

### 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 the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:16-21). The foolish rich man had made a decision in his heart to take the rest of his life easy 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 his final destination, whether to hell or to heaven, we are not told. If he went to heaven, we are told that he was not “rich toward God” (12:21). Jesus follows the parable by giving some practical advice to those whose disposition is toward greed and selfishness. He will return and hold all to account for how they have lived their lives. Those who have turned from serving self and become servants of His will be greatly rewarded for their 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 avoided often due to different beliefs as to the timing, but in the early days of the church, it was a very frequent topic. Paul the Apostle, in writing 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). In fact, 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.”<sup>1</sup>

This is a primary doctrine about which we should be hearing often, and even more so as the Day approaches. As the Day of the Lord draws nearer, it is no surprise that we should find it such an unpopular and controversial topic. The enemy of our souls seeks to blind believers and non-believers alike to this glorious truth, and Satan is busy ensuring that many are asleep regarding this 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 countless false prophets setting specific dates and times for His return. We should not let that spoil our anticipation, joy, and excitement as we wait in hope for His sure return. I have written extensively about the return of Christ; you can access the eight studies by going to [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com) and scrolling down until you find the heading of Second Coming of Christ studies. In this study in Luke, we shall focus on what Jesus is expecting of us while we are waiting for His coming.

#### The Expectant Servants

**<sup>35</sup>Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup>like 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. <sup>37</sup>It will be good for those servants whose master**

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

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. <sup>38</sup>It 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 common life of Israel.

Question 1) We are told 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 to have the light on. 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 that they wore 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 to “be dressed ready for service.” The picture Jesus paints is that of a master who has been married, is returning to his household, and is inspecting how ready his servants have been. Are all the lights on? Are they expecting Him? Is everything ready to enjoy the wonderful celebration of a marriage? What joy will flood the hearts of those who have been 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 also told 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 continually be checked, 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 normal to have a light on outside for when he arrives home. The Lord Jesus wants to arrive 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 the servants would be in the dark as to the timing of the master’s return. Christ is longing that His servants 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 it is to be one of 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 business, preparing and building up the household of God, the Church. We are to be expectant of our loved One’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, I was asked if I would work on a trial basis for three months to see if I actually liked the job, could do the job, and would stay. My new boss hated the thought of my family packing up all our worldly goods in England, only to find we didn't like it here.

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 of time. I found myself missing them terribly. After eight weeks of working in the USA, I was told 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 convinced that 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 use their house at no charge until we found a place of our own. I had a car that was loaned to me by the church. I had everything ready. I cleaned the house from top to bottom. I planned out where I was taking them after they got off the plane, i.e. where we were going that night to celebrate our reunion. On top of getting everything ready, I also got myself ready. I had a haircut and bought some new clothes. This was a big deal for me. I was way past missing my family. I was 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 difficult to get out of the airport, for there was so much to talk about!

Many of you don't realize, but my wife is an American, while I am British, and because of some legal issues regarding my past (before I became a Christian), we were not allowed to live in the USA together from 1980 till 2000. However, God moved for us in a powerful way, and now I was bringing my family home to their country. If I am like that with my family, think what a momentous celebration it will be for the Son of God, Jesus Himself, coming to Earth to reveal Himself to His Bride. We are told that He will dress himself to serve, and He will make us recline and wait on us (verse 37). Have you ever known a King to do such a thing!

### **The Wedding Banquet**

This reminds us of how, in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, The Lord wrapped a towel around His waist and washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-17). In several months from this point, the disciples were to be witnesses to an action that was both symbolic and of His work in the Incarnation and 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”** (Like 13: 29). This is a recurring theme that runs through Jesus' words, i.e. everything will be revealed when He returns. Everything will be put right, and the truth will be known at last! 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 word in the Greek that is 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 we are to be serving while we wait, and the way that we do this is to serve one another. This is what pleases Him!

The passage describes a master returning from a wedding banquet. It speaks of the time when Christ Himself will return to this earth in great power and glory for His Church, i.e. the Bride of Christ, those who have been born-again of the Spirit and walking with the Lord Jesus. The book of Ephesians describes what it will be like for the servants of Christ when He returns. They will be radiant with joy! Paul writes of it in terms of a bride being presented to her husband.

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup>to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup>and 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).

It is significant that Paul uses the analogy of a wedding in the above passage because in Scripture there are a number of places, which speak of a wedding between the servants of the Lord and their lover, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Revelation, one finds a wedding that will take place between the Son of God and His bride, you and me, if you are a Christian.

<sup>7</sup>Let 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 writes to the believers at Corinth that he has betrothed or promised them to Christ.

<sup>2</sup>I 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 and symbolizes 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 made 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 those 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 that is 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.

When I worked as a commercial fisherman in my younger years, during the winter we would hunt for huge schools of sprats (small fish around two to five inches in length). In those earlier days, we did not have a fish sonar to see electronically the sprats underwater. We would have to look for tell-tale signs that indicated that there were a lot of fish under the water. One of the signs was a lot of seagulls diving on the school of fish. We had to continually be on watch every moment of the day. On some days, we would not catch anything because we could not find any signs. When we would find the fish, we would usually catch around forty tons within minutes and completely fill up the two boat holds that we had working together. There would be no more room to load anymore.

Everything depended on staying awake! I would have to stretch, to eat, to drink tea, i.e. anything to stay alert and not fall asleep on the job. Our Captain requires us also to stay awake. We are not talking here about trying to stay awake twenty-four hours a day. What He is looking for is the expectation of Christ in our hearts as the darkness gets darker. We should also have eyes toward every opportunity in which we can serve our King.

While we are waiting, our lives are to be spent in caring for our Master’s household. We are to serve our way into people’s hearts just as Jesus did. He did not come to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). 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. Nothing escapes His attention, and 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 that have been prophesied to happen before the coming of our Lord. Matthew (Chapter 24) and Luke (21) record Jesus as sharing with his disciples a number of signs, i.e. world events or signs of the times, that would 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.

In the midst of the darkness of those days, we will be greatly encouraged as we see certain signs being fulfilled. The news networks will not be prepared; we will not see an “exclusive” on CNN or the BBC. The world’s leaders will not be prepared. The false religions of the day will not be prepared, and sadly, many in the Church will not be prepared. However, there are already those who are looking, watching, and waiting today, i.e. those who believe that we are already living in the last days. Certainly, a number of the signs have already been fulfilled. We are encouraged to lift up our heads in wonder, praise, and adoration for our King is coming!

**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 that is not His. The intent is that of being ready for the unexpected. Just as a thief will catch the owner of the home by surprise, there are many people that will be surprised and totally unprepared for His arrival.

<sup>39</sup>But 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. <sup>40</sup>You 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 that he breaks in at an unexpected time, usually when the occupants of the house are asleep. Jesus warns us that the majority of people will be unaware of the time of His coming. This is not so for the true Church of God. Paul the Apostle wrote:

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

This warning of a thief's coming was to the many thousands of people that were listening to Him that day. There were many who were still living in the darkness, just as there are today.

**Question 3) Why would Christ come at a time when most people were not expecting Him? Why will they not be expecting Him? Is this ignorance of His coming of the Lord's doing?**

Jesus said that, in the days before His return, great deception will be at work to keep people in the dark as to His return. When the disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of His coming, His reply was to watch out that no one deceives them (Matthew 24:4). The enemy is busy trying to get you so concerned with daily life that thoughts of living for Christ will be put to one side. Satan wants you busy and tired out. He wants you to fall asleep in a spiritual sense. His plan is for you 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 a daily warfare. 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 tells us another sign of the last days: it will be a time where sin shall know no bounds, resulting in a slow ebb from living a life pleasing to God.

<sup>12</sup>Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup>but 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 being 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 of to whom He is talking, Jesus then talks about faithful and wise managers of a household, but also He speaks of those stewards or managers who are not walking in the will of God.

<sup>42</sup>The 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? <sup>43</sup>It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. <sup>44</sup>I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>45</sup>But 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. <sup>46</sup>The 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 that the parable was not only for the Twelve but also for others who would subsequently exercise authority over God’s people. The greater the knowledge and authority someone has, the greater is the responsibility to God for how this authority is used. However, we are all responsible for how we treat one another. It would be good for us if we would honestly look at these words and say, “Are you speaking to me, Lord?” If we take to heart what Jesus is teaching in this passage, we will have a rich entrance into all that God has for us when He comes back 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 mentions 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 all 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 we are living, all those with some type of leadership who are 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).<sup>2</sup>

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 who has been given responsibility to feed and nourish the servants of God. It is God’s work. The reward for them is that He will put them in charge of all His possessions. Jesus uses very strong words in order to wake up people. He wanted them 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 Received**

<sup>47</sup>That 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. <sup>48</sup>But 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, Study Guide, *The Declaration of Something Mysterious*, Published by Insight for Living. 1995. Page78.

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 who is 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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