

33. You Must Be Ready!

Luke 12:35-48

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

The passage we are studying today follows on from Jesus teaching on the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:16-21). The foolish rich man decided to take the rest of his life and spend, spend, spend on himself. There was no thought for others in his mind. He was called to eternity and had not laid up anything for eternity and was not "rich toward God" (12:21). After the parable, the Lord gave some practical advice to those whose disposition is toward greed and selfishness. Christ will return and hold all to account for how they have lived their lives. Those who turned from serving self and become servants of Jesus will be greatly rewarded for faithfulness and service toward Him. His words for them were to be ever watching and always ready for His coming.

The return of our Savior for His church is one doctrine of the Christian faith that is often avoided by teachers due to different beliefs as to the timing, but in the early days of the church, it was a frequent teaching topic. Paul the apostle, in his second letter to the Thessalonian believers, reminded them that he often spoke about the Second Coming of Christ: **“Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:5).** Commentator James Montgomery Boice writes that "there are 260 chapters in the New Testament, and Christ’s return is mentioned no less than 318 times in those chapters. Statistically, one verse in twenty-five mentions the Lord’s return. The only books that don’t mention the Second Advent are Galatians (which is focused on refuting the Judaizers) and the short letters of 2 and 3 John."¹

Christ's second coming is a primary doctrine about which we should hear often, and even more so as the Day approaches. As the Day of the Lord draws nearer, it is no surprise that it is an unpopular and controversial topic. The enemy of our souls seeks to blind believers and non-believers alike to this glorious truth, trying to lull people into a sleep regarding the topic. One way to do this is to discredit the whole doctrine with many counterfeit ideas regarding the Day of the Lord.

Those who are not asleep regarding this topic are sometimes reluctant even to consider it, given the vast amount of misinformation and fabricated novels, along with many false prophets setting dates and times for Christ's return. We should not let that spoil our anticipation, joy, and excitement as we wait in hope for His return. I have written extensively about the return of Christ; you can access the eight studies by going to www.groupbiblestudy.com and scrolling down on the All Studies tab until you find the heading of the End Times and the Second Coming of Christ studies. In this study in Luke, we shall focus on what Jesus expects of us while we are waiting for His coming. □

The Expectant Servants

³⁵Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve,

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), p. 705.

will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night (Luke 12:35-38).

In verse 35, the Lord Jesus gives two commands before using a metaphor from the everyday life of Israel. □

Question 1) Jesus said that we should "keep our lamps burning" like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet (v. 35). What do you think is meant by this, and what is Jesus expecting of His servants (v. 37)?

We are to be dressed ready for service and have on the light. The metaphor is of the Master of a household returning home after legalizing His marriage. At the time when Jesus walked the earth, the Israelites used to have long robes down to the ankles. When they needed to move fast or to get busy at work, the robes would get in the way, so they would tuck them into their belt to allow their legs to move unrestricted. The New International Version, the translation I am using, takes the Greek description of tucking their robes into their belt, and translates it, "be dressed ready for service." The picture is that of a master just married, returning to his household, and inspecting how ready his servants are. Are the lamps burning? Are they expecting Him? Is everything ready to enjoy the wonderful celebration of marriage? What joy will flood the hearts of those who are expectantly waiting for Him. The picture is of a body of servants in a household who have been so joyously serving Him by getting the house ready, getting themselves ready, and preparing everything for their Master's homecoming.

We are to have our lamps burning (v. 35). Lamps at that time were composed of a lighted wick set in olive oil. Many lamps were used to light up a home; they had to be checked continually, the wicks trimmed, and oil replenished to make sure that they would not go out. When a member of the family is out late, it is reasonable to have a light on outside for when he arrives home. The Lord Jesus wants to come and find us wide awake rather than yawning and fumbling for a light to turn on. It is possible that the phrase "keep your lamps burning" is symbolic of that inner fire of zeal burning in our hearts for the person of Christ and for that love expressed through service to Him in the world. The symbolism, perhaps, is also indicative of the altar of the Temple, i.e., the place of sacrifice, for the fire must always be burning on the altar. It must never go out (Leviticus 6:13).

Weddings in ancient Israel could last up to seven days, so servants often did not know the timing of their master's return. Christ is longing that His disciples might be awake, no matter how dark it will be, and it is getting very dark in the world in which we live. He wants to see our love, passion, and devotion displayed by our "watching" (verse 37). Our waiting is not to be a passive thing, but one of the diligent service of preparing His house. Paul the apostle wrote to his protégé, Timothy, saying, "You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Our God is expecting that we will be busy about His work, preparing and building up the household of God, the Church. We are to be expectant of the Lord's arrival. □

In the year 2000, I left my country of England to serve in the USA as one of the pastors in a large church in Cincinnati, Ohio. When I was hired, my boss asked me if I would work on a trial basis for three months to see if I liked the job, could do the job and would stay. He hated the thought of my family packing up all our worldly goods in England, only to find we didn't like it in the USA.

I was clear with him about my legal issues with US Immigration and the legal process that I would need to go through. I left my family and started to work as a Small Groups Pastor. I had never been away from my family for such an extended period. I found myself missing them terribly. After eight weeks of working in the USA, my boss said that, if I wanted to stay, I should make preparations to get my family on a plane. I was accepted to work full time! My boss was sure I could do the job for which he had hired me. We sold what we had, and my wife and two children came with six suitcases of our most precious possessions.

A very generous couple allowed us to use their house at no charge until we found a place of our own. I had a car loaned to me by the church and had everything ready. I cleaned the house from top to bottom and planned out where I was taking my family after they got off the plane, i.e., which restaurant we went to for us to celebrate our reunion. On top of getting everything ready, I also got myself ready. I got my haircut and bought new clothes. Our reunion was a big deal for me for I was way past missing my family. I was now yearning to place my arms around my loved ones and hold them close. I shall never forget that time as long as I live. We hugged, we kissed, and we cried. What a reunion we had. It was challenging to get out of the airport, for we had to talk about so much. If I am like that with my family, think what a momentous celebration it will be when Jesus returns for His Bride. He will dress himself to serve and will make us recline while He waits on us (v. 37). Have you ever known a King to do such a thing!

The Wedding Banquet

The words we are studying are prophetic of the messianic meal at the inauguration of the kingdom, i.e., the wedding supper of the Lamb. At that meal, "People will come from the east and the west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13: 29). This celebration is a recurring theme that runs through Jesus' words; i.e., everything will be revealed when He returns. Things wrong will be made right, and the truth will be brought to light! There will be justice on earth. Jesus says, "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when He comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them" (v. 38). This is the same Greek word used as "dressed, ready for service." What joy we will experience. It will be worth all the waiting! Any suffering we have to endure will pale in comparison to our reward of being with Christ. We are told, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). How long will we have to wait? God alone knows, but while we are waiting, we are to be serving, and the way we do this is by helping one another. □

The passage describes a master returning from a wedding banquet. It speaks of the time when Christ will return to this earth in great power and glory for His people. The book of Ephesians

describes what it will be like for the servants of Christ when He returns. Paul, the apostle, writes that God's people will be radiant with joy! He writes of it in terms of a bride presented to her husband. □

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Paul uses the analogy of a wedding in the above passage because in Scripture, several places speak of a marriage between the servants of the Lord and their lover, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Revelation, for instance, a marriage takes place between the Son of God and His bride, you and me, if you are a Christian.

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7).

Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth that he has betrothed or promised them to Christ.

²I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2).

We see a picture of this relationship every day a bride is married, for a ring that is never ending symbolizing eternal life is placed on the bride's finger. She is called by a new name, the name of her husband, just as we are called Christians. Her long white dress symbolizes purity and righteousness. The train symbolizes the glory that God has given to His bride, "And the glory which you have given me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). A legal covenant is signed between the two, and all that is His becomes hers. When we are invited to a wedding, there is usually a big feast for all that come. "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Jesus is coming back for His bride. How wonderful!

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes (Luke 12:37).

Question 2) How are we to be "watching" in the day and age in which we are living? How does that translate today into practical living? How does this affect your day-to-day life?

The Greek word translated as "watching" is *grēgoreuō*. It means to *keep awake*, that is, to *watch* (literally or figuratively). We are to be vigilant, awake, and watchful.

In my younger years, I worked as a commercial fisherman so during the winter we would hunt for schools of sprats (small fish around two to five inches in length). We did not have a fish sonar to see fish electronically underwater. We would have to look for tell-tale signs that indicated where the fish were. One of the signs was a lot of seagulls diving on the school of fish. We had to be on watch every moment of the day. On some days, we would not catch anything

because we could not see any signs. When we found the fish, we would often catch forty tons within minutes any fill up the two boats we had working together. □

Everything depended on staying awake! I would stretch my arms; I would eat something and drink tea, i.e., anything to stay alert and not fall asleep on the job. Our Captain requires us also to keep awake. We are not talking about physically being sleepless for twenty-four hours a day. What God is looking for is the expectation of Christ as the darkness gets darker.

While we are waiting, our lives should be occupied by caring for our Master's household. C.H. Spurgeon said, "The meanest work for Jesus is a grander thing than the dignity of an emperor." The Lord Jesus sees everything that we do for Him, and nothing escapes His attention. It will be good for us when He comes and finds us watching.

Another element of "watching" is to keep our eyes on current world events, e.g., events prophesied to happen before the coming of our Lord. Matthew (Chapter 24) and Luke (21) record Jesus sharing with His disciple's several signs of the times, that will take place on the earth to indicate His soon coming. We are to watch for the signs. We will study more of these signs when we come to chapter twenty-one in our study in the Book of Luke.

Like a Thief in the Night

Jesus now gives us a second metaphor. We are to be ready for an unexpected thief. We are not to think of the Lord Jesus as a thief, i.e., that He is coming to steal something not His. The thought is that of being ready for the unexpected. Just as a thief will catch the owner of the home by surprise many will be surprised and unprepared for His arrival. □

³⁹But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Luke 12:39-40).

When a burglar plans to break into a house, he doesn't send a postcard to let you know when he's coming. He makes sure he breaks in at an unexpected time, usually when the occupants of the house are asleep. The Lord warns us that the majority of people will be unaware of the time of His coming but it will not be so for the true church of God. Paul the Apostle wrote:

¹Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴**But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.** ⁵**You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.** ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, Emphasis mine).

Question 3) Why would Christ come at a time when most people were not expecting Him? Why will they not be expecting Him?

Jesus said that, in the days before His return, great deception will be at work to keep people in the dark. When the disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of His coming, His reply was to watch out that no one deceived them (Matthew 24:4). Our enemy is trying to get us so concerned with daily life that thoughts of living for Christ are put to one side. Satan wants us to be kept busy and tired in a spiritual sense. His plan is for many to fall away from following Christ and forget about living for others. Without daily spiritual disciplines, the voice of Christ can seem to grow distant. The struggle with the enemy is on a daily basis. This is why the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Jesus also gives us another sign of the last days: it will be a time when sin shall know no bounds, resulting in a slow ebb from living life pleasing to God.

¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³but he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:12-13).

Can I implore you to remain faithful and not to allow the days in which we are living slowly to lull us to sleep? Put a plan into place to stir up your spiritual life. Dedicate yourself to attendance at a good Bible-believing Church where the Word of God is taught, and devote yourself to serving Christ today. □

Wise and Unwise Servants

Peter then said to Jesus, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” (v. 41). Peter asked a question they were all thinking! In answer to Peter’s question, the Lord talked about faithful and wise managers of a household, but also stewards or managers not walking in the will of God.

⁴²The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. ⁴⁶The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers (Luke 12:42-46).

Jesus’ answer revealed the parable was not only for the twelve disciples but also for those who exercise authority over God’s people. The more knowledge and authority someone has, the greater the responsibility before God for how that authority is used. If we take to heart what Jesus is teaching in this passage, we will have an abundant entrance into all God has for us when He comes for His people. □

In ancient Israel, there were individuals like Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold by his brothers to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials in Egypt. Joseph became the manager of Potiphar's household, taking care of all the business and management of Potiphar's house (Genesis 39:6-9). The Lord Jesus is not just talking about a servant, but a servant manager over a household.

Question 4) To whom would Jesus be referring when He mentioned the wise managers? Who are those that beat the servants and have no awareness of Christ's soon coming?

The steward or manager of a household speaks of those in authority over men, e.g., leaders in government, business leaders, the Pharisees and Scribes that were listening to Him, pastors of churches in the day in which we are living, as well as all those with some type of leadership responsible for giving their employees and church members their food allowance at the proper time. The lifestyle of a leader or manager among men will be brought to account. Those who have served faithfully will be greatly rewarded while those who are unfaithful to their management position by only looking out for themselves will suffer loss and punishment. Their deeds will be exposed. Commentator Kent Hughes says:

The "servant" here has not simply been lazy or indolent but monstrously unfaithful- a drunken glutton who beats not only men but women, an abuser of both divine trust and human life. His life is a grotesque perversion. When the master returns, the cruel servant suffers a grisly end, and Christ pronounces him to be an "unbeliever." Those in Christian leadership may profess what they will. They can use every Christian cliché, hold the Bible like Billy Graham and say "The Bible says," build a following in wide Christian circles, but if that man or woman consistently behaves in an unchristian way, he or she is not a true believer. Paul told the Ephesians: "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person- such a man is an idolater- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them" (Ephesians 5:5-7). And listen to St. John: "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother (1 John 3:10)."²

These words are very sobering to those who lead people, especially those who continually preach and teach God's Word. It certainly is applicable to me as one given responsibility to feed and nourish the servants of God. It is God's work. The reward for those faithful is that He will put them in charge of all His possessions. Jesus used strong words to wake up people. He wanted us to realize that all will be uncovered and made clear. There will be an everlasting reward for those who are His own and serving in His kingdom. Those who have pretended to be serving, but are not genuine, have earned for themselves punishment. This is because not only are they self-deceived but also they are guilty of deceiving and mistreating others, perhaps leading others astray from the truth by their examples.

Responsibility to the Truth We Have Receive

² R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Series, Luke Vol 2, That You May Know the Truth*, Crossway Books, 1998, page 65.

⁴⁷That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48).

Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll helps us with this passage:

Apparently, just as there are a variety of rewards in heaven, there are degrees of punishment in hell. God has given all people enough understanding of Himself to condemn them if they reject what they know (see Romans 1:18-20). But if they have much knowledge and turn away, their judgment will be heavier than if they receive little and turn away.³

Among those who are unfaithful to the charge and have responsibility for people, there will be those that think that the Master will not come soon, and they begin to enter into a lifestyle that is not honoring to the Master. The unwise servant was not ready for his master's return. The Day of the Lord will come as a surprise to him. There will be degrees of punishment to those who did not get ready. Those who have been blessed with knowledge concerning the Master's will and do not do it will be punished with "many blows," while for one who has never heard and is completely ignorant as to the Master's will, there will be "few blows."

There is an accountability to the light we have received. James warned us about this: "**Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly**" (James 3:1). This servant had no care for the flock but lived for himself just as the Rich Fool did in verses 13-21 of chapter twelve. This urges us to live and put into practice all the light we have received. If today you have been putting off a decision to follow and serve Christ, put it off no longer! Heaven is before you! Eternity is a very real place; you have been created for much more than for what you are currently living. God has a plan for your life that is exciting and full of purpose and joy. Would you place your hand in His and give Him your life? Be found as one ready and waiting for His coming!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I am sorry that I have sinned and fallen short of Your glorious ideal for living. Please forgive me! Come into my life and grant me peace. I want to be ready for Your coming. I don't want for that day to come as a thief and find me not expecting You. I receive You as my light and life, my Lord and Savior today. Amen.

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³ Charles R. Swindoll, Study Guide, *The Declaration of Something Mysterious*, Published by Insight for Living. 1995. Page 78.