

Luke 12:35-48
November 17, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: One of the key doctrines of Christianity is the Second Coming. What is your understanding of the Second Coming? [Let people engage]

Transition: Our Lord taught that we should not be anxious about tomorrow ([Matt. 6:34](#)), but He did *not* teach that we should ignore tomorrow! In fact, to the contrary, Jesus taught that our view of the future ought to be uppermost in our thinking about how we should live today. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should think often about the fact that He is coming soon and that every person must stand before Him to give an account. We should view ourselves as stewards who have been entrusted with time, money, and abilities, which we are to use for our Master's kingdom. At some time—we don't know when, but we do know that it is certain—our Lord will return, and we must give an account to Him of how we used what He gave us. After telling His disciples to seek for His kingdom, Jesus goes on to exhort them to be ready for His return, because when He comes, He will judge everyone.

Jesus shifts the emphasis from being worried about the present to being watchful about the future. The themes in Luke 12 all go together, for one of the best ways to conquer hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry is to look for the Lord's return. When you are "living in the future tense," it is difficult for the things of the world to ensnare you. In this section, Jesus explains how we can be ready for His return.

BOOK:

Watchfulness

³⁵ "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ 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. 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. ³⁸ 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. 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. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

⁴¹ Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

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? ⁴³ It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷“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. ⁴⁸ 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: In light of this text, how can you apply this lesson in your daily walk? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

To “watch” means to be alert, to be ready, not to be caught by surprise. That is the attitude we must have toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thes. 5:2; Rev. 16:15). We must be ready!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 222-223). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Beware of Carelessness (Luke 12:35–48)

Jesus shifted the emphasis from being worried about the present to being watchful about the future. The themes in Luke 12 all go together, for one of the best ways to conquer hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry is to look for the Lord's return. When you are "living in the future tense," it is difficult for the things of the world to ensnare you. In this section, Jesus explained how we can be ready for His return.

Waiting and watching (vv. 35–40). Jewish weddings were held at night, and a bridegroom's servants would have to wait for their master to come home with his bride. The new husband would certainly not want to be kept waiting at the door with his bride! But the servants had to be sure they were ready to go to work, with their robes tucked under their girdles so they were free to move (see 1 Peter 1:13ff).

But the remarkable thing in this story is that the master serves the servants! In Jewish weddings, the bride was treated like a queen and the groom like a king; so you would not expect the "king" to minister to his staff. Our King will minister to His faithful servants when He greets us at His return, and He will reward us for our faithfulness.

To "watch" means to be alert, to be ready, not to be caught by surprise. That is the attitude we must have toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thes. 5:2; Rev. 16:15). We must be ready!

The saintly Presbyterian pastor Robert Murray McCheyne sometimes asked people, "Do you believe that Jesus is coming today?" If they replied in the negative, he would say, "Then you had better be ready, for He is coming at an hour when you think not!"

Working (vv. 41–48). Lest we get the idea that watching and waiting are all that He requires, Jesus added this parable to encourage us to be working when He comes. The Apostles had a special responsibility to feed God's household, His church; but each of us has some work to do in this world, assigned to us by the Lord. Our responsibility is to be faithful when He comes. We may not appear successful in our own eyes, or in the eyes of others; but that is not important. The thing God wants is faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2).

Once a believer starts to think his Master is *not* coming back, his life begins to deteriorate. Our relationship with others depends on our relationship to the Lord; so if we stop looking for Him, we will stop loving His people. The motive for Christian life and service must be a desire to please the Lord and be found faithful at His return.

I do not think that Luke 12:46 teaches that unfaithful believers lose their salvation, because our going to heaven depends on faith in Jesus Christ and not good works (Eph. 2:8–10; 2 Tim. 2:11–13). The phrase "cut him in sunder" means "cut him off, separate him"; and "unbelievers" can also be translated "unfaithful." Our Lord will separate the faithful believers from the unfaithful; He will reward the faithful, but the unfaithful servants will lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

God's judgment will be fair. It will be based on what the servants know of God's will. This is not to suggest that the more ignorant we are, the easier time we will have at the Judgment Seat of Christ! We are admonished to know God's will (Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9) and to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Jesus is stating a general principle: the more we have from God, the greater our accountability before God.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 239)

d. Jesus' teaching about readiness (12:35–48) (Matt. 24:45–51)

In this section Jesus told two parables (vv. 35–40 and 42–48) which were joined by a question by Peter (v. 41). The second parable expands and explains the first.

12:35–40. Jesus taught that the disciples should **be ready because the Son of Man will come at** a time when they will **not** be expecting **Him**. The parable describes a scene in which several servants were **waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet**. The point was that they had to remain constantly vigilant so that the **master** would be able to come into the house whenever he might arrive at home. If they are **watching** (v. 37) and **ready** (v. 38), their master will **serve** them. **The second** watch was from 9 P.M. to midnight, and the **third watch** was from midnight to 3 A.M. The point of the words about **the thief** (v. 39) is the same—the disciples must “be ready” for “the Son of Man will come” unexpectedly.

12:41. Peter's question holds the two parables together. **Peter** wanted to know the extent of the first parable's meaning. Was it addressed only to the disciples **or to everyone?**

12:42–48. Jesus did not answer Peter's question directly. Instead these verses indicate that He was talking primarily about the leadership of the nation at that time. The religious leaders were supposed to be managing the nation for God until He brought in the kingdom. However, they failed in that task; they were not looking expectantly toward the kingdom. Because of the penalty exacted (vv. 46–47), Jesus must not have been speaking about believers who were not **ready**. He seems to have been referring to the nation's leaders who would be present at the time of the coming of the Son of Man. Faithless ones (v. 47) will be judged more severely than those who, though wicked, do **not know** about the coming of the Son of Man (v. 48a). Unbelievers with a great knowledge of God's revelation will have to answer for their lack of response to that revelation.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1540). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

12:37 That Jesus used parables with slaves does not imply that He endorsed slavery. The parables drew on everyday facts of life in the Greco-Roman world and were not intended as social commentary. Jesus' teaching focused extensively on justice and human dignity, as noted in the Sermon on the Mount.

12:46–48 The punishment of “cutting in two” was not unheard of in the ancient world. To be assigned a place with the unbelievers could mean that the slave's corpse was left unburied, although this could also be a mixed metaphor—Jesus switching from the parable's picture to the significance of the picture. The scenes of dismemberment and beatings are intentionally harsh and do not need to be pressed too far with regard to God's character. Jesus used the most graphic images known to His audience to illustrate the dire consequences of being unprepared for the Day of the Lord.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 358-363). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

At this point Jesus' teaching changes focus from earthly possessions (12:13–34) to watchfulness with respect to the parousia. Three parables or similitudes on vigilance follow: the watching servants (12:36–38), the watchful householder (12:39–40), and the servant in authority (12:42–48). Watchfulness and faithfulness with one's possessions were not unrelated for Luke, in that true watchfulness, or living in readiness for the parousia, consisted in laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth. Tannehill observes: "Detachment from possessions [12:13–21] and from cares of daily life [12:22–34] is an important part of the readiness for the coming of the Son of Man which Jesus wishes to see in his disciples." This is also seen in Luke's conclusion to Jesus' eschatological teaching in Luke 21:34a and in the eschatological warning in 17:27–28. The three similitudes function less as a single, carefully constructed theme on watchfulness than as three separate portraits of what it means to be ready.

The section begins simply with a command to be ready and to have a lamp already lit in preparation for the master's return. If the servants are thus prepared when their master comes, they will be blessed, for the master will actually wait on them and share with them the messianic banquet. The next similitude serves more as a warning. It involves a homeowner unaware that a burglar is seeking to break into his home. If he had expected a thief to come in the night, he would have been prepared. So too the believer who believes in and expects the coming of the Son of Man is to be prepared, for he will come at an unannounced time.

The third similitude is the longest and is addressed particularly to the disciples. It involves the role of those to whom the master has entrusted his household. Those who faithfully discharge their duties are blessed. On the other hand, those who abuse their trust and live as foolish unbelievers (cf. 12:20, 45) will be punished and placed with the unbelieving. Another analogy follows whose relationship to the preceding one is uncertain. Whereas the evil servant of 12:45–46 seems to receive eternal punishment, the evil servant of 12:47 is given "many blows" but not, apparently, eternal punishment. He appears rather to be "saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor 3:15, RSV). Although he knew better (was wise), he did not prepare himself (was not faithful) and so will be severely punished. The one who was unprepared due to ignorance of these teachings will be treated less severely, for the guiding principle is that judgment is dispensed according to the knowledge that one possesses.

Some have argued that these three similitudes refer to what happens at death (cf. 12:20). Although there is a sense in which these three parables are quite applicable with respect to death, Luke's main point involves the parousia or coming of the Son of Man. This is clear from the use of the image of the thief coming in the middle of the night, a well-known image for the parousia, from the explicit reference to the coming of the Son of Man in 12:40, and from the placement of these materials in Matthew's great eschatological discourse (Matt 24:45–51). Whatever these similitudes meant in their original setting, in Luke's situation (and in Matthew's) they were clearly understood as references to the parousia.

Comments

12:35 Be dressed ready for service. Literally *Stand, your waist having been belted*. This image of a man who has tucked his long robe up under his belt in order to run is found frequently in the Bible. The use of the perfect participle, "having your waist belted," portrays someone who, instead of waiting until the last moment, is always prepared to act.

Lamps burning. Compare 8:16; 11:33; cf. also Exod 27:20; Lev 24:2–3.

12:36 Waiting for their master. Whether one translates *kyrios* as "master" or "Lord" depends on whether one interprets the saying in light of the first or a later *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life).

In the original setting Jesus' disciples would have interpreted this term (*Mar* in Aramaic) as "master," but in a later situation Luke and Theophilus, knowing that the returning "master" is the Son of Man, would have interpreted it as "Lord."

A wedding banquet. In this parable the banquet is not the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7–9) because the "Master" returns to his servants *after* the feast.

Knocks. In Rev 3:20 the knocking symbolizes Jesus' desire to be present in the church at Laodicea (and any church today), but in this text it refers to the return of the Lord at the end of history.

12:37 It will be good. "Good" is literally *Blessed*. See comments on 6:20. Here the interpretation of the parable becomes part of the parable itself instead of coming at the end as in most parables.

Watching. Compare Rev 16:15. This term is frequently used in the context of the parousia.

When he comes. Christ's coming at the parousia is in view, not his coming for believers at death.

I tell you the truth. The NIV's phrase gives the sense of the Greek (literally *Amen*). See comments on 4:24.

Recline at the table. This refers to the messianic banquet (Luke 13:29; 14:15–24; 22:27–30; cf. Rev 19:9).

And will come and wait on them. The image of the "Lord" serving his servants at the parousia is unexpected and powerful. How blessed indeed are those whom the Lord will serve when he returns!

12:38 It will be good. Again "good" is literally *blessed*. The repetition of the benediction emphasizes how truly blessed those faithful servants will be.

Second or third watch. Luke probably was thinking of the Roman practice of dividing the night into four watches. The watches were 6–9, 9–12, 12–3, and 3–6. The time would therefore be around midnight. If he was referring instead to the Jewish system of three watches (6–10, 10–2, 2–6), then the time would be around 2:00 a.m.

12:39 The thief was coming. A thief's coming was a common image in the early church for the parousia (1 Thess 5:2–4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15).

House be broken into. "Broken into" is literally *dug through*. This suggests a mud brick Palestinian house. See comments on 12:33.

12:40 The parable is applied to the disciples ("you") mentioned in Luke 12:22.

Son of Man. See comments on 5:24.

Will come. As Ellis notes: "The parable discloses that the 'coming' of the Son of Man is nothing else than the 'returning' of the 'Lord' ... that is, Jesus himself."

12:41 Peter asked. Peter acted both as a representative of the disciples and as their spokesman.

Lord. See comments on 5:12; 12:36.

To us, or to everyone? Was "this parable" (12:39–40) for the disciples only or for the crowds as well? Compare 12:1, where a distinction is drawn. The disciples were the target of this parable and even more so of the following one. This is evident, because similar instructions are directed to the disciples in 17:22–30; 22:24–38.

12:42 The Lord answered. See previous verse.

Faithful and wise manager. The parable uses a picture of a manager placed in charge of his master's household and has as its corresponding reality Christian leaders placed over the church by the Lord. By introducing the parable as he did (12:41) and by using the term "manager" instead

of “servant,” Luke underlined the application of this parable to leaders of the Christian community even more clearly than Matthew.

Puts in charge. The tense in Greek is future. Luke may have intended this to refer to those who would be appointed over the church (cf. Acts 1:8; 20:28; and esp 6:1–6, where the same word is used).

To give them their food allowance. Although there may not have been a particular reality corresponding to this in the original setting in Jesus’ life, Luke and his readers quite possibly would have understood this to refer to the responsibility of church leaders to “feed” the people of God. Compare John 21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2–3.

12:43 It will be good. This “good” is the third “Blessed” in this section (cf. Luke 12:37–38).

That servant. The servant is the manager placed over the other servants.

12:44 I tell you the truth. Compare 9:27; 21:3. This may be a variant way of saying “Amen, I say.” See comments on 4:24.

In charge of all his possessions. Compare 19:17. Luke used this metaphor to describe the coming reward of those who by faithfully serving the Lord are prepared for his coming. Compare “rich toward God” (12:21); “treasure in heaven” (12:33; 18:22); “receive many times as much” (18:30); “take charge of ten [five] cities” (19:17, 19). Christian “managers” have the potential for great reward or great punishment (12:46). Compare Jas 3:1.

12:45 The negative outcome if the manager is not faithful or wise is now given. The person described fits the picture of the defiant sinner in Num 15:30–31.

The servant. “The servant” is literally *that servant*, i.e., the manager opposite to the one described in the preceding verse.

My master is taking a long time in coming. This may suggest that the delay of the parousia was a problem for Luke and/or his readers. For a discussion of this issue, see Introduction 7 (3). The predominant idea in this passage is, nevertheless, being prepared for the parousia. There is no displacement of the parousia into the far distant future, nor is there a “demythologizing” of the event into something else. On the contrary the warning involves being prepared “because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (12:40).

Eat and drink and get drunk. Such behavior recalls the fool of 12:19; cf. also 21:34; 1 Cor 15:32/Isa 22:13.

12:46 On a day ... and at an hour. This parallelism adds emphasis.

He will cut him to pieces. “Cut him to pieces” is literally *cut in two* (cf. Exod 29:17). In Jer 34:18 such was the punishment for those who had broken covenant with God by mistreating their Hebrew slaves, i.e., God’s other servants. Here it is uncertain whether this serves simply as a picture of severe punishment or whether it also includes the idea of being cut off from God’s people. The next statement appears to lend support to the latter idea.

A place with the unbelievers. This explains the preceding statement. The plight of the unbeliever will be described in Luke 13:28. The parallel in Matt 24:51 makes clear that the servant receives an eternal punishment because he goes with the hypocrites to the place “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Compare also Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30, which add “darkness”; 13:42, 50, which add “fiery furnace”; and Luke 13:28.

12:47 This verse, along with 12:48a, b, is an example of antithetical parallelism. It deals with two managers like those in 12:43–46.

That servant. “That servant” is the one described in the following words.

Knows his master's will. Compare Acts 22:14; Rom 2:18. This servant is not the same as those described in Num 15:27–31; Deut 17:12; Ps 19:13. Yet he is more guilty than the next man, for “anyone then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins” (Jas 4:17).

Will be beaten with many blows. “Will be beaten” is a divine passive for *God will beat*.

12:48 But the one who does not know ... few blows. Punishment of the one who sinned in ignorance is less severe.

More will be asked. This proverb, an example of synonymous parallelism, provides the principle by which the punishments in Luke 12:47–48a are differentiated. The servant who knows what to do and does not do it is more culpable than the one who does not do it because of ignorance. Fitzmyer notes, “The presupposition in the sayings is that servants entrusted with tasks have also been given the wherewithal to carry them out.” This statement contains two divine passives, “has been given [by God]” and “will be demanded [by God],” and two uses of the third person plural as a circumlocution for God: “has been entrusted [by God]” (literally *they entrust*) and “will be asked [by God]” (literally *they will ask*). See comments on 16:9.

The Lukan Message

This section brings up the issue of whether Luke was addressing the problem of the delay of the parousia. If Luke wrote some fifty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, he and his readers might have encountered the problem found in 2 Pet 3:4, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” There are hints of this in Luke 12:38, 45. (See comments on 12:45 for additional references.) Yet Luke had not abandoned the hope of an imminent parousia. It is also doubtful that Luke saw the parousia as “delayed,” for his understanding of God's sovereign rule of history would have prohibited interpreting the long wait as a “delay” in God's program of redemption. Luke may have been trying to correct a misunderstanding on the part of some Christians who assumed that the parousia should have occurred already, but this does not mean that Luke shared that misunderstanding. For Luke there was no “delay” on God's part. Furthermore Luke did not demythologize the parousia into a euphemism for death or transform it into a distant future event. The blessed hope is still alive and imminent in Luke's Gospel. If this were not so, he would not have included this section. See Introduction 7 (3).

Another important theme in this passage involves the need for vigilance because the Lord will return at an unexpected hour (12:40). Luke was especially concerned with encouraging and warning the Christian leaders among his readers. Their responsibility is a serious one, for since they have been given much, even more will be demanded of them (12:48). Being a member of the visible Christian community (rather than the true body of Christ) does not guarantee reward; it does not even guarantee salvation. Not even being a leader in the Christian community guarantees salvation. As the parable of the soils illustrates, it is possible to believe for a while and still fall away (8:13). In the same way one can be a leader over God's people and still wind up “cut to pieces,” consigned to a place with unbelievers (12:46) “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 25:30).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 12:35-48). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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