

Be Ready for Every Good Work
Be Ready to Share 2016 Summer Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
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TEXT: Matthew 5:1-16



Good morning. Over the past several weeks, we have heard many questions the culture is asking. Our aim this summer was to use the Bible to equip and empower our witness for Christ. We have tackled some challenging topics, and maybe at this point you are feel slightly overwhelmed and afraid, thinking to yourself: “Am I really ready for this series to end? Am I really going to do this?” If so, you aren’t the only one to feel that way. God knows your heart, and part of the inspired Word of God to us is an elder, mature Christian leader with over thirty years of ministry experience pouring into the next generation. Paul is drawing near to the end of his life, and he speaks into the life of a younger pastor. A part of me has already experienced what this is like at Kenwood from Pastor David and Pastor Scott. My soul has been fed for the past six months listening to their wisdom and heart for the Lord.

What Paul does for Titus, and for us this morning, is to spell out in four sentences what is really important. He squeezes all of that ‘good stuff’ from the last three months into a short summary. It’s the different between taking aim in a snowball fight with a handful of light powdery snow that falls apart as soon as you let go of it and having that nice compact consistency, ready to leap into the fray. Paul gives us the ultimate snowball this morning. He says, “You can be ready to share Christ. Just remember what is really important in the Christian life and keep that the main thing.”

Our passage begins with an imperative to remember, to recall and put something into the mind. The strongest way to convey something in language is with a direct command.

DO THIS! We are a culture surrounded with reminders. At any given time, our smart phones have a whole calendar's worth of meetings, soccer games, and doctor's visits. Yet, even in our busy pursuit to remember everything, we forget a lot of things: anniversaries, birthdays, and homework assignments. How many times have you gone through the process to reset a password? But here is a reminder with higher stakes than all of those. If you could have a superpower to remember one thing this week, Paul would choose this.

The answer is an echo from our text last Sunday: to live as the salt of the earth and a light on a hill. You are a new creation, so ACT like a new creation. I was convicted this week that imperatives do not leave any wiggle room. Remember what living into the fullness of new life entails. It is our mode of operation now, for me, and you, and you, and as a whole body—a whole church family together.

The image of new life in this passage is like a diamond—one life but different facets that come together and shine brightly for others to see and bring glory to God.



The first facet is: We are for society, not against it. From Genesis to Revelation, God brings order out of chaos and establishes His good rule on the earth. God enjoys seeing His creation flourish, and so we come alongside what God is doing in the world. We are subject to what God has sovereignly instituted while recognizing that our ultimate submission is to the Lord.

The second facet is: The Christian life is a relationship of obedience to God. Above all else, we desire to listen to the words of our heavenly Father and respond in obedience. This pleases the King of kings and brings glory to His name. Remember, there is no greater comfort or security than being in the center of God's will. It is a place of real joy, fulfilling purpose, and lasting satisfaction. Jesus is the vine. He is life, and as His children, remember how sweet that new life tastes and feels. Obey Him.

The third facet is: Be ready for every good work—for active Christian service. I don't want you to walk out of this sanctuary without a mental picture of what this looks like. Michael Phelps is the most decorated



Olympian of all time with 28 medals, and we can see why. This is the face of complete

focus and concentration. He is staring that water down. And his body matches where his mind is. Notice his feet—one is pointed straight out and the other is gripping the starting block, pushing off with everything he has. He is in a position of total commitment and readiness for the moment he will hit the water. No distraction can shift his momentum for the race ahead.

Are you ready and prepared for the good works God has placed around you? Are you all in, or are you still standing on the starting block waiting for someone to push you into the water? Just recently the student ministries had our first Guys and Girls Weekend. It wouldn't have been possible without Chris and Jessica McLennan who were ready to say yes and serve our group of teens. They opened their home to 30 teenagers and did it joyfully—sacrificing time and energy into preparations for the house, and they put our needs in front of their own. Be ready.

Remember that your best days are when you finish doing something for another person: when you signed those adoption papers, finished raking piles of leaves, helped a neighbor in need, babysat for a couple on Valentine's Day, cooked a meal and took it to someone. We are wired that way in the image of Jesus Christ.

The final facet is: Remember to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to always be gentle toward everyone. In other words, our words are salty and our actions are light. We have experienced new life, and so our interactions with one another are live-giving, encouraging, uplifting, building each other up, using our tongues to lift up a family member, avoiding work gossip, slow to anger with our kids, patient and slow to anger towards your spouse, gracious to other drivers, turning the other cheek, and returning kindness to our enemies. Imagine a community like that. Envision Kenwood Baptist Church living in this mode. Remember these things!

But Why is it so important to remember all of this? The answer follows the "For" in Titus 3:3: "*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, slaves to passions and pleasures.*" We need to remember our new life in Christ, because our old relationship with God was a mess. At one point in time, every person in this room was distant from God. You and I had incurred the penalty of death for our sin and were on the path of eternal separation from God. Think of a hole over a mile deep with no footholds to climb out—impossible. Not only were we helpless to change course, but we didn't want to! This was our state apart from God. This morning, our temptation is to revert back to our old self and that pattern of behavior. Consider these four reasons why this reminder is so important.

First: Our eyes are tempted to wander from that multi-faceted diamond and become distracted from what is really important in life, becoming sidetracked and following

rabbit trails. I feel like the dogs in the movie UP. In one scene they say: “Soon enough the bird will be ours again. We will capture it and we will SQUIRREL!! And we will be



given such a reward from SQUIRREL!!” There are squirrels all around moving your attention away from what is actually important. The other day I was praying and thanking God for the way He abundantly provides for us, and that made me think of houses for sale and my laptop open next to me. Before I

knew it, I was clicking on houses in the Kenwood area, and an advertisement popped up about cat food. Before I knew it, I was watching funny cat videos on YouTube! A squirrel can come in the form of technology, friends, hobbies, material possessions—just about anything.

Second: We need a frequent reminder of our new life in Christ because our pride makes life all about ME. The focus shifts away from Jesus and onto myself. What are my wants? What would make me happy in this moment? How does this decision affect my image? When pride moves in, humility moves out. Our heart craves for what does not belong to us and we cannot bear to be around the success of someone else. Because of pride, we perceive the locus of authority in what we do instead of in God, and we do not subject ourselves to His authority and the authority He has placed in our life.

Third: We are tempted to unbridle the tongue and give it some slack. James 3 reminds us that for such a small part of the body it packs a powerful punch. The tongue can produce an uncontrollable spark by way of a hurtful word, a white lie, or an argumentative reply. A single sentence can start a forest fire and consume a person. Who created the comeback: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”? Hateful words can land harder and leave a nastier scar than any stick or stone.

Finally: The temporary satisfaction that the world offers is a strong temptation. Instant gratification and brief fixes are like following a trail of breadcrumbs, picking up one at a time and hoping it will eventually lead to the loaf, but it never does. What do those breadcrumbs look like for you? We are fed a constant stream of “antidotes” to the longing in our soul that only Jesus Christ can fill.

Titus 3:3 tells us we were once *foolish, disobedient, and completely hopeless*. Even now

we are preoccupied with sin and fall short of God's standards every single day. Do you feel the weight of that verse? But now, read Titus 3:4: *"BUT when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared HE SAVED US."*

This is a heralding of good news boiling down to the four most beautiful words in the English dictionary: *"But He saved us."* Titus 3:4-7 are one sentence in the Greek, and the verb *saved* is the current behind all of them. Over 2,000 years ago, the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared in Jesus Christ. God in the flesh broke into our world on a rescue mission and demonstrated the extent of His love and kindness. It is as far-reaching as the east is from the west, and through His death and resurrection, He saved us, transforming this sinner's life from the inside out. Jesus Christ alone changed the paradigm. He flipped the script. Nothing bridges the gap and moves us from verse 3 to verse 4 unless our Savior acts, and He has. He saved us.

Death, where is your sting? Sin, where are your chains? Satan, where is your power? Laid waste at the foot of the cross and conquered by the empty tomb. We belong to Jesus now.

Titus 3:5 continues and says, *"Not by works done by us in righteousness but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."* This verse is the key to our relationship with God, the grounds of our confidence, and the basis of our hope. How would you complete the sentence: "He saved me by...."? Everyone answers that question somehow, and it cannot be in ourselves. Salvation is solely based on God's mercy. Titus 3:5 reminds me of my favorite verse in the Bible, Romans 5:8, which says: *"But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* In the midst of our running the other direction and chasing after idolatry in our hearts, God saved us. We did nothing to win our salvation. The inner working of the Holy Spirit in your life, outwardly symbolized in the waters of baptism, means we are born again.

Titus 3:7 says: *"So that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."* The ultimate consequence of being saved and declared right is that we have become heirs of God's promises. We are adopted into God's family as His sons and daughters, cementing our future hope of an eternity spent with Christ.

In Titus 3:8, we read: *"This is a trustworthy statement and I want you to insist (NIV 'stress') these things."* In other words, whatever comes next, I want you to highlight, underline, and bold. This is an oath statement used only by Paul to reach the climax of our passage. Stress this teaching: Remember who you are—focus on your new life in

Christ because we were once foolish, **BUT** He saved us: *“SO THAT those who have believed in God (That’s us!) may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”*

Our concluding word to this summer series is an essential piece of what it means to follow Jesus: “Be ready for every good work.” Those who have experienced an inner paradigm, a changing salvation, do not keep it to themselves. Your heart is made new by His undeserved grace. A passive grace is not biblical. Grace mobilizes us to be ready for good works for the sake of others. Exercising faith arises out of our new status as being saved by God. Police officers are capable of protecting the public because of their training, and astronauts are capable of space walks on the International Space Station because of countless hours underwater in huge swimming pools practicing. We are capable of good works because of Christ.

I have experienced this wonderful salvation, and you have too. Right now in Cincinnati and around the globe, God is saving others, giving us a glimpse of His future Kingdom and the great mystery and privilege is that we get to participate in that.

I remember one summer during college, my non-Christian friend Adam, whom I’ve known since childhood, and I were at the Mt. Washington Kroger picking up a movie at a Redbox at midnight. Here is a picture of the Kroger entrance and to the left is a red vending machine where you can rent movies. While sorting through our options, two guys approached us asking for a ride home. The strong smell of alcohol was wafting from one of



them, and we were unsure how to proceed. After a short deliberation, we decided to take them home. They told us they lived a few blocks down the road, turn right at the traffic light. When we pulled up to the light, I put on my turn signal, but one said: “Go straight.” This was not a great sign. A few minutes later I asked: “Are we getting close?” and he replied: “Yes, turn. . . right. . .now!” I felt like I was in a James Bond movie as I screeched the car into an apartment driveway.

Their next move was surprising. They invited us up to hang out, so we did. Three of us sat on couches while the one guy walked into a back room and passed out on his bed. Adam and I sat across from Steve, and, breaking the silence, I asked about his favorite

movies. It turned out that he and I share a love for Jackie Chan movies. Then a woman came out from her bedroom, really unhappy with the noise we were making. Apparently the man who passed out lived with his mom, and she woke up. We were asked to leave, and now Steve wanted a ride home. He lived less than a minute's drive away, and as we parked, he asked if we would like to see his place. Adam had had enough at this point, but I was praying that God would somehow use this interaction.

I followed him to the third floor and stepped into a completely dark living room. He flicked the lights on and I could see the thankful expression on his face. Steve gathered a tall stack of DVDs from the coffee table and walked towards me. It turns out his roommate had severe ADHD and had packed all his things and moved out recently without telling Steve, but he left his DVD collection. He said: "I want thank you for driving us tonight, so here are some DVDs to pick from. By the way, what do you do for a living?" He stepped in front of me, and I replied "Well I'm actually in school right now studying to be a pastor." His eyes widened, and he looked down at his gift and said: "Well, Pastor, you don't want this one, this one, this one.....here." He handed me a Disney movie and I smiled. "You know, I don't need a DVD as a thank you. The best way you could thank me, Steve, is to come to our Easter breakfast next Sunday morning." It was at this point Steve explained to me that he had grown up Catholic and used to attend mass but didn't know what he believed anymore or where he stood.

I'll never forget what he said that night: "Fred, I lost sight of what I believed." He ended by saying: "You don't know where I've been or what I've done." In his eyes there was confusion and hurt, and I saw myself before God had transformed my heart. I simply replied: "Steve, God wants me to remind you that it doesn't matter what you've done. It only matters what Jesus Christ has done for you." I shook his hand and never saw him again. That's okay, because I am trusting God to bring someone else into Steve's life who is ready for every good work and will pick up that gospel story, and that's enough!

I walked back to the car and Adam asked what happened. That conversation with Steve gave me my first opportunity to share a part of my testimony with Adam for the first time in over 10 years. God is at work even at midnight while you are looking for movies. Be ready.

APPLICATION/CALL TO ACTION

Our application this morning is twofold:

First: Remember! I know you have always wanted to hear a pastor say get out your phone during a sermon, so here it goes. Take your phone out and add a line to your busy digital calendar, but put this one at the top of your list. I made mine a recurring

Monday and Thursday morning message that simply reads: "Remember, God saved us, so be ready."

Second: Pray that God will show you where He is at work in your surroundings and join Him in mission. One place I know God is on the move is at Kenwood Baptist Church. Are you fully engaged for that work to be done? Are you seeking out ministry opportunities and asking questions to plug your gifts into the church, or is grace something you received and then tucked away? Also, be attentive to what the culture at work and in your schools is asking. God's Word has equipped us this summer to engage with those questions and extend God's love to someone else. The next time your neighbor is outside, strike up a conversation. Listen and get to know that person's story a little better. Lend a hand in the garden or mowing their side of the lawn and be ready to share God's story.

Let's remind and encourage one another with these words. Let's stress God's grace. And let's be ready. Please join me in prayer.