"He's Preparing You"

There is a Scripture in Psalm 42 that got me thinking and praying this week. Let me read it to you:

I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"10 As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God. – Psalm 42:9-11 NASB1995

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever been in a very difficult season and wondered why God was so silent and why He felt so far away? As our circumstances linger, we start to question where God is in all of this and when the breakthrough will finally happen. As humans, it is easy to get discouraged when we are in the middle of the process leading to God's promise.

What I want to share with you today is that while we face problems in life, God is preparing us the entire time. Today's message is titled "He's Preparing You." It is my goal today to help you understand God's process and to encourage you to stay the course. We need to be encouraged this morning because we are not the only ones who have faced this kind of thing. Since the beginning of time, we see God using difficult seasons to prepare His people. Remember that Abraham was promised to be a father of many nations. Yet, it took decades before he saw the promise come to pass. Joseph was given a powerful prophetic dream at 17 but it took decades of going through the pit, the palace, and a prison before God brought the promise. Moses was commanded to lead God's people to the Promised Land, but he endured decades in the wilderness before the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan. David was anointed king of Israel before he fought Goliath, yet it was about 15 years before he took the throne. Even Jesus was not immune to preparation seasons. Jesus came to this world to die for us, yet He did not start His ministry until He was thirty. Thirty years where the Bible is almost silent on His life. Have you ever thought of why the Father sent Jesus into this world as a baby? Afterall, He created Adam as a fully grown man (mind you, without a belly button). Why didn't He send Jesus as a full-grown man and have Him go immediately to the cross? Because there is power in the preparation. Jesus on earth not only demonstrated the Father but revealed to us how to live.

All throughout the Bible the Lord is teaching us how to be faithful in times of preparation. Jesus offers us a lesson in Matthew chapter 25. If you have your Bibles, please go with me to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 and we are going to begin in verse 1:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.8 The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for

yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. – Matthew 25:1-13 NASB1995

There were three stages to a Jewish wedding in that day. The first was engagement – a formal agreement made by the fathers. The second was betrothal – the ceremony where mutual promises are made. The third was marriage – approximately one year later when the bridegroom came at an unexpected time for his bride. The bridesmaids were to wait with their lamps for the bridegroom. I actually have a replica of what these virgins would have carried. This lamp would be filled with oil and lit. Without the oil there was no light. I could preach a whole other sermon on that. We learn a lot from these ten ladies. We see that some were prepared, and others weren't. There are many reasons why we are not prepared. We can be lazy, too busy, or we do not see preparation as a necessity. We also see that there were two responses in the waiting. You can either be watchful in the waiting or doubtful in the waiting. Finally, we learn a very valuable lesson in that you cannot rely on other people's oil. There's actually a funny video clip of a lady preacher talking about fried foods. She says, if you want to fry chicken you need what? Oil. If you want to fry potatoes, you need what? Oil. Then she says, "If you want to fry bacon you need what? And the church yelled out oil. The preacher then said, "Oh no, you don't need oil for bacon, because bacon has its own oil!" Part of why we cannot endure the middle of our problem is because we are not relying on our own oil. We need to operate in the anointed God has given us and take authority over our situations. The difficult seasons of life should be a classroom where the Lord teaches us, not a prison where we rot.

Regardless of what we face in life, you and I are called to keep our focus on the presence of God in every step of the process of His preparation. 1 Peter 3:14-15 says this:

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect…." – 1 Peter 3:14-15 NASB1995

As many of you know I am big into self-defense, training, and firearms. I live by the motto, "If you stay ready, you'll never have to get ready." Many times, we look to the stories in the Scripture and think that these testimonies happened over night. No. Joseph was only able to step into his position of royalty because he had built his character in the waiting. God was preparing him the entire time he went through his suffering and when the time came for promotion, he was ready. He was ready in both skill and character.

When you recognize you are being prepared and not punished you walk with a greater authority, confidence, and faith in this world. In public speaking classes they often teach you how to combat nervousness. Most people are terrified to speak in public. So, they teach you to breathe normally. They teach you to feel the floor under your feet, so you feel a sense of being grounded. But you know what the number one thing you can do to kill nervousness, preparation.

I want to encourage you this morning with a few things so if you are taking notes please fill out "perspective #1:"

Perspective #1 – Prayer is the <u>GPS</u> to God's Promise.

The other night Nikki and I were watching trying to wind down the night and watch some TV. We were both getting pretty bored. She finally said out loud, "Why am I so bored?" I said, "Do you want to go do something?" So, we hopped in the car and went to go get smoothie bowls. The funny part was that as we took off my phone starts ringing. It's Gabe. The whole family is connected to the GPS app "Life360" so he knows where I'm at and when I leave the house. I picked up the phone, and he says, "Where y'all going? I want food too." We start laughing so hard. He has FOMO (fear of missing out) because there have been so many times I text him, "Hey kid, I'm gonna go get some food, do you want anything?" and he would be asleep. I'm not gonna wake you. If you snooze, you lose. So, when he saw us leaving, he didn't hesitate.

I fear that many Christians are living with lack in their lives because they simply fail to call on the Lord. They are going through something difficult and rather than cry out to the living God, they try and figure it out on their own. In Matthew 7 Jesus tells us "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be open to you." The problem is many of us fail to ask. We fail to seek. God is not going to force blessings or answers on you. In our times of preparation, we need to seek council from the Lord so that we navigate our preparation times with success.

I think that the most fascinating part about the story of Joseph in Genesis is that he never doubted God. Joseph was a righteous and pure child of God who refused to sin even after facing decades of suffering. I have a suspicion to Jospeh's success. I believe Joseph was fully convinced of the promise God gave him. And because God gave him the dream, he knew God would be faithful to bring it to pass. So, if it has not yet come to pass, everything he endured would simply be training. Waiting on God can either be filled with of doubt or it can be full of training. Stop saying I'm being tested and start saying I'm being trained. In a classroom there is a teacher. In a dojo there is a sensei. In life there is our Lord. We need to be consistent in seeking direction and wisdom in our preparation times through prayer.

Prayer destroys the lie that God is ignoring you or that He is silent. Please fill out truth #1:

Truth #1 – God is Always <u>Speaking.</u>

Now, there are moments in history where "God was silent." One example is the intertestamental time between Malachi and the Matthew for 400 years. But here's the reality, even if the Lord stops speaking audibly or though wonders, the Word of God was always available. The people living right before the New Testament still had access to the Torah. They could still meditate on God's written voice through Scripture. No matter where you are at in the preparation, God is speaking. Alright, please fill out point #2:

Perspective #2 – Your Problems are <u>Preparation</u> for the Promise.

The story of David and Goliath inspires me. But not in the typical sense of the underdog wins the day. What inspires me is that David defeated the giant on the confession that it was the Lord's victory not his. What inspires me is that David never spoke about his victory over Goliath. Let me ask you this question, who told the story of David killing Goliath? It wasn't David. It was Samuel. David didn't write about his victory; he wrote about his failure. He wrote about Bathsheba. Wy is this important? Because David demonstrates that hidden sin leads to destruction. In the case of Bathsheba, the destruction was the murder of Uriah. But David also teaches us the opposite. David had a lot of victory in his life. When he was victorious there was one very powerful theme…he was connected and surrendered to God. David showed us the private devotion leads to public victory. When David remained surrendered there was victory because God brought it about. This truth destroys the second lie about the preparation times. Please fill out truth #2:

Truth #2 – God is always <u>Working.</u>

Jesus tells us in John 5:17 that the Father is always working and He Himself is always working. If you are in a preparation season right now encourage yourself by reminding yourself that God is always working. And if God is always working, it means that everything you are facing right now is part of the solution. You are not being punished you are being prepared. Now, sometimes you are also being pruned and it doesn't feel good, but boy will it be rewarding.

Here is a good exercise. Pick a recent season in your life where you endured a trial. I'm talking an extended trial or bad season in your life not just a single moment. Once you identify that season, journal three things you learned in that trial. Write down what God showed you. Write down what God gave you in that trial. I'm not trying to encourage you to reopen a wound, I am trying to get you to see where God was working in the trial. We need to remind ourselves that God is always working, He has not forgotten us, and this thing will end in victory.

Perspective #3 – Your Problems are Part of the <u>Process</u> for the Answer.

Going back again to the story of Joseph. In every stage of his season, there was something he could learn and gain. Jospeh learned humility in the pit. He learned management and endurance in Potiphar's house. He learned patience in the prison. All of those things were necessary for him to learn before he took the throne and saved Israel from extinction. You can either cry out "why me God?" or you can say, "What are You teaching me Lord." Let me encourage you to say the latter. The sooner you understand the lesson the sooner you will exit the season. James tells us to "count it all joy when we face trials of various kinds, for the testing of our faith will produce endurance. This teaches us a very powerful truth. Please fill out the final point truth #3:

Truth #3 – God Never <u>Wastes</u> a Moment.

If you can encounter the presence of God in every moment of life, that means that God will never waste a moment, even in the waiting.

CONCLUSION – New season of South Gate