

Are You Ready?

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me please to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel?

Luke's Gospel in chapter 12 and they're reading again at verse 40. Luke 12 and verse 40. Where Jesus says, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Well tonight I want to focus on really the whole section that we read in this passage verses 35 down to 48 of Luke chapter 12.

And really focus on the theme of readiness and the return of Jesus. Readiness and the return of Jesus.

We have focused over the last few days on what Christ has done but I want to focus for a few moments tonight on what Christ has promised.

[1 : 17] We've focused really on the past and the present over the last few days but tonight I want to focus a little more on the future. Readiness and the return of Jesus.

And for those of you who may be taking notes or just like something to hang your thoughts on, we're looking at the passage under two headings. A call to be watchful and a call to be faithful. First we have a call to be watchful in verses 35 down to 40. And here Jesus calls on his hearers to be watchful in the light of his return.

And throughout Luke chapter 12 Jesus has been speaking about discipleship. He's been speaking about what it means to follow him, what it means to be committed to him.

In verses 1 to 3 Jesus warns his followers about embracing the hypocritical teaching of the Pharisees. These men who only cared about external appearances are not internal godliness.

[2 : 21] Then in verses 4 to 7 Jesus encouraged his followers not to be fearful in the face of any opposition that may come their way. Because they have a God who valued them and not only does he value them, he is not going to forget them.

Then in verses 8 to 12 Jesus challenged his followers to be willing to confess him, to profess him, even in the seasons when the pressure might be on and they might be encouraged to actually compromise.

Verses 13 to 21 Jesus emphasizes that the weight of eternity must shape how his followers live in the present. And then in verses 22 to 34 Jesus calls on his followers not to be worried, not to be anxious, not to be fearful about the present.

Instead they should remember the providence of God and not only remember the providence of God, but they should also prioritize the very kingdom of God.

And now Jesus is going to speak about being prepared for his coming, being ready for his coming. He is right now on his way up to Jerusalem. He has set his face like Flint to go in that direction.

[3 : 34] He is going to be crucified. He is going to be raised and he is then going to ascend to heaven. He is going to ask what he is going to do and yet he is also going to return.

And he wants those who are listening to him to be aware of how they should live in this gap between his ascension to heaven and his return to earth. That is the question he is seeking to answer.

How do you live in the gap between Jesus ascension to heaven and his return to earth? While Jesus begins by calling on his hearers to be watchful to be ready for his return in verses 35 and 36, we need to stay dressed for action, keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

In these verses Jesus uses a number of images. He begins by calling on his hearers to be dressed for action. The images of someone tying up their robes at the waist in order to be free to move around and indeed run around.

We see the image in Exodus 12. You remember the Hebrew slaves are eating a Passover and they have to pass over with their robes tucked in, just ready to leave Egypt and bow toward the land of promise at a moment's notice.

[5 : 00] They are dressed for action and here is Jesus and he is saying to his followers, be ready for action, be dressed for action. We also see Jesus calling on his heaters to keep their lamps burning.

In Jesus' day there were no street lights, there were no electric bulbs, and so in Jesus' day lamps would have to be lit if a house received an unexpected visitor and an unexpected guest at night. Here is Jesus and he is saying, be ready for that unexpected visit, be ready for that unexpected guest. Finally Jesus calls on his heaters to be like watchful servants.

Their master has gone to a wedding feast and he could be gone for many days, they don't know when he is going to return. They know that he said he will return but he is not told them when. But these servants are watching, they are waiting so that when the master returns and when the master knocks, they open the door and Jesus says, don't you love the image?

They open the door at once to him. They don't need to rouse themselves from a sleepy slumber.

They are waging, they are waiting, they are ready and Jesus is saying here, be ready for the knock of your master.

[6 : 19] Be ready for the knock of your master. While in each of these images Jesus is emphasizing the importance of readiness being ready for his return.

And in verses 37 to 38 Jesus speaks about the blessing that those who are ready for his return will enjoy. We read, blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.

Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch or in the third and finds him awake, blessed are those servants.

Now twice Jesus uses this word blessed to be blessed as to be highly favored, to be blessed as to be approved by God. And Jesus is saying here that those who are ready for his return will find themselves under the blessing of God, under the benediction of God, under the very smile of God. And Jesus describes the nature of the blessing. It's breath taking in its scope. It's almost unbelievable, unthinkable, unimaginable. We have this great role reversal where Jesus speaks about the master now dressing himself for service.

[7 : 34] And he proceeds to have his servants sit down and he serves them. That's why these servants were so eager for his return. They knew what their master was like.

They knew his character and they knew that if they were ready for his return, he would come and reward them. And friends, that is the reality that we find in the gospel. You see, what master would wear a servant's clothing?

What master would invite his servants to sit down at his own feast? A master, a Lord like Jesus. He's the master. He's the Lord. He's the sovereign. He's the king of all creation. But he's also the one we're told who took the form of a servant. The one who humbled himself all the way to death, even death on a cross.

And he's the one who has prepared a place for his people and is continuing to prepare a place for his people, where he might be with them and might feed them with rich food and well-aged wine on his holy mountain.

[8 : 42] Jeff Thomas describes it like this. He has the keys of death in hell and yet he says these words.

He's so overjoyed when he sees the servants dressed ready for service and keeping their lamps lit, serving their Lord faithfully and waiting for his return that he himself tucks his robe into his belt, invites his servants to sit around his table, and then as they sit there wondering what in the world is going on, he begins to serve them.

Would you like this tender steak? How many roast potatoes do you want? Here are the peas, the parsnips, the corn and the cob, the carrots and Yorkshire pudding, the beans and the stuffing. Here is a great silver jug of hot gravy and tall crystal glasses of water with ice cubes tinkling at the top. Then he has prepared a delicious cheesecake and fresh cream as a dessert and the best Kenyan deep roast coffee and little bars of peppermint chocolate to complete the meal.

The Lord is sort of everything and now he's hovering around in the background, not intimidating them, not spoiling their meal, but everything they want he provides.

[10:20] He gives them personally and individually all his food richly to enjoy. This is a blessing to them because they are dressed ready for service and their lamps are lit and they are waiting for his return. It's not a wonderful image.

Jesus hovering around serving his people. But Jesus isn't finished because he also wishes a warning to those who aren't ready for his return in verses 39 to 40.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the servant was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.

Jesus changes the image somewhat and now speaks about a master and this master isn't prepared for a thief to come to his house. And when the thief came in and broke into the house, the master suffered unexpected and yet preventable loss.

If only he'd had a dog, if only he'd barred the windows, if only he'd stayed awake, if only, if only, if only. But he wasn't ready and he was found wanting.

[11:35] And Jesus concludes by saying in verse 40, You also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Now the Son of Man appears in Daniel 7. He's a divine and glorious figure who enjoys cosmic triumph at the very end of history. And here is Jesus. Here's the carpenter from Nazareth. Here's the Son of Mary and Joseph.

Here's the one who Nazareth rejected because they were so familiar with him, so used to him. And he's saying to them, I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm going to the cross. I'm going to the grave.

I'm going to rise from the grave. I'm going to ascend to heaven. But know this, I am coming back.

And I am coming back as the Son of Man. So be ready. Be prepared. Be watchful.

Friends, Jesus is returning. This is one of the foundational doctrines of Scripture. In fact, if you go through the New Testament, you find that there are over 300 references to Jesus' return.

[12:48] And the New Testament tells us that his return will be personal. He will come in his own resurrection body. And the New Testament tells us that his return will be visible where every eye will see him and every ear will hear him.

And the New Testament tells us that his return will be glorious, but he will come not as a suffering servant, but as the Son of Man. He will come with the great trumpet call. He will come in the glory of the Father and the angels.

And the New Testament tells us that his return is imminent. He himself says, I am coming soon. I am coming quickly and some are ready for his coming and some aren't. Some are ready.

They've seen Jesus. They've seen him as he's presented in the Gospel. They've seen his finished work and they now cling to him in faith, saying, with him, I am well pleased.

Like the Apostle Paul, they long for his appearing because they know that there is blessing. There is a crown of glory. There is a place in his banqueting hall prepared for them.

[14:01] For them, the return of Jesus isn't something that they view with fear. It isn't something they view with trepidation. For them, the return of Jesus is the welcome knock of their Lord, their Master, their Savior, their friend, and their earnest prayer is come, Lord Jesus, come.

That is what they're praying for. And maybe that is your prayer today, that you are praying, come Lord Jesus, come. You're like that woman in the song of Solomon that we looked at this morning who said, may haste my beloved, come, come Lord Jesus, why do your chariot wheels tarry?

But some aren't ready. They too have seen Jesus as he's presented in the Gospel. But they're indifferent to him.

They get little thought to his return. And if they do think of his return, it fills them with a sense of dread. And Jesus says that such people will suffer incredible, inescapable loss when he comes like a thief in the night.

Friends, as we consider the return of Jesus, I want to ask this crucial question. Are you ready?

[15:24] I'm not asking are your friends and family ready? I'm not asking do you understand what it means to be ready? I'm not even asking do you hope to be ready one day? I'm asking you this pivotal question on which your eternal destiny hangs tonight.

Are you ready? If Jesus was to return today, if Jesus was to return within the next 10 minutes, would he find you dressed for action?

Would he find your lamp burning? Would he find you eagerly awaiting your master's knock? Are you ready friend? That is the question and that is the question I put to you tonight. That is the question Mirdle puts to you on such a regular basis.

Are you ready? Are you ready friend? Because he is coming and the question is will he find faith? That's the call to be watchful. This brings us second to a call to be faithful in verses 41 to 48.

[16:41] Here Jesus calls in his hearers to be faithful in the light of his return. Verse 41, Peter jumps up and he asks a question. We read Peter said Lord are you telling us partable for us or for all?

Now we probably all sat beside people in school or in college or in university and we would have heard an inspiring lecture. And that particular person would put up their hand and they would say is this going to be on the test?

They hadn't heard anything the teacher was really saying. All they were caring about was are we going to be examined on this? Well that's Peter. Jesus has been speaking about the importance of being ready for his return.

He's been preaching in such a way that the hairs on the back of your neck stand up on end and now Peter puts up his hand and asks this ridiculous question. Jesus do I need to be listening to this?

If Peter is asking Jesus is this teaching for me? Is this teaching for your inner circle of friends? Or is this teaching for everyone? Who is this for Jesus? And what we see in verses 42 to 44 is that Jesus doesn't answer Peter's question.

[17:58] No. Instead he speaks to Peter and the others about the importance of faithfulness in the light of his return. We read and the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and wise manager?

Whom his master will set over his household to give them the portion of food at the proper time. Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Jesus begins by speaking about a faithful steward. This man has been given a privileged position. The master of the house has gone and he's gone for a period of time and so he has set the servant, the steward over his household.

He is to ensure that there is enough food in this house for all those in the household and he is to ensure that they are fed at the proper time. And when the master returns, Jesus says he finds this faithful steward doing exactly what he'd been commanded to do.

Nothing more, nothing less. And Jesus says that the master will reward such a faithful and wise steward. The master will bless, he will approve, he will smile upon his faithful and wise steward.

[19:17] And he will set him over all his possessions. He will promote him and give him increased responsibilities. Once he just had to make sure that those in the house were fed, now he has set over the whole house all the possessions.

It's a very simple teaching. Jesus is saying that the ones who are ready for his return will be engaged in faithful service. They will be engaged in faithful service in the present and they will know his blessing in the future.

Such a person stewards all that the Lord has entrusted to them in a way that honors the Lord, a way that glorifies the Lord, a way that praises the Lord and they will receive his reward when he returns. Charles Spurgeon writes, May the Lord keep you waiting, working, watching, that when he comes, you may have the blessedness of entering upon some larger, higher, nobler service and you could accomplish now for which you are preparing by the lowlier and more arduous service of this world. That's some thought, friends, that you might think that you're not doing very much for the Lord. You might think to yourself, if only I was in a more public place, a more prominent place, a more prestigious place, then I could better serve the Lord.

[20:48] And what the Lord has seen is, if you are faithful in the small things, the Lord is going to reward you and set you over much on the day that he returns. It's not about being on the platform.

It's about faithfulness in the place, the space the Lord has put you in. I read out a really good article this past week on the Gospel Coalition website and it was about cleaning toilets to the glory of God. Cleaning toilets to the glory of God. Faithful, faithful wherever the Lord has put you. Faithful.

But Jesus isn't finished as he speaks about how faithlessness will be punished on his return in verses 45 to 48. But if that servant says to himself, my master is delayed in coming and begins to beat the male and female servants into eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him at an hour, he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will will receive a severe beating.

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given of him much will be required and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

[22 : 22] And Jesus now speaks to you about a faithless steward. And this man speaks to himself more literally, he speaks to his heart, he speaks to his inner being and he says, my master's been delayed.

But this man doesn't simply speak to himself, Jesus also tells his hearers what this man does and what happens to him, look at what he does, he embraces the old saying, when the cats away the mice will play.

You might look down on me for this, you might never look at me in the same way after this, but I love Dad's army. It's one of my favourite programmes. And Saturday night when ministers should be preparing their sermons, I watch Dad's army. And there's an episode called Absent Friends, where Captain Manning's been away on holiday and he returns having left Sergeant Wilson in charge.

And the platoon have all gone and they've gone to the pub for a darts match with the wardens. And Captain Manning's furious that that's where his platoon have gone while he was away.

And that's what this servant is like here. And we're told he begins to abuse the male and female servants. He beats them and he even goes down to the master's cellar and he eats and he drinks and he gets drunk.

[23 : 39] He's an even more wretched version of the rich fool that we meet in verses 13 to 21. You remember the rich fool said, I'll eat, I'll drink, I'll be merry. Well this foolish man here eats, he drinks, he gets drunk and he abuses the other servants and look at what happens to him. The master returns, the master always returns and he cuts the man to pieces.

It was a punishment that was reserved in Jesus' day for the breaking of a covenant promise, a covenant pledge, a covenant relationship. We read about it in Jeremiah, but the master does more than cut him to pieces. The master also assigns him a place with the unfaithful.

You see friends, there are some things that are worse than being cut to pieces to be put with the unfaithful as one such punishment. And Jesus brings all this to a conclusion in verses 47 to 48.

Peter had asked Jesus whether he was speaking for the benefit of his disciples or all his hearers, and Jesus hadn't given an answer. It should have been obvious that this teaching about readiness for his return was for all people.

But now Jesus says that those who have heard his words and known what he requires and failed to do so, those who have shown themselves to be utterly faithless will receive a far greater punishment than those who didn't know.

[25 : 11] And I can't help thinking of the fact that there was a man there that day who had heard all the words of Jesus and numbered himself among the followers of Jesus.

I think he was a man who acted with no faith, no wisdom, picture the scene. There's Peter, there's James, there's John, all listening open mouth to what Jesus is saying. There's Philip and Andrew hovering around in the background, but sitting in the middle of them all.

Perhaps with his hand in the money bag, a position that Jesus himself had entrusted to him is Judas Iscariot. Here was a man who heard all that the Savior said about readiness, and yet he said in his heart of hearts, he said to himself, this isn't for me. I don't really need this.

Here was a man who could prophesy in the name of Jesus, a man who could drive out demons in the name of Jesus, a man who could perform mighty works and wonders in the name of Jesus, and here was a man who showed himself to be completely and utterly faithless.

A man who had one day stand before the throne of Jesus saying, Lord, did I not do this, that and the next thing in your name, and the Lord will say to him on that day, depart from me. I never knew you. Never knew you.

[26 : 47] Friends in these verses, we hear Jesus emphasizing the importance of faithfulness as we live in the gap between his ascension and his return.

And I want to speak to any who might be here today who are still outside of Christ, who still haven't received him by faith.

Listen to Jesus' words in verse 47, that servant who knew his master's will but did not get read your act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

A few weeks ago, I had a friend stay with me, Martin Dudgeon. He works for Platform 67 that reaches out to the unreached people groups with the Gospel, and we were speaking about that great question, what happens to those who have never heard the Gospel?

[27 : 57] And yet as we were having lunch, we were considering the even greater question. What about those who have heard the Gospel again and again and again, and have done absolutely nothing with it?

My friend, if that is you, Jesus is saying your punishment will be far greater than those who never heard the Gospel. A day will come when you will find yourself in that environment where there is only weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

A day will come when you will find yourself cut off from the Lord, cut off from His covenant, people cut off from His covenant promises, and all you will be left with is the harrowing and haunting memory of missed opportunities.

You will remember the sermons preached and how you were left week by week to the empty cross and the empty tomb. And you will remember every wake and every funeral that you ever attended. And every time you heard Jesus' words in John 11, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

[29 : 22] You will remember every conversation that you had with your husband, with your wife, with your parent, with your child, with your friend, with your colleague, with your minister, with your elder about closing in with Christ.

You will remember every time Murdo choked with you at the door of the church about your soul, but although he choked there were tears behind his eyes. You will remember every time he invited you to a Christianity Explore meeting and every meeting that you ever went to.

You will remember every book that you read and every song that you heard and every service that you attended. And you will remember that while you were given those opportunities you did absolutely nothing with them.

The echo that rings throughout the caravans and caves and corridors of hell is the cry, I'm too late, I'm too late, I'm too late, I wasted it, I wasted it, I wasted it.

That is why friend, I am imploring you tonight if you are outside of Christ to receive Christ by faith. That is why I am imploring you today with this word to be ready, to be ready.

[30 : 50] That is why he will be doing the same week after week in this place so that you, my friend, will not be crying out in those corridors saying too late, too late, too late.

But I also want to speak to those tonight who are in Christ, those who have faith. Throughout Luke 12, Jesus is exhorting his followers to live in a way that magnifies and glorifies his name.

He calls on us to avoid hypocrisy, verses 1 to 3. He calls us not to be afraid of man, verses 4 to 7. He calls us to acknowledge him, verses 8 to 12. He calls us to be rich toward him, verses 13 to 21. He calls us to seek his kingdom, verses 22 to 33, 34. He's calling us to be faithful, calling us to be wise with the time and with the opportunities that we've been given.

And he's saying in these verses that an awareness of his return should manifest itself in our lives and motivate us in our living. An awareness of his return should be seen in our walk and in our talk.

[32 : 12] Friends, do we believe? Can I ask you, my Christian friend, do we believe that Jesus is really returning? Or are we living as if he's been delayed and we're not expecting him any time soon?

Are we faithful servants? Are we faithful stewards engaged in our master's business? Or would we be embarrassed? Would we be ashamed if Jesus returned at some point this week and found us doing what we're doing?

Friends, who would we want him to find us with? What would we want him to find us doing and saying?

Where would we want him to find us? I said it to my own congregation a few weeks ago. If Jesus was to return on a Tuesday or Thursday or Saturday night, our prayer meeting nights, where would we want him to find us?

If he was to return on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening, where would we want him to find us? With our feet up beside the TV saying, well, I've had a hard day, I've had a hard week, or rather gathered with his people saying together, come, Lord Jesus, come.

[33 : 37] Charles Spurgeon famously put it this way, always act just as you would wish to be acting if he were to come.

Friends, as we consider these solemn truths concerning the return of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, I want to ask you the question again. Are you ready? Are you watchful? Am I watchful? Are you faithful? Am I faithful? We may not be what we want to be or where we want to be, but are we ready?

Looking, looking, looking to Jesus. Looking to Jesus. Amen.