

Being Ready

“Pray Daily to Know and Do God’s Will”

I. SCRIPTURE

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour [watch of the night] the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matt. 24:43-44; [NKJV]).¹

II. MAKING OUR WAY TO THE WEDDING

Most of you know that Hydrie, Rica and I began making our way to our daughter Lilli’s wedding last Thursday evening. After Rica’s school and my work day finished, we drove up to our daughter Sheena’s house in Reno, who would also be joining us on our flight to Spokane. Our airline requirements said that we would have to be tested for COVID-19 before boarding our flight, so early the next morning we made our way to the airport to be tested, so that we would have our results well in advance of our afternoon departure. By Friday night, we arrive at my brother’s house, who had graciously offered us a place to stay over the weekend.

The following Sabbath morning, we made our way to our sister church, the Church of God (Seventh Day) located just a few miles away. We would have a beautiful fellowship with our old friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ there, before making our way to the wedding rehearsal at 2 pm. At the rehearsal, we would meet our son-in-law’s family and enjoy an extensive, delicious afternoon luncheon before we would make our way back to my brother’s house for a 6:30 pm “open house”. There, all arriving family members, church folk and other guests would meet up for a meal and some fellowship before Lilli’s wedding the next day.

III. THE “OPEN HOUSE” EVENT

A. OUR DOGS AS “FAMILY”

Most of you here know that our pets, whether cats or dogs, are as much a part of our family as our spouses, our children, our other relatives and friends. For us

1. Matt. 24:43-44; Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *New King James Version*.

men, as the saying goes, “a man’s best friend is his dog”. For me, I was heartbroken that we had to leave our little dog Boomer behind for four (4) days to attend the wedding. My brother’s best friend is a beautiful, large Akita, who was his faithful, loving companion for the last two-plus years. Now this dog is one of the most majestic, oversized (maybe about 150 lb.) puppies that you’d ever come across. You know, the kind of puppy who gets large as he ages, but whose behavior doesn’t mature as quickly as the years go by? I realized his size when he accidentally stepped on my foot as I was preparing for the guests to arrive for the open house. I was surprised by his weight.

B. THE BROKEN GATE LATCH

At about 6:30 pm, family and guests started arriving. As I was waiting for my own family and friends to arrive, I wanted to be at the front of the house to greet them. The house is located at the end of a cul-de-sac, and up on a hill. The arriving guests would have trouble finding it among the other houses that were located there, and seeing it through the beautiful trees, shrubs and greenery that surrounded it. Somehow, I would be assigned the role of gatekeeper. My sister-in-law asked me to make sure that the front gate remained securely latched after each guest had arrived, and the children playing outside would come and go. She was afraid that the big puppy dog might escape from the house. The latch was broken, I was told, and I quickly realized that I could only close it with a little finagling. And as each guest would arrive, the big, majestic, puppy dog would be at the gate with me, wanting to know who was arriving, and wanting to approve or deny entry to whom he felt should be there within his domain, or not. Some, I noticed, could come through pretty easily; others, he would growl at, as if to say, “I don’t want you here”. One guy I remember in particular that majestic puppy dog did not want to come in, was a guy who was a little large, “overweight” you might say. I will call him “big guy”. As the dog softly growled, I cautioned “big guy” to slowly make his way through the gate and past the dog, being careful not to agitate him. He complied, and made it safely through and into the house.

C. PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

As all the guests had arrived and I also made my way back into the house, I began to enjoy an evening of beautiful fellowship and food: beautiful hospitality that was provided by both my brother and sister-in-law, and food that was lovingly prepared and served by my amazing sister-in-law.

As the evening went on, I couldn't help but notice the behavior of my brother's baby: the big puppy dog. As some of the "big" people, some of the children and others who seemed to be a little more physically vulnerable than the rest, as they would try to approach him, or even just to pass him, that he would growl softly at them. Over the course of the evening, I noticed that he still didn't want "big guy" to be around him, and "big guy" was also smart enough to stay away. But next, I noticed that one of my friends, herself a "big girl," was trying to pay attention to him, to reach out and I noticed him becoming agitated and giving a low, soft growl. As she withdrew her hand and he passed by, things appeared to get back to normal.

Later, my brother and sister-in-law, my eldest daughter and son-in-law, "big girl" and her husband, Hydie and I would be sitting around the dining room table. I noticed my brother's baby, "majestic puppy" slowly approaching the table. As he started to get close to "big girl", I was very concern. In a loud voice, I warned that she should be careful, because "puppy" was previously was agitated by her when she reached out to him. She argued with me, as she usually does, saying that I was wrong. Fortunately, she chose not to reach out to him, and my eldest daughter scolded me to say that I was rude to talk over my gracious sister-in-law, who was in a conversation with the others at the table. I apologized and shut up, but not regretting that I had warned another guest about what I had been noticing about "majestic puppy dog".

D. AN ANGEL'S PROTECTION

As some time went by, as we were still talking around the dining room table, until it was a little too late, I did not realize that Rica had approached "majestic puppy dog" to love on him a little. He was laying down in front of sink area, appearing to be resting quietly there. As I heard the deep bark and saw Rica's shocked look out of the corner of my eye, I turned my head toward them and realized that "puppy dog" had attempted to bite her hand and lower arm. As the dog was put out of the room, confined to another part of the house, we examined her hand and arm, and realized that although she had some teeth marks, her skin was not pierced. Looking back, I realize that her guardian angel had protected her from something far worse happening to her than a few superficial wounds and some deeper inside hurt. Rica ran away and hid, feeling deeply hurt as she realized that the love she wanted to extend to the big puppy was not welcome, not wanted.

After some amazing time together, the evening finally came to a close, and the guests left, while our family and my sister-in-law's mom, whom I affectionately just call "mom", would linger a little while longer before we would return to our rooms for the night.

You know, there are people whom we meet in our lives who really stand out. That evening, it was "Mom". Although I had met and seen her before at previous family events, she stood out so beautifully to me this particular evening. I noticed how she had taken an interest in her three granddaughters, my three nieces... I noticed how lovingly and attentively she played games with them, looked at their family photos together, and how tender she was with them, with Rica, and with everyone at the "open house". And it was on this particular evening that I started to affectionately call this beautiful 88-year-old woman just... "mom".

IV. THE WEDDING DAY

A. MORNING PREPARATION TIME

The morning of my daughter Lilli's wedding started out for me as just about every morning. Before I would start the day, as I do nearly every day, I would pray these words as an adaptation from The Lord's Prayer: "Father... as Thy kingdom come, and as Thy will be done, help me today to know your will for my life. Help me to hearken my ears to hear Your voice... help me to have a heart so filled with love for You that I will do whatever You want me to do as You present it to me, without hesitation... so that I please You in all that I do today. And please give us today, our daily bread... particularly please keep giving us YAHUSHA [Jesus] as our Bread of Life, and as our Water of Life, so that I am sustained today by Him, through His love and sacrifice for me..."

As the morning progresses, I would take my beautiful wife Hydie and my beautiful daughter Rica to another part of town to get their hair done by a beautician, who I believe is one of our church sisters. I would return back to my brother's home in time to share another coffee and some conversation with him and my sister-in-law; Mom was still upstairs in her room. My sister-in-law would make her way around the house to get some supplies that she needed while my brother and I would sit down again at the dining table to talk. Majestic Puppy Dog was resting behind the counter stove located in the center of the dining room. My brother and I were deep in conversation as Mom eventually made her way down to the dining room. Out of the corner of my eye, I had not noticed that she had quietly

made her way to the area where Puppy Dog was. But I couldn't see him as the center dining room stove-counter had blocked my view of him. There was a deep loud bark as mom fell to the floor. As my brother rushed over to that area, I realized that Magnificent Puppy Dog has just bitten the side of mom's face. I rushed over to her as my brother pulled the dog off of her. Mom was still sitting up and I noticed that blood was rushing out of the side of her face and down her neck. I asked to lean back, to rest her head on my lap as I sat down behind her. Meanwhile, my brother takes his beloved family member away, to lock him up in a room. As I see that mom's blood is beginning to pool on the floor at my side, below where her head is lying, I attempt to find where it is coming from so that I can apply pressure to stop it. As I begin to pray to our Father, and weep and plead with Him for mom's life, I notice that mom is also praying, "Dear Jesus..." I hear her pray repeatedly, as I am praying "Dear Father..." we're in unison as we pray for her bleeding to stop. But as I pray and weep for her, I notice that she is also praying for others, rather than herself. My brother returns; I ask him to get my sister-in-law, who is herself a medical professional. She calls 911 and remains on the phone with them. They refuse to come respond until my sister-in-law assures them that we will all have masks on, except for mom, who has a facial wound, including a torn lower lip. They argue with her, that mom also needs a mask. They hesitate to come, until my sister-in-law convinces them that our situation will not allow us to put on a mask, as we have our hands on her face and neck to stop the bleeding.

Meanwhile, as my sister-in-law remains with us on the dining room floor, mom in her totally unselfish Christian way, tells her daughter, "You must make it to the wedding. You can't allow this to interfere with your plans to go." Meanwhile, mom and I remain in constant, unified prayer, that all will turn out well... my prayer being focused on mom, while her prayer was also focused on others around her, including on her daughter and my brother, and the wedding event soon to arrive. Meanwhile, I notice that the pool of blood on the floor is not expanding, and it starts to harden. Prayer is being answered.

The paramedics arrive after what seemed a very long time. They seem hesitant to take control of the situation with mom. I ask them to let me know when I can remove my hand from her neck. After a pause, they say I can. But I notice that they have not yet provided support for mom's head. I ask them to support her head as they take over. As I remove my hand from her neck, I see that her neck is clear. And I feel confident now to tell mom as I hand her over to the paramedics,

that she will be okay. They now take her away, as my sister-in-law follows them to the hospital. Before she leaves, my brother says to her, “we need to put him down”.

B. THE UNUSUAL MID-DAY ACT

Today’s Wedding Day is Sunday. It is a 3-day weekend, as Memorial Day is the next day, Monday. With a lot of hesitation, my brother makes the decision that he must “put-down” his beloved family member. He tells me that he can not take the risk of what happened... to happen to someone else. He reviews his relationship with this beautiful, magnificent-looking, puppy-like dog. He remembers how loving that he had been toward him over the last 2-plus years. He realizes that he can’t wait until the veterinary clinic reopens on Tuesday. He breaks down in tears as he retrieves his pistol. We cry together as he recounts all the moments that he and my sister-in-law had shared with his family member, his puppy. He brings this majestic, beautiful animal upstairs. We walk together out to the back porch. I ask him if I can pray before he does this strange... this unusual act. I realize now that this is the hardest day that he has experienced so far in his life. I pray that our Father would forgive us now as we take the life from this animal that He had created... I prayed that He would console my brother, as I remember how much love that I have for my own furry family member Boomer... as I realize that I would also find it impossible to do something that my brother felt that he had to do. We pray and weep together, as I put my arm around my brother. As we hear the neighbor’s dogs are barking in the distance, and Puppy Dog looks out in the distance, a single shot is fired into his head, and he instantaneously collapses, lifeless on the back porch. It happened so quickly; I realize that there was no pain for Puppy Dog. But the pain and trembling that remains, remains with my brother. As he is emotionally stunned, and spends a few more minutes with his baby, I help by going to the garage to find some large plastic bags to wrap his body up for his burial. After some time passes and he is mostly covered in plastic, we bring Puppy Dog’s heavy, lifeless body out for burial at the edge of my brother’s beautiful, serene property.

V. MAKING IT ON TIME TO THE WEDDING CEREMONY

By now, despite how difficult that it was to do, we must try to turn our thoughts toward getting prepared to arrive on-time at the wedding ceremony. Before Hydrie and Rica arrive back from the hairdresser even more beautifully than before they left, I turn my focus now to removing and putting away my blood-stained clothes,

taking a shower, and putting on the wedding garments that I had prepared beforehand. Meanwhile, we are in touch with my sister-in-law about mom. We still don't know. Although they had stabilized mom, they still hadn't taken the images that they needed to prepare for her surgery. After getting dressed, I have a few minutes to try to get composed. I can't stop breathing hard; I'm still agitated. I'm thinking about my brother, who is still in the back yard contemplating digging a grave for his baby boy. I knew that he is still distraught. His son now, whom my brother had notified by phone, has now made the way over to the house. He steps in and digs the grave for my brother, who is still stunned, and has no energy to do this unusual act. By the time I am dressed and ready to go to the wedding, my brother makes his way back to the house. I embrace him again, trying to ease his pain. We all agree, including my sister-in-law, that we will not allow what just took place to interfere with the once-in-a-lifetime joy of Lilli's and my new son-in-law Luke's wedding ceremony, that is about to take place. Meanwhile, in all their beauty, Hydie and Rica also make their way back home and also prepare themselves so that we can make our way on time to the main event: The Wedding Ceremony.

VI. BEING READY – NOW IS THE JUDGMENT OF THIS WORLD

Had my brother, the master of his house, had known what behavior that his baby boy would have exerted that morning, he would have not have allowed it to happen.

And as for me, my family, and each and every other guest, as we are supposed to do at the beginning of each and every day of our life, we are to be prepared to know and do the will of our Father, Who art in Heaven. Yes, to do His will in each of our own lives, as it is done in heaven, despite what turn it may take for us each day.

For me, if I had my own will and I was not following the will of my Father, I would have had it that the Wedding Day experience would only be filled with joy and beautiful memories. Never in my life would I have thought that I would have to try to dump so many violent images just before going to my daughter's beautiful Christ-filled wedding. [Comment.] But then, I remember that YAHUSHA [Jesus], too, when He was facing a violent death, spoke these words, **"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."** (John 12:27-28). And so, who am I to question YAHUAH [God] about the portion that He provided Me on that special day. At the same time YAHUSHA [Jesus] spoke those words, He also acknowledged that Satan is the still the ruler of this world, but that he will eventually be "cast out". He says, **"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out"**.

Even the apostle Paul acknowledge that Satan is still the “god of this age”, and can have his will with those who are not connected with YAHUAH [God]. He writes, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God [YAHUAH], should shine on them. (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

And now, let me ask you this question, “Do you think that you are protected within the gates of YAHUAH [God]’s body, His church?” I am here today to tell you, “No! You are not totally protected here today!” Even in our own specific congregation, just as I stand at the gate letting everyone come into the area to which each of you have been invited, there are magnificent, beautiful, innocent looking predators, many whom we know and love, looking to see if you are vulnerable... whether they can easily pounce on and grab you within their jaws, and tear you apart. For the apostle Paul writes further, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ [ADONAI YAHUSHA HA’MASHIACH], but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” (Rom. 16:17-20b).

VII. CONCLUSION

Dear brothers and sisters in MESSIAH [Christ], there are uncountable lessons we can learn from my experience as I was preparing for and making my way to the Wedding Ceremony. But right now... and at the very beginning of each and every day for the rest of your life, I encourage you to pray a prayer similar to this, “Father, as Thy kingdom comes, I pray that Thy will be done in me today. Today, help me to hearken my ears to hear Your voice. And, help me to have a heart so filled with love for You, that I will be capable (despite my own weaknesses) of doing whatever You want me today, without hesitation. And please give us today, our YAHUSHA [Jesus], who is our Bread of Life, our Living Water, our Sustainer, whose love and sacrifice for me will sustain me... today and evermore.”

Amen.