

“NEVER LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT CLEAN UNDERWEAR.”

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Well, what words of wisdom, favourite adult sayings, mantras were you brought up with?

Were I a betting person – I’m not – I would take a punt that all of us, even if we have not been a scout, have at some time have been given well-meaning advice in the arena of “being prepared”.

‘Being prepared’, ‘being ready’ is a condition generally encouraged. At a deep level it taps into a deep human instinct for survival and even in shallow waters it can leave a tidemark. Does anyone apart from me remember the sarcasm of particularly nasty teachers over missing homework? Or the raised eyebrow of the houseproud relative making a surprise visit?

We know the difference between being prepared and unprepared and being caught napping can be an uncomfortable experience.

Being prepared or unprepared is something that bothers people to different degrees according to how we roll and the thing for which we are preparing – or not! And I wonder where we would put ourselves on a ‘readiness scale’ between never really being prepared and always ahead of any deadline? (Nature and nurture each play a part so we can always blame our upbringing or genetics if we don’t like the answer!)

‘Being prepared’ is a theme that runs through many Old Testament stories – Noah making sure he’s ready for the coming disaster (Genesis 6:13-18), Gideon preparing for battle (Judges 7), Elijah gearing himself up for his journey (1Kings 19:5-8). In all sorts of impending human situations, battle, starvation, disaster, the key to survival is good preparation, being ready.

The theme of being prepared accelerates in intensity in the New Testament. Jesus speaks with urgency to small groups and crowds, encouraging all who hear him to be ready for what lies ahead. And Jesus is not just speaking about forthcoming human events. Jesus is God, who at a point in human history came among us, showing us the Kingdom of God has arrived. So Jesus speaks with a Kingdom perspective. People who follow Jesus need to be ready for what each day will bring and also prepare for the time when their human days end.

As part of a lengthy block of teaching recorded in Matthew’s gospel (Matt 24:36-44). Jesus paints a chilling picture of normal life abruptly and irrevocably ending with the final “...you must be ready...”

If 2020 tells us anything, it is that wherever we stand on the readiness spectrum, life can catch us napping. But Jesus tells us that we can and should be prepared for the eternal things. Are we?

