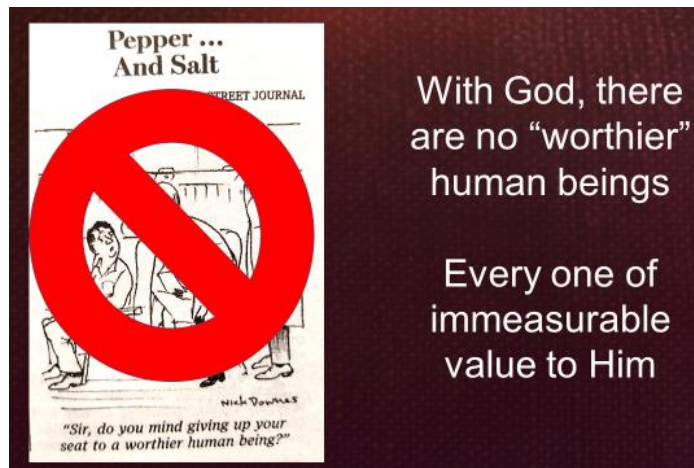


## PRESENCE FOREVER: What Sin Rejected, Grace Restores

With your permission and cooperation, I'd like to begin our time in the Word today by asking you 3 questions. They may be the most important questions you've heard in a long time. And yes, you may have heard them before – in fact I hope you have – but if not, or if you've shelved them for a while, let's blow the dust off, and for just a few minutes, take them on. Three questions. Here we go.

### #1 Do you know WHY you were created?

I ask that because the Bible seems to indicate that no human being, conceived in a mother's womb is a mistake. No matter how they're conceived, or where. Every person can turn to Psalm 139 (pp.521-22 ESV) and sing with David "You (Lord) knitted me together in my mother's womb!" (139:13). "I am fearfully and wonderfully *made* (lit. "set apart"). Wonderful are Your works." A conceived-in-the-womb human life is not merely a biological process; God's omnipotent hands are in there, knitting, shaping, making, setting apart.



"In your book," David continues, "are written my days...every one of them." God had a purpose in creating you. Do you know why?

### #2 Are you FULFILLING the purpose for which God created you?

Because God purposefully created you, there are 3 "callings" in your life for which He has asked you for a response.

## God has called you to His salvation

*Romans 1:5-7 [Paul] we have received [from Jesus Christ] grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you **who are called to belong** to Jesus Christ,*

## God has called you to Christ-likeness

*Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Second, once you've responded in faith to that call, *he has **called you to Christ-likeness***. God the Father's passion is that each person He creates and who is born

into His family become a unique expression—with your personality and gifts and traits—of what Jesus Christ would look like if He were in your skin.

## God has called you to a station in life

*1 Corinthians 7:17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.*

Third, one you've been born into His family by faith, and as you seek every day to become more like Jesus through cooperation with the presence and work of

the Holy Spirit, *he **calls you to particular stations in life***. He calls some to marriage. He calls others to singleness. He calls his children to develop their giftings and then opens doors of opportunity in which those gifts shine to the glory of God. My bride was called to be a teacher, a musician, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, gifted with mercy and an exhortation motivation.

Called to **salvation**. Called to **Christlikeness**. Called with giftings and motivations to **particular stations** and spots in life in which the Holy Spirit expresses the character and power of God through you.

Do you know why you were created? Are *you* fulfilling the purpose (i.e., the callings of God) for which you were created?

### #3 Are you PREPARED for what's next?

Listen to how one description found in *Destined for the Throne* (Paul Billheimer, forward by Dr.

Billy Graham):

*Few secular historians have any conception of the meaning and purpose of history. G.N.Clark addressing Cambridge University said, "There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered." Andre Maurois, French biographer, novelist, and critic opines, "The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why we are here on this puny mud heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea and I am quite convinced no one has."*<sup>i</sup>

*The ancient Greeks considered history an endless circle repeating itself, going no where in particular, accomplishing no discernable purpose. Moderns like Jean Paul Sartre teach that "each man exists in a watertight compartment as an isolated individual in a purposeless universe. The average historian has no clue...[beyond what may be happening in any given age or period]."*<sup>ii</sup>

*If one wants to know the meaning and purpose of history, he must look at the end, the final outcome, the net result. Since Biblical prophecy is "history written in advance," when we turn to the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, what emerges as the finished product of the ages?*

*It is one thing and one alone: **the Eternal Companion of Jesus Christ**, wholly God and wholly Man. The final and ultimate outcome and goal of events, from eternity to eternity, the finished product of all the ages, is the spotless Bride of Christ (i.e., the eternal company of believers), united with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, seated with her heavenly bridegroom upon the throne of the universe—ruling and reigning with Him over an ever-increasing and expanding Kingdom.*

God the Son entered the stream of human history for this one purpose, to claim His Beloved (Revelation 19:7, 9, 21:7, 9-10).

*Thus the Church, and only the Church, is the key to and explanation of history. The Church, blood-washed and spotless, is the center, the reason, and the goal of all God's vast creative handiwork. Creation has no other aim. History has no other goal.*

I understand that what I've just read is a mouthful. I also understand that in simply hearing it, you may not understand all of it, or even "buy" it. If I may boil it down, the Bible teaches history and human experience is all about one central thing – being prepared to experience God's presence in an age and in a universe that will never end.

Here is what the Bible unquestionably teaches about you/me, and the future:

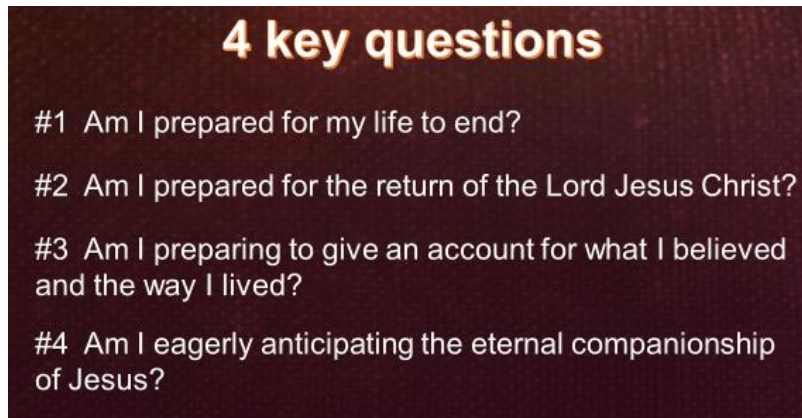
**Since I've been created to flourish forever  
--alive in the very presence of God--  
preparation for what's next is vital.**

**Am I?**

In the moments we have this morning, I'd like to unpack the 4 questions (arising from

Scripture) all persons should be asking themselves in order to be prepared for what's next. They are

#16



### **#1 Am I prepared for my life to end?**

Jesus once addressed this in a story (Luke 12, p. 871 ESV)

Luke 12: 13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."iii

Now, if you were in a Bible study and you were asked, "Make 5 observations about this *rich man*, what would you observe? You might observe

- #1 This RICH MAN had a great piece of land (his "land produced plentifully")
- #2 This RICH MAN had a business growth plan (he planned to expand his holdings)
- #3 This RICH MAN betted he would live a long time ("I have ample goods for many years!")
- #4 This RICH MAN believed living was about personal enjoyment ("eat, drink, be merry!")

And, this last observation might be the most significant.

#5 This RICH MAN, in God's estimation, was a fool.

The very night this RICH MAN was scoping out all of his plans, he died. In fact, he died a pauper. A pauper because he was NOT RICH toward God.

Are you prepared for your life to end *way before* you think it will? And if it does, what obituary will God write about you? Here's the truth – James (4:14) spells it out. "You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then

vanishes. If you are not “rich toward God,” how prepared are you for your life to end?

## **#2 Am I prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

Take note of Paul’s incredible description (1 Thess. 4:13-18, p. 987 ESV)

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep<sup>iv</sup>, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead **in Christ** will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up (Latin word, “raptura”) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words

In the first century church, the expectation of the soon return of Jesus was so vibrant that some churches were knocked-a-bit-off-stride when some fellow Christians died before He came back. So the Holy Spirit gave Paul this word of reassurance (“a word from the Lord”, vs.15).

**#1 Grieve in hope** for fellow believers who have died

**#2 Understand** that Jesus will resurrect fellow believers who have died

**#3 Here’s what will happen** when Jesus returns

Jesus will descend from heaven with a cry and a unmistakable trumpet blast  
Jesus will resurrect and take up the dead-in-Christ first  
Jesus will then take up the in-Christ living  
Every one “in Christ” will be caught up into the air  
All “in-Christ” will meet the Lord there, and be with the Lord forever

**#4 Use these words** to “comfort” one another.

Are you prepared for your life to end? Are you prepared for the sudden return of the Lord Jesus Christ? You are if you are “rich toward God,” if you are today “in-Christ.”

## **#3 Am I preparing to give an account for what I believed and the way I’ve lived?**

**Psalm 10:13** Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”?

**Matthew 12:36-37** The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

**Romans 3:19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

**Romans 14:12** So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

**Hebrews 4:13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**1 Peter 4:5** but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Admittedly, the future prospect of this is challenging to think about, to say the least. What we think, what we say, what we do – everything about each one of us is totally exposed to the God who made us, to the Lord who knows us. Additionally, we are *responsible* for all of it. Our choices matter. In fact, our choices matter for eternity.

This is why the Spirit-inspired authors of Scripture over and over again call on us to think both joyfully and soberly about our lives

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

You see, every one of us has been

**Since I've been created to live & flourish forever  
--alive in the very presence of God--  
preparation for what's next is vital. Am I?**

Am I prepared for my life to end?

Am I prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Am I preparing to give an account what I chose to believe, how I chose to live?

**#4 Am I anticipating my indescribable experience  
in eternity in the companionship of Jesus?**

**Ephesians 2** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>a</sup> and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

<sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the

immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

I wonder...have you ever read this passage and overlooked verse 7? It answers why God created us and poured out his great, merciful, forgiving love *even when we willfully lived in the deadness of our rebellion and sinning*. Why did God *still* pour out His mercy on us through Jesus? So that in an age that will never end, an eternal, omnipotent, limitlessly creative and majestic God might show us the *immeasurable* riches of His grace toward us – all of it coming to us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Translation? Eternity is going to be a blast!

**Since I've been created to live & flourish forever  
--alive in the very presence of God--  
preparation for what's next is vital.**

### CONCLUSION

If I were a betting man, I would be on the following. Namely, that there are three kinds of responses to today's teaching.

Some listening may blow this off. "Another Sunday, another sermon. Too much information...and I don't really care. I will live my life in my own wisdom, and take my chances." You are, I take it, choosing to throw in your lot with the fool in Luke chapter 12. My heart aches for you.

Some listening this morning are dialed in...because they are already preparing. You used to live in Ephesians 2:1-3. But you put yourself in God's hands through faith. You've been made alive in Christ. You are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and quite frankly, not only have you been preparing by pursuing God's presence over the past two months...but every day, you have your ear cocked toward the sky. Every day, you're listening, and you're ready for the Lord Jesus to return.

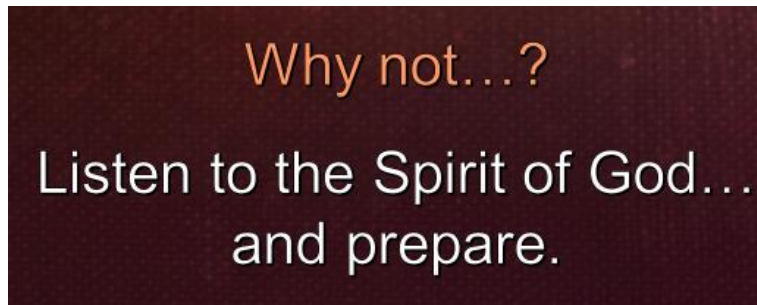
Keep listening. Keep preparing. Share this opportunity with others.

And...some of you listening have **this** going on in your heart. "I've not been preparing. I'm not ready for my life to end. I'm not ready to meet Jesus or to give an account of my choices and living to God. Where do I start?" Start in Ephesians 2

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

And then, after you have been born into God's family by faith, forgiven and declared righteous, start taking those steps that grow you and prepare you for what's ahead. Experience Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



Copyright 2019 © David A. Staff  
All rights reserved

---

<sup>i</sup> Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne: How Spiritual Warfare Prepares the Bride of Christ for Her Eternal Destiny* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1975, 1996), 19.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 12:28 **(to his disciples)** But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. <sup>32</sup> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

<sup>iv</sup> Paul's word picture describing early Christians who had died before the Lord Jesus returned., used also by other Biblical authors to emphasize that those who belong to the Lord will awaken in resurrection to eternal life with God. Cf. John 11:11, Acts 13:36, 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18,20 as well as 1 Thessalonians 4.