague confession of faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world. A man may plead all that, and much more, and after all be rejected, shut out from the kingdom of heaven at last. Mere appearance and profession are but snares and a delusion. Two men may live together, work together, and to all appearance be much alike in many respects, and yet the one is ready and the other is not. All the ten virgins were very much alike, but at the last testing crisis, when the Bridegroom came, only five of them were ready, and being ready they went in to the marriage feast, and the door was shut! "Can one really know that they are ready?" is a question often asked. It was put to me once in a railway car. I asked my friend if he really knew where he was bound for to-day. He said that of course he did. After some talk on the subject, he confessed that it would be mad and foolish of any man to be sitting there not knowing exactly where he was going, and without a ticket. Faith in Christ and His finished work is our through ticket to glory. Having this ticket, a man is ready, and none can challenge his presumption or his right to travel. We can know with more certainty whether or not we are thus ready to die, than we can know when we are travelling if we shall ever see our desired destination. There are many fatal accidents. Yes, dear friends, we can be ready, and it is for our peace and safety that we know it. Jesus Christ here says to one and all of us, "Be ye also ready." He will not ask us to do or to be what is impossible. The act is ours. The power is of God. Whoever questions this, denies the truth, knows not the Scriptures nor the power of God. I beseech you, believe not the devil's lie, and the world's delusion. We can be ready in the way which God has graciously made known to us in Christ Jesus.

II.—There is readiness of CHARACTER. We said that when a man truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, as offered to him in the Gospel, he is justified and saved from the penalty of sin. By readiness of character a man is sanctified and saved from the power of sin.

Justification and adoption as stated in the Shorter Catechism, are acts of God's free grace. To as many as receive Him, Christ gives the right, power or privilege to become the sons of God.

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God. The difference between readiness of state and readiness of character, is the difference between the young inexperienced Christian and the mature aged saint, the difference between the Christian who is worldly and selfish, and the Christian who is heavenly and self-sacrificing. The one is justified and

saved from the penalty due to us for sin, and is thus far ready. The other is sanctified and saved from the power of sin, and is thus far ripe for death. It was many years after his conversion that St. Paul could say with full knowledge and assurance, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." It was when St. John was about ninety years of age, that he could say, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." To have this assurance, this readiness of character, is what we all ought to seek, and not rest satisfied without it. It is an unspeakable comfort to hear our departing friends say to us, "I am ready," and to know that we also are ready. I had not the opportunity of seeing much of her who has so suddenly and unexpectedly passed into eternity. Those of you who knew her best can tell better than I can how ripe she was for death. I saw her half an hour before she fell asleep. She then looked as well as any one here at her age. She hoped to be with us here two days after at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But it was ordered otherwise. By her own confession as a member of this Church, and her consistent character, we believe she was ready. "Be ye also ready," is the warning, loving voice of Jesus, to you, her sorrowing relatives, to us as a Church and congregation, and to every soul in this neighbourhood. Let us then all learn the lesson thus so clearly and impressively taught by this dispensation of God's providence. We cannot tell which of us shall be called next. Let us then be ready, not only in state, but in character and life, not only justified, but also sanctified. Let us have all our concerns temporal and spiritual, wisely arranged. Let us be ready, and not like the ten virgins who all slumbered and slept. Let us be like the wise and faithful servant, ready, waiting and watching for the coming of our Lord. Blessed indeed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing.

III.—This readiness will not interfere with our duties in this life, but fit us more and more for them. Many seem to imagine that a devoted attachment to Christ and His cause and a watchful, prayerful attitude of soul will unfit men for the stern, hard, uphill duties of life. To the honest, straightforward man of business, or any man, the Scriptures distinctly declare that "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." If a man wishes to make the best of both worlds, and have real success, the wisest and happiest course to take is to be a devoted Christian and thus ready for death. This does not mean that we are to be always thinking of death and the grave, and saying we are ready, and live as if walking among tombs and dead men's bones. He is not a good, brave, successful soldier who thinks much of the shot and shell and the dead bodies on the battlefield. To do so would unfit him for the fight and incur the displeasure of the general. His eye must be open to every movement, and his ear to the sound of the trumpet. Readiness is the indispensable condition of every good soldier of Jesus Christ. A faithful, cheerful attention to our present duty is our best preparation to meet Him. In the field, at the mill, in the store, in the busy market, in the quiet home; whatever, wherever our duty is, there we can be ready, there we can work out our salvation, there we can fight the good fight of faith, there we can work out the drama of our mortal life, however humble or uneventful. Jesus comes and calls many thus engaged, as our departed friend was in her chair at her work, with needles in her hand. May the Lord, when he comes, find us all as faithful in the discharge of the duties of our calling. The circumstances in which our Lord may find us are of less importance than our readiness to meet Him.

Doubtless many of us here to-day can say in humble, simple faith in Christ and His finished work, we are ready.

Some of you would like to say so, but you say you do not feel so. Whoever does feel ready to die when in the bloom and prime of life, when all is well and hopeful, and as far as we can see, there is work to do and strength to do it? But mark, my dear hearers, the words of Christ here are not feel you are ready, but "Be ye also ready." Be ye ready, not because you are young or old or in the prime of life, but because death may come to you at any moment, as it came to her who is gone, and seal your doom for ever. An old man whom I knew died suddenly, and a friend of his said he had little time granted him to prepare for death and judgment. "Why, how old was he when he died?" it was asked, "Sixty-four," was the answer. This man, like many more, overlooked the fact that his departed friend had at least fifty years to prepare.

Many men prepare and arrange the things that are the most uncertain in this life and neglect the one thing needful, of which alone we can be certain. Oh, my friends, be wise. Be ready. There may be some one here to-day who has never given this all-important matter a serious thought. You may have had no thoughts about death till to-day. For you to die is a vague, perhaps a pre-adventure, a leap in the dark. I beseech you, for the safety of your soul, face this awful question, and settle it now. Accept God's plan of salvation. By faith in Christ and His finished work you can be ready to meet Him at any time when He comes to call you home. The trumpet call is once again heard in our midst. Let us, in the name of Christ, the Captain of our salvation, sound it out loud and clear: "Be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh." Amen.



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