

# Preparing to Minister in a Hostile World

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-09-19

On Tuesday we are going to have another preparedness meeting. It is my belief that we have a duty to prepare for contingencies that may hit us in the next months and years. But as we do so, it is also important that we do so with courage, faith, and a vision of what God can do through tyranny, shortages, and even through a hostile environment. God is in control of everything and human responsibility should never be accompanied by fear. Indeed, we prepare *so that* we can be better able to minister. So I have titled today's message, "Preparing to Minister in a Hostile World." And I believe the passage we just read gives us great perspective on facing hostility and an uncertain future.

But before we dig into this passage, let me use an illustration that I used in connection with a Christmas message way back in 2005. I told you a little about the explorer Shackleton. When he was preparing for a trip to the Antarctic, he put the following advertisement into the London newspaper. And as I read this advertisement, see if it is an advertisement that would at all appeal to you. It said,

Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

That's all it said. And the ad was signed Sir Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer. He's the first one pictured in your outline. Interestingly, thousands responded to the call expecting nothing more than the honor of being associated with Shackleton. They were willing to put everything on hold and even risk their lives so that they could be identified with him in his famous explorations. And many did not return alive from that trip. If you have never read the story of these courageous men, do so. I cried my way through many parts of the story. These were men who captivated the hearts of a generation; men of courage, boldness, perseverance, personal sacrifice, loyalty and love. When people have those kinds of characteristics, preparation for the future becomes visionary rather than self-absorbed and fear-driven.

In verses 18-22 Christ called upon some men to be courageous witnesses who would take great risk by identifying with Jesus. But before He did so, He showed them what it would take to minister to a hostile world. In verses 12-17 we have the paradigm of what we too can imitate.

## A Man Sensitive To God's Timetable (v. 12 - "Now when...")

The first thing that we should imitate is Christ's sensitivity to right timing. Verse 12 says, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee." The "when" may not seem important, but in terms of Biblical timing it was critical that Christ leave at this point and go to the country where John was imprisoned.

## This requires God's leading

This was moving *into* danger, *but* because it was *God's* timing, it was the safest place to be. And we too need to be sensitive to God's timing for moves (which some of you are considering), for purchases, for ministry, and for preparedness. Repeatedly through the Gospels we have references such as "the time has come" (John 17:1), "my appointed time is near" (Matt. 26:18), "the right time has not yet come" (John 7:8), "from that time on" (Matt. 4:17; 16:21), "at the right time" (Matt. 24:45), etc. Timing was important to Christ, and in this case, the time had come for Christ to leave one area of ministry and go into another. And we can't settle that issue of timing for *other* people because God's timing for them may be different than it is for you. This was a case where Christ dove into a dangerous area, but it is just as important to realize that there were other occasions where Christ *left* dangerous areas because, as He said it, "My time has not yet come."

When we think of preparedness for hostility, or economic issues, political tyranny, etc., it is very easy to become critical of other people because their sense of timing doesn't match yours. I think it was Ron Dotzler of Abide Ministries who said that the safest place to be is in the center of God's will, even if that's in North Omaha. But if God has *not* led you to North Omaha, then it's a pretty dangerous place to be during a time of riots. It may be God's will for you to *flee* from a city of danger like Paul did from several cities, or it may be to go *into* a city of danger like Paul did at Corinth because God had told him, "no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." Now if Paul hadn't had that reassurance, he could have been plenty nervous. But he knew it was God's timing. A man with a good sense of timing will not be out of balance in his ministry. He will be able to say "No" to some things as Christ did, and "Yes" at other times. So the first issue that is important to resolve under God's timetable is sensitivity to His leading. This past Tuesday, John Mayes gave out a handout on guidance that has helped *him* to have confidence in *his* move, and he has copies that he can share with others who are seeking God's leading.

## This requires our preparation for God's leading

The second issue under this first point of God's timetable is the need to be *prepared and ready* for *when* God leads. This human responsibility is the flip side of the previous point of divine leading. If God says "Go," you better already have a car, and some gas in the tank, and some savings, and prepare yourself to find a new job, etc. But this issue of preparedness deals with many things. It's not just preparing for economic collapse. If God led our congregation to minister during a disaster (such as a massive tornado), would we be ready emotionally and physically to minister? Would we have the medical supplies to help a person if we stumbled onto a car accident - or are first aid kits something you don't think about. This passage highlights Christ's readiness to immediately move when it was God's timing. And unfortunately, there are unbelievers who have showed themselves far more ready to drop everything for a cause than we often are for the Lord. Let me read you a short account of Shackleton's advertisement for his last exploration.

Shackleton was seated in an office in London, speaking to a friend about his forthcoming expedition. The friend said, "I am surprised at the publicity you are giving to your new venture. It is rather unlike you." And Shackleton replied, "I have a purpose in doing so. I want my colleague, Mr. Wild, to hear about my

plans. He has buried himself in the heart of Africa, and has left no address, but I thought that if I would broadcast the news that I was going it might filter though into the very center of Africa, and if Wild knows I am going, he will come.” ... They both turned, and standing in the doorway was Mr. Wild.

It was a dramatic moment as Wild and Shackleton shook hands—the handshake of loyalty. “I heard you were going,” said Wild; “the news found its way into the heart of Africa, and when I knew, I dropped my gun, picked up a bit of baggage, and made straight for home, and here I am. What are your orders?”<sup>1</sup>

Would you do that for Jesus Christ? Can you think of times when you have dropped your own good agendas to serve Christ’s better agenda? Are you willing to face discomfort, inconvenience and danger for the honor of being used by God in a crisis situation? That is the kind of loyalty God calls for. And I am convinced that God *will* call many Christians to be prepared to minister in this city when crisis hits. Can I guarantee we will hit tough times? No. But I am pretty confident that it will, given the moral state of our nation. We want to be prepared to answer “Yes” to Jesus immediately rather than having to frantically scramble.

There is a screenshot in your outline that I took from the S.A.L.T. Plan (a book that I highly recommend on a proper worldview or perspective on preparedness). That screenshot is a photo of a farm that is completely surrounded by water, but no water is touching the house because the farmer had the foresight to make berms around it in case of future flood. This foresight meant that the farmer didn’t have to frantically scramble for himself when the flood came. Instead, he was able to immediately mobilize to serve the Lord by serving others. Let that picture of preparedness burn into your mind. It illustrates preparedness for the sake of ministry. And it showcases all of the points in this sermon - especially the confidence that the farmer was able to have.

So under the general point of God’s timing, it requires God’s leading and it requires preparing for God’s leading. Both are important.

## **A Man Bold In The Face Of God’s Enemies (v. 12)**

But there is a second major issue that we need to put on. It is the issue of boldness. Christ was very bold in the face of God’s enemies because He knew He was right where God wanted Him to be.

## **The One Who Imprisoned John (Herod Antipas) Was The Ruler Of Galilee (14:1-12)**

Verse 12 says, “Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.” On first reading you might think that Christ was going the opposite direction from the trouble John was facing. But as a matter of fact, the one who had imprisoned John, Herod Antipas, was the ruler of Galilee. The cue to go to Galilee was that in prophecy Galilee was not to be without a witness. John had been ministering there for most of his eighteen

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 335–336.

months of work. Now Christ takes over. And there is not a shred of timidity. Luke 4 adds another clue of what enabled Him to be bold. Luke tells us “Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.” When we are filled with God’s Holy Spirit, He gives us power and He removes fear.

## Galilee Was A Place Of Spiritual Darkness And Gentile Domination (cf. vv. 15-16)

The danger of Galilee can also be seen in the fact that verses 15-16 call it a place of spiritual darkness and Gentile domination. Christ did leave certain hostile areas at times, but it was not because He was a coward. Christ was bold in facing the world. And we need men and women of courage today. People who will not shrink from witness just because of danger or shame or difficulty. There are multitudes who prefer comfort and security, but lasting honor and glory comes to those who are willing to be spiritual Shackletons. The disciples were willing to obey Christ’s call to be fishers of men - a very dangerous move. Are you willing to witness, or has the increasing hostility of our culture made you close your mouth? They were willing to minister to the outcast? What about you? They were willing to be bold in what God called them to do? What about you? I think boldness is a pre-requisite to properly preparing for America’s uncertain future. Otherwise preparedness can reinforce fear. And many books on preparedness do sadly reinforce fear.

## A Man Who Can Relinquish Ministries (v. 12 - “departed”)

A third characteristic of Christ that made Him great in ministry was that He was able to relinquish ministries. That may seem like an odd statement to make. Did Jesus really relinquish ministries? Yes; many times. For example, He didn’t heal every person who wanted to be healed. He passed by the lame man that Peter later healed in Acts 3, and a close reading of Acts 3 reveals that Jesus must have passed by Him numerous times on His way to the temple. Why did He pass Him by? Here was a need; surely Jesus will fill that need! Well, Jesus passed him by because it was not God’s will for Jesus to heal him; it was God’s will that Peter heal him. All the people that were later ministered to by the apostles in Israel were previously passed by. And we see a relinquishing of another ministry in verse 12 of this chapter. Verse 12 tells us that He “departed” from Judea. He departed.

And there is an enormous amount of ministry that is left out of the record in Matthew that occurs between verses 11 and 12. In fact, all of John chapters 2-4 occurred between these two verses. And once you study the success of Christ’s ministry in John 2-4, leaving Judea may seem strange. Judea had been a place of incredible ministry already. Why would Jesus leave Judea when He was becoming so popular? But this highlights why it is so important to serve *God* rather than *ministries*. God sometimes calls us to relinquish good ministries that are popular and effective, and we have to trust Him. Some of you are going to feel a loss when some of our members go to the church plant in Iowa, but trust that God sometimes has people relinquish one ministry in order to go to another ministry. That’s good. We find in this passage that God had reasons for moving Jesus on to something else.

First of all, it was a prophesied move according to verses 14-16, so Jesus was being sensitive to God's will. Let's read those verses. It says He departed...

Matt. 4:14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: 16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.

As already mentioned, Luke 4 also adds that He was led by the Holy Spirit to do this. It was also a time when the people in Galilee needed help as never before, now that some of the leadership had been taken out. But the parallel account in John 4:4 shows that it was also a needed move because of the readiness of the Samaritans to hear the Gospel. These are all different forms of guidance: there is the objective Word of God, the Holy Spirit's subjective leading, there is divine providence, there is a burden over the need, and then God provides open doors. And God continues to guide us in these ways.

So God had His purposes in Christ relinquishing the ministry in Judea, but it may have seemed like a foolish move to the disciples. People don't always understand a person relinquishing one ministry to serve in another - but if God is truly guiding them, then they are in the center of God's will.

Sadly, sometimes even *ministers* don't recognize the need to move. Sometimes we get so tied into the routine of a particular ministry (or non-ministry activity) that we can't leave it even when its usefulness is gone. Why? Because we are serving the ministry rather than the Lord. Churches can do this. Once a committee or a ministry is started in a church it is difficult to stop it at appropriate times. That committee just seems to continue forever. It's a sacred cow that can't be killed. I think our church has been fairly open to stopping ministries when it is God's timing. The Providential History Festival was a very loved ministry to the broader community, and there were a few who wanted to see it continue. But there were several lines of God's guidance that were solidly indicating that we should quit. It was not a sacred cow. Another awesome ministry that served a purpose for a time but was then ended when that purpose was no longer needed was Heritage Builders. I loved that ministry that taught skills from one generation to the next in a family-integrated way. Another ministry that we stopped was our hospitality and evangelism ministry to the dormitories of the International Students. Relinquishing a ministry can be painful - and relinquishing the last one was very painful for me because I thought it was one of the most significant and successful ministries that our church had ever launched. But various lines of God's guidance dictated it be relinquished. And we must be sensitive to His guidance.

Glenn Durham told me the story about a young lady who cut her ham in half before she put it into the oven. When asked why she did that, she said, "I don't know. That's the way my mother did it." They asked her mother why she cut the ham in half before cooking it and her mother said that Grandma taught her to do that. When they asked Grandma, she said, "You silly girls. I cut the ham in half because I didn't have a big enough pan to cook it in." We need to be men and women who are willing to think through our ministries and know why we do them and why we do not do them. Engaging in a ministry just because another church is successfully using it is not a good enough reason to start a ministry or to continue such a ministry. Churches can wear themselves out satisfying the needs of our consumer

oriented society. We must be sensitive to the Lord's leading. And this is especially true in the area of preparedness. Some people get consumed by it and go way overboard. Others who have been burned don't ever want to do it again. But God's leading can help us.

## A Man Who Can Handle Rejection (v. 13; Luke 4:16-30; cf. Matt. 13:58)

A fourth lesson that we can learn from Christ is that He was able to handle rejection, scorn, and mocking. Verse 13 says,

And leaving Nazareth [and we will look in a moment at why He had to leave Nazareth] He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Turn with me to Luke 4 to find out *why* Jesus left Nazareth. Luke 4:16-30:

Luke 4:16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

Luke 4:23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' " 24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

Luke 4:28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Jesus was rejected and faced the anger and scorn of the people of His hometown. Many a man has given up ministry because he can't stand rejection. Many a person has become discouraged over the rejection they receive witnessing at the abortion clinics. And there are times to leave and there are times to keep going back. But Christ was not discouraged over rejection. He took it in stride and was faithful to continue ministering.

What does this have to do with preparedness? Well, during a time of crisis many people are asking the wrong questions and looking for the wrong answers. You may have the right answers; the important answers, but people aren't willing to listen. You need to be able to handle their rejection. You are trying to help them prepare for the future, and they are not interested and they give you push-back. Trust God on that. And don't let their negativity remove *your* zeal. Some may mock you for preparing. Forget about the approval of others; do what God has called *you* to do. Now it sure doesn't hurt to reevaluate whether your



ideas are unbiblical and wrong or too extreme. Sometimes rejection is because we are wrong. But this brings us to the fifth point.

## **A Man Who Gains Confidence From God's Word (vv. 14-16)**

Christ gained confidence from knowing God's Word. We must be Word-driven. The preparedness movement has way too many humanistic leaders. We must be Word driven. We can't even allow our present circumstances (which are not bad at all) to demotivate us from preparing. When God's Word speaks of our nation deserving judgments, we need to take that seriously. If God relents from His judgment, then praise the Lord, our preparations still won't be in vain because if we prepare right, our preparations will always be useful. In the case of Jesus, it didn't matter what the immediate circumstances pointed to, He based His actions on the Word of God. Future oriented people aren't driven by their present circumstances. We wouldn't prepare for the future if we did. So these verses show three aspects to His confidence.

### **Convinced By Scripture Of His Duty (v. 14)**

Verse 14 shows that He had confidence in what His duty was by looking to the Word of God. He left Judea "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: [and all five regions of Galilee are outlined here] "The land of Zebulun [that's NorthCentral ] and the land of Naphtali [which was in the southcentral region], the way of the sea [that's west Galilee], beyond the Jordan [that's North East Galilee], Galilee of the Gentiles [which was the Northern most tip of Galilee]." You couldn't get a more explicit outline of where Christ was supposed to minister when He left Judea. It didn't matter how dangerous Herod Antipas might appear to be, Christ had confidence in going there because of God's Word.

### **Convinced By Scripture Of The Power Of God's Grace (v. 16)**

But secondly, verse 16 shows that the same Scripture gave Him confidence in the power of God's grace and the success of His ministry. Galilee was notorious at being pagan and unfit for worship. If there was any circumstance that could sap you of confidence, it would be Galilee. But the darkness of Galilee was no match for the light of Christ. Verse 16 says, "The people who sat in darkness *saw a great light*, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death *Light has dawned*." Christ's light could pierce through this toughest of spots. And when you study the doctrine of God's sovereign grace, it gives you confidence in evangelism. You know that nothing is too tough for God's grace to conquer. We need men and women who are confident in the ability of God's grace to transform men and societies - whether in a big city like Omaha or in a small town like Red Oak. I am confident that God can use us here in the city and we are confident that God can use a church to transform Montgomery County, Iowa. People might say that church ministry in either place is a futile cause, but confidence in the power of God's grace enables us to trust Him and obey Him by taking action. And the "taking action" part is preparing for ministry in either place. Preparedness is not just the five "G"s of God, guns, gold, groceries, and gas. It also involves repentance, getting right with God, preparing our hearts for ministry, and preparing our

family for whatever changes God is calling us to. It involves planning for alternative jobs, alternative living quarters, networking, etc. And in all of these things we need to have confidence that God's grace and power can provide *as we do our duty*.

### Convinced By Scripture Of The Nearness Of The Kingdom (vv. 14-17)

The third thing that gave Christ confidence in this ministry was the nearness of the kingdom. All of prophecy shows the irresistible growth of God's kingdom once it is established. All that is needed is a beachhead in a county, and already there is spiritual warfare because your angels have accompanied you into that county. There is already spiritual warfare over Omaha. There is already spiritual warfare over Red Oak. And those angels are part of the advancement of Christ's kingdom. In any case, Christ was confident that the kingdom would shortly come. In verse 17 He says, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Verses 15-18 are a quote from Isaiah 9 which prophecies not only the judgment upon Israel when it would reject Christ's message, but also the acceptance of his message by the Gentile regions. And that is the famous passage which goes on to say,

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

And Isaiah said, "He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth..." When we do not see circumstances the way Jesus did, we can easily be ready to give up. Christ gained His confidence not from the circumstances, but from the promises of a God who cannot lie. Don't go into preparedness saturating yourself with humanistic books that scare the daylights out of Christians. Go into preparedness with the Word of God undergirding all your thinking.

Christ was fulfilling a kingdom prophecy and so verse 17 says,

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Some people who don't believe the kingdom was set up in the first century try to say that Christ Himself was the kingdom that had come near. But if that is what it meant, Christ would have said, "The kingdom of heaven is *here*" because *Christ* was here. Christ was *not near or at hand*. The kingdom of heaven however was to be set up in two years at His resurrection. Prophecy made Christ confident, and it can give us confidence as well.

While some of the predictions about the future of American can be scary, I am personally excited about what God is going to do through these future problems to strip humanism of its strength. We should never be troubled when idols are in danger of toppling; we should rejoice.



## A Man With An Authoritative Message (v. 17)

The last thing that Christ had was an authoritative message. When our message to the world does not carry a “Thus saith the Lord,” it loses its impact. Our modern woke culture that sees no absolutes needs an authoritative message that shows that God does indeed speak with absolute truth. There is an anchor for anchorless society. There is a strong foundation for a society that is lost in a sea of meaninglessness.

### Without Apologies

And notice that Jesus gave this message without any apologies whatsoever. He was not embarrassed. We need men and women who will not apologize for what God’s Word has to say. And especially during times of crisis, people long for something that is secure and certain that they can hang on to. And our message needs to be the same as Christ’s. Without apology and without shame He said “Repent.” Verse 17 says, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent.’” Repentance is not a popular message when things are going well. But I believe God is going to be preparing Americans through disaster to be willing to listen to a message of repentance. We need to be there to pick up the pieces. If we aren’t prepared like that farmer in the picture, we will be scrambling and will be in no position to preach such a message or to provide answers to those who are seeking.

### With Certainty

And His message of absolute certainty was a refreshing change to the doubt and constantly changing opinions of rabbis. He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven *is* at hand.” If only the church would give a clarion call to the world. There is such confusion in the church today that some churches do not believe that repentance is even part of the message of the Gospel, and they do not believe the kingdom has come. They are still waiting for it. We must give a clear and certain and unambiguous message that repentance is essential, and that the kingdom of God has come with power and has been growing non-stop since the time of the apostles. Many of those who oppose preparedness are skeptical that our nation needs a message of repentance. They don’t see the urgency of America avoiding God’s judgment through repentance. But those of us who do, both prepare and trust the God who orchestrates providence. This is not a time to fear; this is a time to advance and offer solutions that the world cannot offer.

Christ was a Person who stands tall like Shackleton; indeed taller than Shackleton, and He does not ask us to be like Him on our own. He promises to *make* us fishers of men. He promises His grace, His Word and everything else that we need to become men and women of boldness, with a keen sense of timing as we are led by the Lord, with a willingness to begin ministries that are needed for the moment and drop ministries that are no longer needed. He will enable us to face rejection and find confidence in His word. And He alone can enable us to speak with authority and power. You do not need to fear following His lead. Christ did this alone, but you can do it by His power. May we all prepare ourselves to be ready to minister in a hostile world. Amen.