

CHAPTER ONE

READY OR NOT

Those who were *ready went* in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, “Lord, lord, open up for us.” But he answered, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” (Matthew 25:10–12 NASB, emphasis mine)

Life is full of major events and challenges for which we have to prepare. Some spend months or years preparing for a wedding, the SAT exams, or the launch of a new business. For others, getting ready for Christmas each year is a yeoman’s task of baking, cleaning, buying, and decorating.

Establishing a dental clinic in Ghana, West Africa, was a major challenge for me. After shipping equipment halfway around the world, I found the entire nation of Ghana had only one dental equipment technician! Sometimes life takes us by surprise, and we must adapt our preparations.

Most Americans have spent countless hours getting ready for life’s challenges, but the vast majority of us haven’t even considered preparing for the most important day ever: Jesus’s return.

Are you ready for Jesus to return? Is your church ready? What does *ready even* mean? When we ask these questions, Christians usually respond with a mix of fear, apathy, and confusion. Let’s look at a couple of typical American responses:

- We don’t know when he’s coming, so why prepare?
- Even though this might sound sacrilegious, I’d rather he waited a little longer until after my grandchildren are born. Oh,

ARE WE READY FOR JESUS?

and maybe after I have a chance to visit Hawaii. Then I guess I'll be ready.

- I go to church every Sunday. My pastor doesn't say anything about getting ready.
- I am sick and tired of what is happening in America. I am good and ready for Jesus to set things right. (Liberals and conservatives both answer this the same way!)
- I've asked Jesus into my heart, so I guess I'm ready. That's all I need, right?

People are uncertain about what being ready for Jesus really means. There are so many aspects: emotional, spiritual, and physical preparation. The term being *ready* means different things to different people. What matters most, of course, is what ready means to Jesus.

My first pastor had a favorite saying: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." I like that. Focus on what is most important. This book details what Jesus told us was important about preparing for his glorious return. You may have read other books about the second coming, but this one is different. Some give an opinion of the chronology of future events. Others attempt to show how current events are related to prophecy. This book begins with the prophetic word, but then shows how to apply it. It discusses how to respond and react to the prophecies. In my opinion, this was Jesus's intent. He gave us prophecy so that we could understand the times and respond appropriately. In this light of application, every one of Jesus's teachings about his return takes on new meaning and is a game changer. After reading this book, hopefully you will never think about his return the same way again.

THE PREDOMINANT VIEW OF THE CHURCH

The majority in the American Church today hold the simplistic view that everyone who has made a profession of faith in Jesus is ready

for his return. Most believe that this profession alone is all that is needed. I used to believe that myself. I've been a disciple of Jesus for twenty-two years. There was a time when I was tired of hearing about his return. What is more controversial than prophecy? If you want to see Christians embarrass themselves or start arguing as if they were talking politics, just mention the timing of the rapture! Everyone has an opinion and is quick to voice it. I wondered, *Why does this even matter?* Isn't winning souls the most important thing we can do as we wait for Christ's return? Does it really matter what happens after Christians are with Jesus in heaven? Isn't the key presenting the gospel to as many folks as possible to get them into heaven? Can't we avoid that end-time stuff?

I also wondered if all those folks who talked about prophecy were a little strange. Some are like Chicken Little—always seeing *the end* in every international happening. And isn't this prophecy business dangerous? If not handled correctly, teaching about Jesus's return can scare some churchgoers, especially seekers. Do we really want to stunt church growth?

If any of that describes your thinking, this is the right book for you. Those thoughts are exactly where I started out ten years ago when God took me on this journey.

Now, obviously, the conversion from spiritual death to life that occurs at salvation is *the* most important and foundational aspect of preparing for Christ's return. We can't minimize it. This book discusses this fundamental aspect of preparation in chapter four: It's a Wedding. But, as I matured as a Christian and carefully studied the scriptures, it was apparent that 25% of the Bible involves Jesus's return. I asked myself, *Isn't it logical to conclude that there is more to being prepared than just a profession of faith?* If not, God wasted a lot of pages giving us unnecessary details. It was this internal conflict between what I was being taught in church and what my personal Bible study was uncovering that launched me on this journey of discovery.