

Ready for Jesus?

Jesus will suddenly return and reward his faithful servants

.....**Luke 12: 35 – 48**.....

“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. ³⁷It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. ³⁹But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. ⁴¹Peter asked, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?’ ⁴²The Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and the then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. ⁴⁶The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

(slide) Every time I read this parable, I think of Naoma. Naoma was a saint of a woman, whom I knew about 20 years ago. Every morning Naoma would pull back her curtains and look up at the sky and say, *‘Jesus, is today the day you are coming back?’*

Naoma looked forward to Jesus’ appearing because she was ready for him. Naoma knew that she belonged to Jesus because every day she told him so. She never doubted that she was safe in Jesus’ care.

Jesus told his disciples many parables about his coming back, and warned them how important it was for them to *‘be ready’* for his return. Before his death, and before Jesus ascended back into Heaven to join his Father, I imagine the disciples really couldn’t understand what he was talking about. Peter even asked him, ***‘Lord are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?’***

By telling them a story about a Master who expected his servants to be faithful in taking care of what he had left them in charge of, Jesus was preparing his disciples for the task he would one day leave them to do.

The message behind Jesus' parable is pretty intense; it's not exactly rated 'PG'. As with some of his similar parables, the severity of his warnings is surprising to those of us who didn't know that Jesus said things like this.

Jesus had just finished telling his disciples the 'Parable of the Rich Fool'. It was about a wealthy farmer who was fixated on accumulating earthly wealth while neglecting to invest in 'eternal wealth.' In the parable, the farmer was in the process of building '**bigger barns**' for his harvest when God '*demanded*' an accounting of how he had spent his life.

The man found out too late that his preoccupation with worldly wealth had made him '*poor*' toward God. Jesus cautioned his disciples to make sure that their hearts were set on the kind of '*treasure*' that would make them '*rich*' for eternity.

In today's passage, Jesus continued to warn his disciples that they must be vigilant not to lose the eternal inheritance that they hoped to receive.

He said, '***Be dressed and ready for service.***' '***Keep your lamps burning.***' He compared their waiting to servants being alert and prepared for their master to return from a wedding banquet.

Those who heard Jesus say this may have thought of the Exodus, when Israel was instructed to wait through the night with their '*loins girded*'. They were to watch for the signal with their sandals on and staff in hand, ready for the LORD to come to free them from Egypt. (*Exodus 12:11*) Here Jesus used the same instruction: '***gird your loins,***' so that they would be ready to meet their Master at a moment's notice.

Men used to wear long robes in Jesus' day, and they still do in parts of the Middle East. In order to move fast or to do physical labor they would pull up their robes and make them into a kind of shorts by tying them around their waist or tucking them into a belt. (slide)

To '***keep your lamps burning,***' would mean to wait expectantly for their Master to return. When our children were out with their friends at night, I would always turn on the front porch light on for them and not be able to really sleep until I heard them open the door.

In this case, however, keeping a lamp lit needed more attention than just flipping a switch. '***Lamps***' in Jesus' day were usually made of clay and filled with oil that kept the wick lit. (slide) If the oil ran out or if the wick wasn't kept trimmed, the flame would go out.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus told a parable about the Ten Young Bridesmaids who were waiting for the groom to arrive so that they could escort the bride to the wedding feast. (slide) Five of them were 'wise' and made sure that they had enough oil for their lamps to light the way to the wedding feast. The other five, however, were caught unprepared with no oil for their lamps. By the time they had found oil to buy, the wedding feast had begun without them, and the doors were locked so that they could not get in. (*Matthew 25:1 – 13*)

The '***second and third watches***' for Roman soldiers would be between 9 PM and 3 AM. The Jews divided their watches differently. Their '***second and third watches***' would have been

between 10 PM and 6 AM. Either time frame meant that there would be no time for them to finish *'getting ready,'* because they would likely be sound asleep when the *'Time'* came.

I remember one of my pastor colleagues talking about what it was like to live in Southern California. She said that they taught their children to keep their shoes beside their bed in case of an earthquake in the middle of the night. They needed to *'be ready'* to get up and run to safety at a moment's notice.

Who is the *'Master'* in this parable? We learn his identity in the second example that Jesus told about the *'thief'* who breaks into a house. Jesus said, ***'So shall it be when the Son of Man comes at an hour when you least expect him.'*** Who is the *'Son of Man'* Jesus is talking about?

The *'Son of Man'* is the Messiah whom the prophet Daniel saw in a vision many centuries before Jesus' birth. Daniel had been taken prisoner with many other Israelites by King Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. While he was held captive in Babylonia, God gave Daniel a vision to see Israel's future deliverer.

Daniel called this person in his vision ***'The Son of Man'***. Daniel saw the *'Son of Man'* being led through the clouds into the presence of Almighty God, the ***'Ancient of Days'***. (Daniel 7:13-14) (slide)

Daniel witnessed God giving the *Son of Man* sovereign power and authority over all nations. He saw people of every language bowing down to worship him. He watched as the *Son of Man* established for God, an everlasting kingdom, indestructible, and forever ruled by Him.

Both of Jesus' parables warn about the absolute necessity to be ready and prepared if we want to enter into the Kingdom of God with Jesus. The Day when Daniel's *'Son of Man'*, who is Jesus, the Master of the Parable, will arrive, is known as the ***'parousia.'*** (Matthew 24:27)

(slide)

The reward for the servants who have kept everything in order while their Master was away, is a surprise. Instead of the faithful servants serving the Master, the Master will instead ***'wait on'*** his servants!

Jesus cautioned his disciples that they must not grow complacent and lose faith that he would return. He warned them of very severe consequences if they slacked off or misused the authority the Master gave them.

What is the importance of Jesus' message for us? We need to be spiritually prepared at every moment, because ***'No one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, only the Father'***, knows when Jesus will come to gather up his faithful. (Matthew 24:36) (slide)

The unprepared servants didn't take the Master seriously enough and they were not included with the faithful. They were **'assigned a place with the unbelievers.'** How terrible that will be!

How can we be sure that we are prepared for Jesus? We need to make sure that 1) we have received FORGIVENESS for our sin and then 2) we need to continue to be FAITHFUL to our Lord, Jesus.

When we ask Jesus to forgive our sin, we are transferred into his Kingdom. He becomes our Master, and we become, his *'servants.'* We become citizens of Heaven and we belong to him. He cleans us of our sin, and he makes us holy to enter into God's presence.

Our heart's desire changes. Our priority becomes wanting to please Jesus. Our life's goal is to remain faithful in serving wherever and however Jesus calls us to do so.

In the coming weeks, Luke will lead us into more discussions about Jesus' Second Coming. We are rapidly approaching *'Advent'* Season in our Christian calendar. In Advent, we not only anticipate the birth of God's Messiah, but we take time to examine our hearts to make sure that we are ready for Jesus' return to earth.

If we have received Jesus' FORGIVENESS and we remain FAITHFUL, doing our Lord's work, we will, like my friend, Naoma, look forward without any fear, to that Day when Jesus appears.

The Apostle Paul assures us that Jesus will gather all who are his to himself. Paul tells us that those of us who are alive when Jesus appears will be given **'imperishable'** bodies, specially designed to live with Jesus in eternity, and we will **'meet the Lord in the air'**. (slide) Those who have already died will be gathered from their graves, and their soul united with a new heavenly body, to also meet Jesus as he comes (*1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16*)

Jesus' faithful have been waiting thousands of years for him to return. While his delay may become discouraging, and we wonder if he really will come, Peter reminds us that there is a reason for the Lord's delay.

'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, ... But He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come in repentance.' (*2 Peter 3: 8 – 9*)

On the Day of his Appearing, how do you want the Lord Jesus to find you? (slide) He will come so fast that there won't be time to repair relationships or to release grudges. Don't let any sort of *'darkness'*; bitterness or anger keep you from being spiritually ready for Jesus.

Seek the Lord while you can. ***'Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.'*** (*2 Peter 3:14*)

The Lord *will* come, the time to make sure you are ready is now. Amen.