

GraceNotes

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GROWING IN GRACE “Memory-In-The-Making”

It's been forty years ago, but I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing. The date was January 28, 1986. I was working as a graduate research assistant in the K10 facility at Oak Ridge National Laboratories. While seated at my desk coding information for a public opinion database, the intercom opened for a plant-wide announcement, “We regret to inform you that the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded today seventy-three seconds after liftoff. There has been no contact with the crew.” If silence can be deafening, then that was surely such a moment. Up and down the office corridors there was no sound except the faint hum of fluorescent tube lights.

Many, if not most, people do remember where they were and what they were doing when the Challenger exploded. The intensity of the memory meter was turned up for me because so many people at ORNL, a U.S. Department of Energy operation, were connected upline to research that ultimately factored into the technology of America's space program. For those employees the disaster was deeply personal. Their burden was palpably present that day.

Surveys show that people frequently remember where they were and what they were doing upon hearing earthshaking, soul-quaking news. Events that commonly cue those remembrances include the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the dropping of the Atomic Bomb, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. And there are others. But now, here's an ‘about-face question,’ reoriented from the past to the future: “Where will you be and what will you be doing when Jesus returns?” To be sure, no one knows, or can know, the answer to such. That is precisely why Jesus said, “*Be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.....For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will*” (Matt. 24:42, 44). The crucial point is that there is no substitute for living prepared.

That the point be not missed, Jesus proceeds immediately in Matthew 25:1-13 with the ‘Parable of the Ten Virgins.’ The compelling power in the parable is that it provides a retrospect insight regarding preparedness versus unpreparedness as per the Lord's return. The parable concludes with five virgins standing at the door, denied entry to the very wedding for which they were attendants. Their late arrival, over and against a timely invitation, disqualified entrance and participation. Unlike their five peers, who prepared and were admitted, the other five simply

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