

LIVING IN READINESS FOR CHRIST'S RETURN. JAMES HORST.

We bring greetings to each one in the precious name of Jesus. It certainly was a precious promise that we sang, that God is all sufficient for the coming year and it certainly is a great blessing that we can trust in that. Certainly we are gathered with the awareness that we are near the end of the year 2007, today is the last Sunday in 2007 and there is only one more business day this year. The opportunities for 2007 are fading into the background, are you ready for the new year? We tend to count time by years, sometimes we go by calendar years, it is a valuable mark of a year's time, often we count years by birthdays, it marks another year, people remember what age they were when certain events took place in their life, they might remember things that took place when they were five years old or when you were 10 years old or 16 or maybe 23. Children often look forward to being one year older, sometimes there is new privileges and new opportunities that the year brings. Other times we count years by school years, that we remember certain events that happened in a certain school year, certain events go by school years, it is another mark of time. So we count the time by years. Today we are near the threshold of another calendar year, somehow a new calendar year is very significant in the business world, a definite mark of time for tax records. Sometimes people have business dealings that they want to finish before the end of the year, there is only one day left and the time is short but if time continues we can use that day as the day of opportunity to finish the business for the year. Well if time continues the new year will come, suddenly the old year fades into history, opportunities for 2007 suddenly slip through our fingers and they are gone forever, what is done is done.

In the business world it is of interest and importance how profitable a year was, people often look for new opportunities for the next year, but in life in general a new year is of interest and importance to us. So God has given us the year 2007 and we raise the question: Did we accomplish what was the most important in 2007?, it soon becomes simply a chapter in history. In years to come possibly not a lot will be told about it but often what we do in one year helps us to be prepared for the next year. If we used 2007 properly then likely we are prepared for 2008. This morning we stand near the threshold of the year 2008, we are about to enter it but it is still in the future. We have a certain amount of expectancy of the future,

we have a little idea of what may take place in 2008 but we cannot see the future, it is hidden by a veil that we cannot see beyond. The songwriter says:

“Oh so you know the present and past,
All that you have been through,
Yet lies before you future deep and vast,
God only knows what it will hold for you.”

So God alone knows what 2008 will hold for you. What it will hold for each one of us, the future is unknown to us, we could raise the question: Will things continue about the same or will there be a big change in our lives if things continue about the same? Are you ready for 2008? Suppose that Jesus would come on January 1 would you be ready? For the message this morning I would like to consider Living in Readiness for Christ's Return. Two things are sure, if you do not remember anything else from the service this morning, remember that Christ will return, it is sure to come and secondly we must be ready when He comes in order to go to heaven, if we are not ready the result will be eternal punishment. So we must remember that Christ will return and that we must be ready. So in the first part of the message I would like to think about the return of Christ.

First of all turn with me to Acts chapter 1, verses nine through eleven. As we look forward to events we look at it through our earth dim vision, many things we don't understand and yet there are enough clear things that we can prepare, think of it like the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ's first coming, they didn't understand the fullness of God's plan of redemption, the gloriousness of it, and all the events that would take place and the whole nature of it, they didn't seem to fully understand it but there was enough clear evidence that they could be ready to receive the new testament gospel and as we look at future we cannot comprehend the fullness of God's plan and how all the details will be worked out. Sometimes we can speculate some, and that has its place, but we cannot fully understand but there is enough clear teaching about the return of Christ that we can be ready. So we have here in Acts chapter 1 verses four through to eight Jesus gives final instructions to His disciples before His ascension, we want to start reading here in:

Acts 1:9-11

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

So we have this account of the ascension here and Jesus preparing His disciples for the time that He would leave them and the promise of His return. As we think of the return of Christ the first point we will consider here is that Christ will return from heaven. We have this account of His ascension into heaven, it is a very sacred time in history, Jesus and His disciples were there, and He was giving them His final instructions and suddenly the force of gravity didn't hold Jesus and He went up, He disappeared into the cloud, it was a very sacred parting. They stood there looking up into heaven, Jesus was gone, but they knew where He went. Then God sent His angels with a very special message here in verse 11; This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

Jesus had told them that He would go and prepare a place and He told them that He would come again and now God sent these angels to them to confirm that. The disciples understood this truth, there was enough evidence that by faith they could believe and then we have after the Holy Ghost came that they taught others. Here in Acts chapter 2 verses thirty two to thirty six we have Peter teaching on the day of Pentecost, it is rather significant some of the words that he says;

Acts 2:32-36:

“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. ³³Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. ³⁴For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, ³⁵Until I make thy foes thy footstool. ³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

The disciples clearly understood the Old Testament scriptures as well as the teachings of Jesus, and they knew that Jesus was at the right hand of God. Jesus was now in His exalted position. Verse 36: they knew that Jesus was Lord and Christ, they also knew that He would come again.

Like in **Philippians. 3:20**: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:” And of course that is the hope of every Christian that Christ will return from heaven.

Secondly Christ's return is sure to come. The two angels at the ascension said that Jesus would come again as they had seen Him go. Jesus said that He would leave, He had told His disciples, and it wasn't right away that He left them, but suddenly the time came that He ascended into heaven, He also said that He would come again, and now today we look for the promise of His return and we don't know when that will be, we wait for that promise to be fulfilled but that day will come. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 1 verse 7. When Jesus went on trial He told the high priest that he would see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, the day is coming and the high priest will see Him come, Pilate will see Him come, the soldiers will see Him come, all will see Him come, no one will be excluded.

Revelation 1:7.

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

Cometh with clouds, every eye shall see Him and that includes us here this morning, it includes every soul in Medina County, it includes every soul in Wayne County, it includes those that pierced Him and all those today that reject Christ, that crucify the son of God afresh, all that are not ready will wail because of Him, every eye shall see Him, we do not know when that day will come but that day will come.

Hebrews 10:37 “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

It has been a little while and now it could be any time, the time will come, Christ's return is sure to come.

Thirdly Jesus will come suddenly. Turn with me to first Corinthians 15 verses fifty one to fifty eight. The disciples watched Jesus leave, He went up and suddenly He vanished out of sight, but suddenly He will appear again, and we could raise the question how long will it take for Him to appear again? Some people, in relation to the new year, they like to stay up and see the new year come in, of course most people have something more worthwhile to do, but we raise the how long does it take to change to a new year? You know we wait until that appointed time and then in a moment

of time it changes to the new year. New Year's Day may be a special time of pondering what God has done for us another year, we may specially commit our way to Him in the coming year, but the change to the new year is sudden, it does not take long yet generally life continues on. As we think of in that moment that it takes to change to the new year suppose that Jesus would come would we be ready? When Jesus comes there won't be a continuing on as always before, there will be a sudden change.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? ⁵⁶The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Jesus will come suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. How long will it take? Instantly it will be different. We can't fathom how this miracle will take place but every eye shall see him. We can imagine that there would be something supernatural that would cause everyone to look up and in that instant Jesus will come, nothing will distract anyone from seeing him, full attention will be on this meeting Jesus, cares of earth and will be dropped instantly, the only thing in focus is being ready to meet Jesus. There will be no time to get ready, there will be no chance of squirming out of what is done or what is not done;

Revelation 22:12: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

There will be no time for changing, no time for rearranging, Jesus will come suddenly. Verse 58 (1 Corinthians 15) here is a very timely verse it says: ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The need to be steadfast and unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord. It is not in vain to be careful about serving the Lord faithfully.

There are those who would like to intimidate us that it is vain to serve the Lord faithfully, but it is not in vain to be careful about serving the Lord faithfully, to be in His will at all times.

Neither does corruption inherit incorruption, behold I show you a mystery, not all of us will sleep, in other words not all of us will die before the return of Christ, those of us that are still alive will suddenly be changed, and given an immortal body, one that is not subject to death. As we think of Jesus coming and the presence of Jesus, this earthly mortal body would not be able to stand the glorious appearance and the events that would take place, all would be changed and given immortal bodies. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** tells of how the dead in Christ shall rise first, we think of the reuniting of spirit and body at the resurrection. As we think of these new bodies how much we will recognise one another we do not know for sure but then as we think of the resurrection, Jesus speaking of the resurrection, says in **John 5:28-29**

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

The verses just before these refer to the Father giving Jesus the authority to judge, but the hour is coming when all of them in their graves will hear His voice, no one will be missed. It says; “and shall come forth,” ones that have done good to the resurrection of life and the ones that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. All will be given new bodies that will not be subject to death, those that are alive and remain likely wont see the resurrection taking place around them, the attention will be on Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 tells: “.... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Saved for eternity with an immortal body, what a blessed state.

In contrast Jesus refers to those that have done evil; “and he also shall come forth unto the resurrection of damnation” Whilst the righteous rejoice at the resurrection of Jesus the wicked will have a different response. The scripture refers to the one that was speechless, **[Matthew 22:12]** the scripture also refers to the ones that try to justify themselves but it was to no avail, and still others that couldn't face Jesus and they cried at the rocks and the mountains to cover them, **[Revelation 6:16]** the wicked will be doomed forever with an eternal body. While we rest assured that there will

be righteous judgment God knoweth them that are his, the righteous children of God will be saved for eternity with an immortal body, to the righteous we read:

1 Corinthians 15:53-54. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”

To have an immortal body that is saved for eternity it will be victory, no sickness, no pain, no temptation. Praise the Lord for that blessed hope. So as we think of the return of Christ we know that Christ will return from heaven and we know that his return is sure to come, and he will come suddenly, all will be given immortal bodies for their eternal destiny. When Jesus will come we do not know. The consequences of being unprepared are eternal, the destiny will be unchangeable, it is a sobering reality, we must be ready. Should he come at dinnertime today are you ready? Should he come during the night tonight at two o'clock are you ready? Should he come at the entering of the year 2008 will you be ready?

Second part of the message. The thought of living in readiness.

First point I have is: we must bow at the name of Jesus. Turn with me to Philippians 2 verses nine to eleven. This chapter gives the example of Christ who was made in the likeness of man, He was humble and He was obedient, through the years of tests He was victorious and now He is our Lord and Saviour.

Philippians. 2:9-11

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; ¹¹And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus humbled Himself, He provided salvation and we see today that God has highly exalted Him. He is not only our Saviour but He is our Lord, He is worthy of our worship, He is worthy of our full surrender to His Lordship, we need to bow to Him. We think of the need to bow to Him when we are converted, when we initially repent of sin and surrender our life to Him, it is the first step of being ready to meet Him, to repent and to commit our life to Him. But as Christians we must continue to bow to Jesus, we need a daily surrender to what He wants us to do. Consider Him

worthy of our worship, honour Him as Lord of our life, honour Him with our daily obedience, we must bow at the name of Jesus.

Secondly we need to believe that Jesus is coming. Turn with me to second Peter chapter 3, we will read several verses there. We know that Jesus is coming, we don't know when, we must beware lest we allow doubt and unbelief and lest we follow our own selfish course and listen to the wrong voice.

2 Peter 3:3-4

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁴And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.”

We know that God has wisely withheld from us when Jesus will come and yet He has given enough information that we can prepare for that time. We don't know when it will be, the warnings have been around for years and scoffers say that things continue the same as always and it is no longer important, we are tempted to begin to doubt, we are tempted to allow unbelief to take root, and we may allow ourselves to think that it doesn't matter so much and we walk in lust like the scoffers do. They begin to do what they think they can get by with and they think it doesn't matter. The call to us this morning is to believe. Reading on here:

2 Peter 3:9-14

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. ¹¹Seeing then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ¹²Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? ¹³Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. ¹⁴Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

God is not slack concerning His promise but is rather given time for man to repent. He will come and the earth will be burned up and as we believe

that, it affects what we do. Like in verse 11 here we will echo this question where it says what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, and verse 14; "...seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"

As we believe the fact that Jesus is coming, as we believe the fact that this earth will be dissolved, it moves us to action and it causes us to be diligent to be without spot and blameless.

Thirdly living in readiness requires a personal faithfulness in daily life. Turning back to Matthew chapter 24 verses thirty seven to forty four. Being without spot and blameless is a personal choice made daily, it is not a one-time decision, it can be a decision to take that course but being without spot and blameless is a personal choice that we must make daily, Matthew 24 refers to the end times and it gives warning to take heed lest we be not ready, some will be ready, many will not be ready, the difference is a personal choice.

Matthew 24:37-44

"But as the days of Noah *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ³⁸For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, ³⁹And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴¹Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

We think of the days of Noah, people were careless and indifferent, they carried on normal activities of life but without an eternal perspective. They failed to take heed to God's way, Noah and his family took part in some of the same activities but Noah and his family were personally faithful to God, they were able to do it to God's honour and to God's glory and then we have this illustration here of the two that were in the field as well as the two that were at the mill, they were carrying on the normal duties of life, the normal cares of life, the normal events that take place in life and we could raise the question; Why was one taken and the other left? Why was

one saved and one not saved? Well it was because one had made a personal choice to be faithful. It is sobering to think that even if we associate with the right people yet there is that possibility that one will be saved and one will not. Which one will I be? Living in readiness requires a personal faithfulness in daily life. The call in verse 42 “watch therefore” We never know when the time will come. Verse 43 gives the illustration of this thief if the goodman of this house would have known when this thief was coming he would have watched. And verse 44; “Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as you think not the son of man cometh.”

The Son of man could come at any hour, be ready, daily keep the record clear, make sure things are clear before you lay down to sleep at night lest Jesus comes whilst you are sleeping. Each of us makes this choice, be ready at all times, living in readiness requires a personal faithfulness in daily life.

Fourthly living in readiness requires patient endurance. We read on hear in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:45-51

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; ⁴⁹And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Patient endurance. We see here that there was a work to do, but as we think of ourselves being like unto this servant that was given responsibility, verse 46 says; “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” There is a work to do. But in verse 48 it mentions about the Lord delaying his coming, there was work to do, there is a responsibility to continue on and to meet the needs of this household, after a while the work didn't seem so important and he started to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken, to please himself instead of meeting the needs of others. When the Lord returned it was not a blessing there was severe punishment. So it is with us after a few years, are we still zealous to serve God or do we allow human nature to find fault with eve-

ryone else and leave God's work undone to indulge in selfishness, rather than exhorting one another and encouraging each other to faithfulness. Do we let the work undone or do we do the work that God has given us to do. It takes patience to zealously serve God. Back in verse 13 of this same chapter it says:

Matthew 24:13: “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

Enduring to the end is what counts

Also reading a few verses from James chapter 5

James 5:7-11

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. ⁸Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. ⁹Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. ¹⁰Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. ¹¹Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

It takes a patient endurance, faithfully, patiently serve the Lord until He comes. Be ye also be patient, stablish your heart, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Many get weary and loose out but living in readiness requires patient endurance.

Fifthly be prepared to be judged by your words. Turn back to Matthew chapter 12 verses thirty six and thirty seven, familiar verses here, we know that speech is a gift from God, it is a blessing to be able to communicate and it can be used right but with this gift comes a responsibility, comes an accountability, the tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil, [**James 3:8**] but there is a responsibility that goes with it.

Matthew 12:36-37

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. ³⁷For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Rather sobering. Words come easily for most people, what kind of words are they, are they idle words, are they gossip words, are they unkind, are they lying words? We need God to control our tongue. We need sound

speech that cannot be condemned. The Bible calls us to be slow to speak, **[James 1:19]** to consider what we will say, we need to consider, we need to have right speech. A challenge for each of us to have good words, to have true words, to have kind words, to have words that edify.

Sixthly be ready to be judged according to our works. Turn with me to second Corinthians 5. Some say that what we think is really what matters and what we think is important that is true, the scripture also calls us to do righteousness, what we do will make a difference at the judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:10

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.”

We will be judged according to the things done in the body, the deeds done in this mortal body, this body that is subject to pain and sickness and death, in a world that is full of cares as well as full of sin and temptation. We make choices each day that could affect our destiny, all must appear, all must appear before the judgment seat Christ to be judged:

2 Corinthians 5:11 “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;” In our frailty we scarcely comprehend the terror of the Lord and yet as we with an open mind consider the scriptures we get a glimpse of it.

Now turn with me yet to Revelation 22 verses ten through twelve, the last chapter of the Bible, a few final instructions we might say, a glimpse into the future, an important glimpse into the future. So as we think of this decision-making that we are doing today and that affects our destiny that is now in this body but the day is coming at the return of Christ when decision-making will be over, what is done is done.

Revelation 22:10-12

“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. ¹¹He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. ¹²**And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.**”

When Christ returns how will it read for me? Will it be unjust or will it be righteous? Will it be filthy or will it be holy? Today is the day of deci-

sion. Verse 12 says: "And behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be."

Today we have the opportunity to make choices, today is the day of decision, when that moment comes there will be no changing. So in conclusion as we come back to our question; Are we ready for the new year? but more important is; Are you ready for the return of Christ if it is at two o'clock tonight are you ready for the return of Christ? Two things are certain: Christ will return and we must be ready. Only those that are prepared will go to heaven. May we be ever ready for that time.

Revelation 22:20-21

He which testifieth these things saith, **Surely I come quickly.** Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.