



## **“Investing in God’s Promise Before the Crisis”**

**Sunday, Aug. 10  
9 am Service**

**Rev. Pete Burgess**

**Summary:** Rev. Burgess reflected on a moment early in the COVID-19 pandemic when he realized that meaningful spiritual and community support cannot be built in the middle of a crisis—it must be cultivated long beforehand. Using this as a parallel to Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12 about being ready for the master’s return, he contrasted fear-driven “disaster prepping” with joyful readiness for God’s promised kingdom.

Drawing on the story of Abram in Genesis, Burgess emphasized that righteousness in Scripture is tied to action, not just belief—Abram’s choice to trust God’s promise was itself an act of right living. Christians, like Abram, live in expectation of a promise not yet fully realized, and are called to prepare not by hoarding security, but by deepening relationships, generosity, prayer, and trust in God’s goodness.

Such preparation makes us more open-handed, joyful, and resilient, not only for God’s coming kingdom but also for life’s inevitable challenges. Ultimately, he urged listeners to examine where they are investing their treasure, because “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

### **Full Sermon:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Good morning. Wonderful to see all your bright, shining faces this morning. A couple years back, a time you will all remember in your own way, at the beginning of what turned out to be the COVID era, a couple of months into the pandemic, and the shutdowns, and the cancelling of in-person church services, and all the things that went with it. There is a particular moment that stuck out in my mind, and at that moment, in the time itself, I told myself, remember this moment. And I have tried to ever since. I and my clergy friends and colleagues had been trying like crazy to scramble and respond to the really fast-changing, and bizarre, and unexpected, and hard-to-understand situation that the pandemic was bringing down around us, and had come up with all kinds of different ideas, ways of connecting people while we couldn't be together, ways of reaching out, ways of checking in, ways of trying to support each other in prayer, just to let each other know what was going on.

And they were some good ideas, and none of them went anywhere. And it was disheartening, to say the least. But I finally realized that the time to be laying the groundwork for all of those good ideas was six months before, a year before, five years before. That once the disaster had happened, once the thing was upon us, this was now not the time to suddenly become an expert

in prayer, to suddenly have a vibrant network of connections, of people who would call and check on each other, you name it, all the different things that we were trying to set up. The things that did continue were the things that were well-established, like Sunday worship. We all get that, we understand what it is, and so if we have to change the format of it and put it online and do these things, then there was some structure for doing so, even though it was a lot of figuring things out we'd never done before. And there were other things that, you know, that people had had the habit of doing weekly together, and things like that, that were able to be sustained, but it was not the time for new ideas, no matter how brilliant, and no matter how needed, no matter how needed.

The need was there, and we couldn't meet it, and that was very frustrating. And I remember saying to myself, remember what this feels like. Remember what it feels like to be caught this off guard, caught this unaware, and try to live in a way that it won't happen again. Try to understand that even right now, in the midst of this disaster, you are laying the groundwork for what you will have to offer other people, or yourself, or your family in the next one. It starts right now. That, I think, is a pretty universal feeling of not wanting to be caught off guard again. If you felt it, you didn't like it.

And there's a whole lifestyle and a whole industry in our society built around disaster prepping, filling bunkers with food and weapons, and getting ready for the apocalypse. Now, I'm not a prepper, but I get it, I think. I think it's a very human response, and a very human need to feel like that when the worst happens, you'll be ready, and the people who count on you will be safe. What could be more human than wanting to feel that way? And we have whole professions in our society organized about being ready. First responders, nurses, doctors, the military, constant training and discipline and ready and alertness for action for whatever may come at whatever time, and particularly in life and death situations. We need these people, we revere these people, and that kind of readiness and the discipline that it requires comes through in the Gospel passage that we had this morning.

Jesus using some different examples to evoke in us that feeling of having been caught by surprise, and of needing to live ready at a moment's notice. Be ready for the Master to come home at any time, be awake and on guard for the thief may come at any time. He's using these scenarios to bring that feeling up in us and to teach us something, but there is something very different about what Jesus is saying here than anything I've said so far, and that is that what Jesus is telling us to prepare for is good. The whole passage opens with him saying, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This is good news. Remember, this is Jesus speaking. This is not doomsday prepping.

This is glorious day of the Lord prepping, that God who has promised a kingdom, God who has promised mercy and compassion and light, God who has promised to do away with these fallen and destructive structures we all toil under will do that. The promise will be kept, and your readiness is the readiness for that, the readiness for something good, and it requires the same kind of discipline and preparedness and alertness for action, but it's a completely different way of understanding the world and of looking at it and of what it means to get ready. I'm reaching all the way back to Genesis this morning with the passage we have about Abram and his vision, one of many exchanges he has with God about God's promise to him, God's covenant with him that he will make of him a great nation, land, but more importantly, descendants, and here is Abram,

not yet Abraham, wondering, when's that going to happen? You have promised this great tribe and nation countless descendants, and I don't even have one. All that I have is about to pass to some distant relative by a fluke of inheritance practice, but I don't have an heir, and we see God recalling Abram to a life that he has already committed to, to be lived in anticipation of God's promise kept, despite all of his reasons to doubt, to have faith, and to regard the one who has promised as faithful, as Paul would say much later. Paul picks up on this same history, the story of Abraham and then of Isaac and of Jacob, of all the Hebrew patriarchs and all their families who lived with a promise, a promise that was coming but was not yet, a promise that they would live to see only partially realized, but not in all its glory, and yet living in readiness, living in action as people who would place everything on that promise that God had made. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and when Abram believes the Lord, it is reckoned to him as righteousness, which sounds maybe kind of like a little bit of a throwaway line.

It's very sounding. It was reckoned to him as righteousness, but there's a significance there in that righteousness in the Old Testament pretty much always tied to right living. It is about action. If you think about the covenant of Moses and all the Torah laws that come from that, righteousness for the people of Israel would be keeping the Torah law. It was important to think right and to feel right and to believe, but righteousness is measured in did you do the things? If you saw your neighbor's ox in a ditch, did you help your neighbor get it out? It's a very different question than do you think that you should help your neighbor?

It's did you do it? And so, it's interesting to me that here, Abram, it is reckoned to him as righteousness, as right living, as an act in this world to choose belief, to choose faith over doubt and to place that trust in God. It is a foundational stone upon which his whole life of faithfulness rests, and the whole promise rests on that faith. In a spiritual sense, we are of the same generation that Jesus was talking to, that Paul was writing to, not in a literal sense, but in a spiritual sense, because we are the who live in a time in history under a new covenant made by Christ's life and death and resurrection. We are those people. We are the people who are being addressed. We are the people who have become heirs through hope rather than through dissent or through bloodlines of that kingdom that Jesus is preaching, of this good kingdom that has come near.

We are the people that it has drawn near to, and we are called to live in expectation of that goodness and of that mercy and of that light, and what a dramatically different way of living that is than living constantly in expectation of the next disaster that might befall us. It causes us to live in a completely different way. When we are living only to store up for ourselves more security, more materials, more safety against whatever next wave might crash against us, then we are living in anxiety. We are living deeply individually. We are living in a grasping way, and we are living into a fantasy that our world so badly wants us to buy into, a fantasy of self-sufficiency that we can and should be doing it on our own. Christ is describing a completely different way of living. The same one who said that the son of man has nowhere to lay his head, a man who went from place to place with no security whatsoever, is calling us to live into a dependency on God, into a vulnerability to the things around us built on a trust in God's goodness and in God's promise.

We're called to build ourselves, and one another up, spiritually in expectation of that good day that is coming. It would make us more open-handed, more generous, I think quicker to be joyful and thankful and all of the virtues that Christ teaches us to truly adopt that mindset. But paradoxically, it may also make us better able to withstand whatever next hard time is coming. What if all the time between the last disaster and the next was spent becoming people more closely tied to one another, more profoundly given over to the work of prayer, more deeply committed to sharing those things that we have in this life with those who need them so much? We would find ourselves at that next juncture ready to cooperate, ready to live together, ready to build each other up resilient and flexible and open to a new thing that might happen, a completely different way of entering into a challenging time. Jesus says that where your treasure is, your heart will be also, and I think most of the time we are most clearly able to see that in hindsight. Something forces us to reckon with the fact that we have been putting our treasure where it shouldn't have been, and that our heart has followed there, and now we need to bring it back on track.

But we don't have to only do that in hindsight. It is possible right now, today, at any time, to take stock of where we are building things up, where we are building up our treasure, and to take stock of the shape that our hearts are in also. Amen.