

Be Ready, Be Faithful, Be Rewarded

Luke 12:35-59

Key Verse: 12:40

“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

In today’s passage Jesus teaches his people how to prepare for his coming again to this world. In the Bible, Jesus clearly tells us that there will be an end to time. Just as there was a beginning, there will be an end. These days many have a circular concept of time. They think that there is no beginning and no end, but only an endless repetition of cycles. However, the Bible clearly says that there will be an end to the world as we know it. This will happen when Christ returns in glory as King and Judge. All of human history is streaming toward this one universal event. When Christ comes, he rewards or punishes each and every person without missing one, both the living and the dead. We are all destined to meet him for judgment (2 Cor 5:10). Are we prepared for this? In this passage Jesus teaches how to live in order to be rewarded when he returns. First, Jesus teaches us to be ready for his coming again (35-40). Second, Jesus teaches us to be faithful to our mission (41-48). Third, Jesus warns us that a fierce spiritual battle awaits (49-53). Finally, Jesus urges us to reconcile with God before it is too late (54-59). Let’s listen to Jesus’ teachings with a prayerful attitude and learn to be ready, be faithful, and be rewarded when he comes again.

I. Be ready and watchful (35-40)

In verses 35-40 Jesus uses two metaphors to explain what it means to be ready for his coming. The first is that of a ready servant. Look at verses 35-36. **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 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.”** Though the master leaves, this servant does not relax by putting on pajamas and a housecoat. He wears his servant uniform. This reminds him to keep his identity and stay focused on the master’s business. Some of us may remember how Dr. Samuel Lee wore a soldier’s uniform to remind himself and us not to relax spiritually. Jesus wants his disciples to always be ready, to be alert for his return. Then, we can welcome him joyfully when he comes. A servant’s readiness reveals his undivided devotion to his master and his loyalty. This pleases Jesus.

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So Jesus rewards ready servants with his best blessing. Look at verse 37. **“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.”** Jesus describes their reward primarily in terms of relationship with him. As they sit at a rich table, the King of kings waits on them. In this way, Jesus honors his ready servants. Jesus appreciates them, provides for them, and shares his reign with them. His love and recognition become the sweet melody of their souls and they rejoice throughout eternity in his presence. We are now in the season of graduations. Many are receiving honors that will be treasured for years. How much more will Jesus’ appreciation be precious to us throughout eternity. This is how Jesus rewards his ready servants.

The second metaphor Jesus uses is that of a thief coming in the night. It stresses the negative result for those who are not ready. Look at verse 39. **“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.”** Jesus compares himself to a thief and those who are not ready to his victims. It is awkward to think of Jesus as a thief. But Jesus said plainly that he comes like a thief (Rev 3:3; 16:15). To those who suddenly lose everything at Jesus’ coming, he seems like a thief. Jesus’ coming will bring them sudden and unexpected loss. The rich fool is one example. Such people enter eternity with only their record of sins to be judged.

Jesus’ coming again is a serious matter. It should be of paramount importance to every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. So Jesus warned his disciples repeatedly. Look at verse 40: **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him.”** Jesus warns us to be ready, because his coming will be unexpected. This means that we must always be ready. Readiness must come from our daily life with Jesus. It is not something we can do suddenly at the last moment. Even so, many have speculated about the time of Jesus’ coming. They think that if they know precisely when he is coming, they can take life easy until the last moment, then repent and welcome him. For example, Emperor Constantine thought that baptism would cleanse all of his sins, and after that he would have to stop sinning and live a holy life. So he postponed baptism until just before he died. This is man’s sinful tendency. So our Father God, in his wisdom, did not tell us the time of Jesus’ coming again. Jesus said, **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”** (Mk 13:32). Since we don’t know the time we must always be ready. Nevertheless, many have boldly predicted the time of

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Jesus' coming again. They influenced people to quit jobs, drop classes, renege on contracts, and go to the mountains dressed in white to meet Jesus. For example, William Miller claimed that Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844. Many people nationwide believed his message. They made drastic decisions and waited. But nothing happened. The result was the Great Disappointment. Those who were disappointed went on to found the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. More recently, Harold Camping predicted Jesus' coming again on September 6, 1994. When it did not happen, he adjusted his calculation to May 21, 2011.

Look at verse 40 again. **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”** Being ready is not a matter of knowing times and dates; it comes from devotion and loyalty to Christ in an ongoing relationship. Jesus did not tell us get ready, but to **“be ready.”** Being ready reveals our love for Jesus and deep desire to meet him and enter eternity with him. **How, then, can we be ready?**

First, we must clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **“Be dressed ready for service....”** The devil entices people to take it easy and indulge their flesh. In this way he puts people into spiritual slumber. This makes Jesus' servants ineffective and useless. How can we overcome this temptation? Romans 13:14 says, **“...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** Just as we put on clean clothes daily, we should clothe ourselves with Christ daily. This happens as we listen to Jesus' word and pray. Christ cleanses our hearts from sinful desires. Christ plants truth in our souls. Christ confirms our identity as his beloved servants. Christ fills us with strength and wisdom to carry out his mission for us. Christ fills our hearts with such joy and peace that we do not think about sinful desires. When we clothe ourselves with Christ regularly, we grow in readiness to meet him. We become more and more eager for his coming, until we long for his appearing like St. Paul did (2Tim 4:8). As one example, St. Augustine overcame hedonism and became a great shepherd of Christ's church when he learned to clothe himself with Christ on a daily basis. This is something anyone can do.

Second, we must hold Jesus' living hope in our hearts. We live in a world that wants to scoff at Jesus' coming again and ridicule those who believe it (2 Pe 3:3). Sometimes we get tired of waiting and are vulnerable to the whisper of our sinful nature. How can we overcome ourselves and the world and truly be ready for Jesus when he comes? 1 Peter 1:3,4 says, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living**

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hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you...."

When anyone accepts Jesus into his heart, he is born again. His hope changes from perishable things which shine for a while and then disappear, to eternal things which have life-giving and lasting value. He no longer chases the fleeting pleasures and treasures of the world, but pursues Christ with avid desire to know him better and grow in him.

When we have this living hope in the kingdom of God in our hearts, we can overcome temptations and the scoffing of unbelieving people. If we are tired, we need to renew our living hope. Then we can devote ourselves to Jesus with joy. We cannot be ready simply out of our own willpower. But we can be ready when we have living hope shining in our hearts. Living hope keeps us rooted in the eternal promises of Christ, even in the midst of a relativistic society. As living hope takes root in us, it grows and transforms us day by day into the likeness of Christ. 1 John 3:3 says, **"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."** When we have Jesus' hope in our hearts we grow in his holy image. We can be ready for his coming no matter how dark the world becomes. Let's ask our Lord to infuse our hearts with his hope. Then we can be ready for his coming.

II. Be faithful and wise managers (41-48)

As Peter listened to Jesus' words, he did not understand what Jesus was talking about. He had not accepted the teaching that Jesus would die and rise again, let alone that he would ascend into heaven and then come back to earth one day. He could not understand why Jesus was saying, "Be ready." He thought he was already ready. So he asked, **"Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"** Jesus did not answer directly. Instead, Jesus taught that when he comes again there will be two kinds of servants. He also taught about the reward or punishment of each. We can learn in this part how to carry out our assigned mission as we wait for Jesus to come.

The first servant is the faithful and wise manager. Look at verse 42. **"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?'"** A faithful person is one who is trustworthy. He is loyal to his master at any cost. He carries out his assigned tasks without fail, no matter what difficulty he may confront. This servant is also wise. He sees things from the master's point of view. He knows how to work effectively and to make the most of every

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opportunity. He always makes a profit for his master, and never a loss. The master chooses this person to be in charge of food distribution for his household. The manager gives a proper amount of food to the servants at the right time; he does not make them fat and lazy, nor does he make them malnourished. He makes them healthy and strong. They are happy to do their best for their master. Everything goes smoothly and the master's estate prospers. When he returns and sees this, he joyfully promotes his manager to be in charge of all his possessions (43).

The second servant is different. He says to himself, **“My master is taking a long time in coming.”** He begins to live as though the master will never return. Instead of working hard to feed the other servants, he takes life easy and abuses his authority. He demands others to work hard while he eats and drinks to excess, even getting drunk. When a servant becomes weak or sick or complains, he beats them mercilessly--men and women alike. In the course of indulging himself, he totally forgets that his master will return. Nevertheless, his master does return. Then he finds the wounded servants and his estate in chaos. What will he do? Jesus says, **“He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers”** (46b). This is the awful destiny of wicked and unfaithful servants.

Jesus is gentle and kind. Jesus is full of grace. But Jesus is also the Righteous Judge. Jesus punishes wicked and unfaithful servants. One's punishment is proportionate to his knowledge. Those with a lot of spiritual knowledge who fail to do what Jesus wants will be punished most severely. Those who know less and act wickedly will be punished with fewer blows. In any case, those who are wicked servants will be punished.

We must know that Jesus rewards the faithful and wise servant, but he punishes the unfaithful and wicked servant. Jesus' clear principle is stated in verse 48b: **“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.”** To the degree that Jesus entrusts his servants with privilege, he holds them accountable to make a good return. We have all been entrusted with something. And we are accountable to Jesus to show a profit. Some have been entrusted with one Bible student. They must do their best to prepare Bible study, pray for that person, and give them the right spiritual food at the proper time. Some have been entrusted with God-given families. Husbands and wives are responsible to love and respect each other, and to make an atmosphere where Jesus gladly dwells, so their home will be godly and happy. They must raise their children in the knowledge of God through sound discipline and proper spiritual education. As a community we

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have a prayer topic to make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We must pray for this and work for this sacrificially. Ultimately, this is a personal matter. God knows our hearts. He rewards the faithful servant.

III. Don't be surprised that Jesus divides (49-53)

As Jesus talked so clearly about reward and punishment, his disciples might have been sweating profusely. So Jesus helped them understand their mission in terms of his world salvation purpose. They would suffer, but he would suffer much more, and the world itself would be divided painfully on the basis of the gospel. In verse 49, Jesus said that he came to bring fire on the earth. Luke 3:16 says that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He brings judgment and salvation. Jesus longed for the Spirit to begin his purging work on earth. But before that could happen, Jesus had to undergo the baptism of his death for our sins and to rise again. Only then could the Holy Spirit come and dwell in the hearts of forgiven sinners. When that happened, the world would be divided into two: those who received Jesus and those who rejected Jesus. This division would cut through family ties. Jesus' people will be alienated from beloved family members. Jesus wanted his disciples to realize that gospel ministry would be a fierce and painful spiritual battle before the final victory came. They needed to prepare their minds for this and not be surprised when painful struggles came upon them.

IV. Judge what is right and reconcile with God now (54-59)

At last, Jesus turned his attention to the crowd. They followed the leadership of the religious leaders without discernment. Even though there were many signs that Jesus is the Christ, many were feigning ignorance to avoid making a decision. Jesus rebuked them for being able to interpret the signs of the weather, but not the signs of the times. Jesus challenged them, and he challenges each one of us, to judge for ourselves what is right. He wants us to examine the Scriptures, think for ourselves and accept him as our Savior and Lord. Each person will be responsible for their own decision. Their situation, like ours, is precarious. We are like people on the verge of judgment and imprisonment. It is time to plead for mercy and for a settlement. It is time to accept Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as our Savior. Otherwise, we will pay the full consequence for our sins. The gospel message is a matter of life and death; it demands a response and time is short. When we die, or when Jesus comes again, our opportunity to accept him will pass. Then it will be too late to ask God for mercy. So we must ask now.

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Today Jesus has taught us how to live in light of his coming again. Jesus urges us to be ready. We must overcome the poisonous influence of hedonism and materialism, clothe ourselves with Christ daily, and have living hope in our hearts. Jesus also urges us to be faithful to our mission, knowing that he rewards and punishes. When we are ready and faithful, we will be rewarded. I pray that each of us may be ready, be faithful and be rewarded.