

The Wired Word

Student Handout

Sunday, **February 28**, 2021 --- from 9:00-9:45am

Zoom ONLY

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220 --- Passcode: 195152

Dear Class Member,

Many of us have been directly affected by the recent freezing weather and storms that occurred in much of the country, and we've heard about how bad things got in Texas. The Texas situation was exacerbated by failures of power plants that had not been winterized. That news gives a chance to think about the subject of preparation as it appears in the Bible, and its related term: Wait for the Lord. So that will be the topic of our next class.

How To Participate:

We are offering *The Wired Word* class live via Zoom. *The Wired Word* Zoom discussion will be from 9:00am-9:45am on Sunday mornings. You can also use these resources to reflect or study on your own, with your family/friends, and/or with your Abide Group.

Until further notice, there is NO in-person Sunday school due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

You can participate in *The Wired Word* virtually by Zoom on your computer or smart device at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86089807220?pwd=eStWa0ZZK0hOTVdwU0pjZlMrdk5ydz09>

or by telephone (land line or cell phone) by calling: 1-301-715-8592

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220

Passcode: 195152

For more information about *The Wired Word* go to: <http://www.sprucc.org/classes/sunday-classes-for-adults.html#WiredWord>

For other learning opportunities through St. Paul's UCC go to: <http://www.sprucc.org/classes.html>

To subscribe or unsubscribe for the **free** weekly mailing of *The Wired Word* student handout, please contact the church office at Office@sprucc.org.



Texas Hard Hit by Winter Storms

The Wired Word for the Week of February 28, 2021

In the News

A large portion of the United States was slammed by two massive winter storms February 10-11 and 13-17, both of which stressed utility services and other infrastructure in the affected states and caused hardships for many residents. Power distributors from Minnesota to Mississippi imposed rolling blackouts as the cold weather stressed their power systems. But in Texas, a state that seldom experiences deep freezes and long-lasting icing conditions, the impact was more widespread. Millions were without electricity and heat for days, resulting in food and water shortages and frozen and burst water pipes.

More than 4.3 million homes and businesses in Texas were left without power, some for several days. Temperatures in Dallas, Austin and San Antonio fell below those in Anchorage, Alaska. Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport recorded a temperature of minus 2 degrees F on February 16, the coldest in North Texas in 72 years.

Across the United States, at least 69 people have died from the freezing conditions. It's not clear how many of those were in Texas, but the *Texas Tribune* said that "many Texans have died because of the winter storm," adding that "just how many won't be known for weeks or months." The *Houston Chronicle* reported that more than two dozen people died from storm-related incidents in the Houston area alone. The deaths have been linked to carbon monoxide poisoning, car crashes, drownings, house fires and hypothermia.

In Texas, the longest stretch of freezing temperatures was 44 consecutive hours. While other states experienced similar conditions, Texans experienced greater impact because their power plants had not been updated for the possibility of unusually frigid temperatures, which rarely occur in the state.

Natural gas, coal and nuclear plants, as well as wind turbines were knocked offline by the freezing conditions, while consumer demand for power to heat their homes and businesses rose dramatically. Baseline natural gas generation capacity dropped by almost 30 percent as pipes and equipment were affected by the cold. Coal and nuclear generation also dropped by about 25 percent. Wind power, which on average generates 25 percent of the state's power, had already been affected and was only supplying 12 percent and then lost over 90 percent of its capacity as equipment failed in the cold.

More than 200,000 people in Texas live in areas where water systems became completely non-operational due to the cold weather.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which oversees the majority of the state's power grid, reported that demand surpassed its planned worst-case scenario. In the face of that demand, the grid operator instructed those utilities still operating to begin controlled power outages to avoid longer-term damage.

The storm has resulted in \$18 billion in damages across Texas, according to a preliminary estimate from the risk-modeling firm Karen Clark & Company.

In its seasonal risk assessment, ERCOT anticipated that "extreme" winter demand could spike as high as 67,000 megawatts statewide if conditions matched the 2011 ice storm that led to blackouts in parts of the state. According to *The New York Times*, researchers estimate that had the grid been able to deliver it, power needed for heating would have pushed demand around 5,000 megawatts higher than that 67,000 megawatts projection.

On February 14, President Biden declared 77 of Texas' 254 counties major disaster areas, making their residents eligible for emergency assistance from the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The White House left open the possibility of further designations as data from the omitted counties becomes available.

Some political figures have organized fundraising and other forms of help for Texans affected by the storms. Celebrities including Beyoncé, Reese Witherspoon and Pierre Desir, teamed up with companies to raise relief funds, as well as donated personally and put donation links on their social media sites.

Local churches, community centers and other locations opened warming stations and have taken other steps to help those affected by the freeze.

On February 16, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott declared that ERCOT reform is an emergency priority for the state legislature, and announced that there will be an investigation of the power outage to determine long-term solutions.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[How Texas' Power Generation Failed During the Storm, In Charts. *The New York Times*](#)

[69 Deaths, 44 Hours of Freezing, \\$18 Billion in Damage: This Week's Winter Storm, by the Numbers. *ABC 13 News*](#)

[This Basic Math Shows How Wind Energy Failures Contributed to Texas' Deadly Power Loss. *The Federalist*](#)

[Texas Governor Says He Is Responsible for the Status of ERCOT, Vows Reforms. *CNN*](#)

[Biden Approved Only 77 of 254 Counties in Texas' Major Disaster Request to Focus on 'Hardest Hit' Areas, White House Says. *The Dallas Morning News*](#)

Applying the News Story

The problems Texans encountered during the freeze suggest the topic of preparation, but not particularly on the part of the average state resident. Beyond having a generator on hand and perhaps a few jugs of stored water, there isn't much homeowners and renters could have done in advance, and the circumstances of many would have made having a

generator impractical. But the need for preparation does apply to the utility services. They were well adapted to the usual weather in that state but had not made sufficient preparations for extreme weather circumstances. Announcements from the Texas governor suggest that changes will be insisted upon to make the utilities ready for future weather emergencies, but clearly, they were not ready for this one.

What might it mean to apply the topic of preparation to our spiritual lives? The Bible has a lot to say about being prepared or ready, but most of it can be coalesced in the phrase "wait for the Lord." So that will be the topic of this discussion.

The Big Questions

1. Whether or not you are a resident of Texas, the bad weather was widespread enough throughout the nation that you too may have been adversely affected. In retrospect, is there anything you could have done in advance to have made you better prepared to deal with the weather-caused problems. What are the reasons you didn't do those things? Is it likely that you will now do them to be ready for the next possible weather calamity? Why or why not?
2. How reasonable is it for utilities and other service industries to update their plants to keep functioning in extreme weather situations that occur only rarely? Should "reasonableness" be the only criteria on which these businesses make such a decision? Explain your answer.
3. Disastrous weather used to be lumped into a category called "acts of God." Do you think that should apply to the recent freeze? Why or why not?
4. What should our faith response to natural disasters be?
5. For what contingencies are you in charge of preparing? How are you doing with whatever those are?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Matthew 24:44

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. (For context, read 24:36-44.)

This verse is similar in tone and message to several in the New Testament that speak of or allude to the second coming of Christ. The idea, of course, is keeping oneself in a right relationship with God so that when Jesus returns, one is included among the faithful.

But there is a broader message as well: the idea of being ready for God's actions to invade one's everyday life -- being a channel through whom God may work, being a ready ear to hear his call, keeping an expectation that God's blessings abound, having ready an explanation for the faith that is in one and so forth.

Questions: If you knew that Jesus was going to return next week, what changes, if any, would you make in your life right now? What do those changes suggest about your state of spiritual readiness? What do you hear in this verse for your life right now?

Some believers seem to think that the warnings about Jesus' return mean stocking up on food, shelter and energy sources. What "supplies" can you stock up on to prepare spiritually for his return?

Psalms 27:14

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (For context, read 27:4-14.)

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (For context, read 40:21-31.)

The verse from Psalm 27 is similar to several others in the psalm, for the call to "wait for the Lord" is a frequent one in that book, though it also appears in Micah and Isaiah, as quoted above.

The Isaiah verses above are not simply a commentary on the energy level of different generations. Chapters 40-55 in the book of Isaiah are addressed to the people of Judah while they are living as captives in Babylon. They've been there for several decades. They didn't know it yet, but God was working in the movements of history, and the Babylonians were about to be overcome themselves by the Persians, and the Persian king would let the exiles go back home.

The prophet indicates that not only is God able to rescue them, but he is also willing to do so. And that's where the prophet begins talking about God giving strength to the faint and powerless, so that they who wait on the Lord -- who live in reliance on the Lord -- will have a sustaining vigor that exceeds even that of the young and naturally strong.

Applying this to ourselves, there is no shortage of things in life that wear us down. But by waiting on the Lord, we are prepared, as best we can be, for the unexpected. In short, waiting on the Lord means carrying on with the tasks at hand in a state of trust. When we do that, the "continuing on" itself can become the medium through which God strengthens us.

Questions: In what specific ways do you work at waiting for the Lord? How does that function as you go through ups and downs in your energy and emotions? How does that function as hard times occur? How does waiting for the Lord also prepare you for life's unexpected hardships?

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

... pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (For context, read 5:12-22.)

Holiness is always a work in progress, not a victorious arrival point. Thus, Paul's advice, given above to the Thessalonian followers of Jesus, is not about having "arrived" at holiness, but keeping the lines to God open: making prayer a part of daily life, and living thankfully, even in difficult circumstances. Those are not arrival signs, but living in readiness activities.

There's a story about the 19th-century evangelist Dwight L. Moody being on a boat on Lake Michigan, far from shore, during a violent storm. Others were below deck praying fervently for survival. Noticing that Moody wasn't with the prayer group, one man went looking for him. He found the evangelist sitting on the bow, riding the swells as the boat rocked back and forth. The man shouted, "Why aren't you below praying with us?" Moody replied, "I'm prayed up."

He was prepared.

Questions: If Paul knew you personally and was speaking the verses above to you, what additional advice might he add? Why?

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. (No context needed.)

The book of 2 Thessalonians is short, but it includes three different prayers for its recipients. The one included above is the second of the three (the other two are in 1:11-12 and 3:16). Note that this prayer is for comfort and strength for the Thessalonian believers, based on the "eternal comfort and good hope" given by God and Christ.

"Good hope" is a side effect of living ready, of waiting for the Lord.

Questions: When has good hope helped you even when you could not solve your immediate problem? How would you describe that good hope to someone else?

For Further Discussion

1. Read and discuss [this report](#) about an 11-year-old boy who died, possibly from hypothermia, during the freeze.
2. This report refers to previous warnings about [potential problems with Texas power plants](#). Read and evaluate it.
3. Respond to this, from a man in the Dallas area: "As an individual, I feel a little ambivalent about preparing vs 'prepping.' Two or three years back after some hurricane or event, I bought a couple of buckets of that storable food that lasts 20 years, just to have as a backup. We own one of those Berkey water filter things too. No power backup though.

"We found a guy who may or may not have been licensed who fixed our plumbing within 36 hours of it breaking for around \$400, so we were very lucky. [My wife] and I were going to try and repair it ourselves, but we wouldn't have been able to locate and fix four separate breaks like that.

"[My wife's] parents' house had their plumbing burst in the walls about 12 hours after we got ours fixed, and the guy we used couldn't handle that kind of job. But then we called this guy we are using right now on a construction project for the warehouse where I work during the day and he came over and opened up the walls from the outside of the house and fixed their plumbing, so they have water again too.

"We're feeling very fortunate. We were able to easily afford the repairs, and so were [my wife's] parents. I can't imagine all the people who were already broke because of the pandemic suddenly facing huge repair bills that they can't pay. Lots of really terrible scenarios right now."

4. Comment on this: A possibly apocryphal story told of Pope John XXIII has it that he held an audience for the media and an American reporter asked him, "If you knew that Jesus was coming back tomorrow, what would you tell Catholics around the world?" The pope's answer was, "Look busy."

Responding to the News

If you wish to help those in Texas affected by the storms, [this article](#) includes a list of places to support.

This is also a good time to check with your denomination to see what their helping agencies are doing during this emergency, not only in Texas, but also in other states where the storm has created problems for people.

Prayer

O Lord, grant fortitude, hope and aid to those struggling with the aftereffects of the storms. Strengthen those who are helping people in need, and enable those who will make the decisions about the utilities going forward to do their very best for their customers. In Jesus' name. Amen.