

Always Ready

Luke 12:35-48

This morning, as we continue to work our way through the book of Luke, we're going to be talking about the return of Christ and how to be ready for that. Christ's return is a huge deal for us – it's the next big event we're waiting for in redemptive history that will have a staggering effect on everything, and it's something we need to take very seriously and prepare for.

That's what we do for the big changes we know are coming in life – we prepare for them – going to college, getting married, having children, entering retirement, and so on. But nothing comes close to the return of Christ. How are we to prepare for that?

I've seen two very different responses that a lot of people lean toward. The first is to feel like it's never going to happen in our lifetimes. It's already been 1900 years since he said he was coming back and if it's been that long, what's another few decades? It's easy to feel like life is just going to continue like normal and Jesus won't return until after we die. And for those who feel that way, there can be the tendency to get completely wrapped up in the things of this life and neglect pursuing the things of God. It feels like there's still plenty of time to get around to that. So that's the way some people respond.

The other is basically the opposite and that is to feel like Jesus is going to return really soon because of current events going on. Israel became a nation again and that was huge. The internet made it much easier for there to be a one world government. Persecution is on the rise and it feels like things could be falling into place for the Antichrist to appear. People are leaving churches very quickly, the love of many is growing cold, and evil is on the rise, so it feels like the great falling away. So some think Jesus' return is very near, and for those who think this way, there can be the tendency to become fixated on matching up all the details of current events with biblical prophecies and trying to figure out when exactly things are going to take place. And it can become very consuming.

Chances are that many of us lean one way or the other and this morning we're going to see there can be a problem with both. I want us to see what that is and learn a different way I think Jesus would want us to prepare. We're going to start

with the last few verses we looked at last week, because the teaching we're going to look at today flows out of them...

Read Luke 12:32-34.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Like we saw last week, this describes a way of life Jesus wants us to pursue. It's different than what's going on around us because the central focus is the pursuit of God's kingdom, not the things of this world. It's not that we have to ignore or completely deny ourselves of all the good things in this world, but they shouldn't be our ultimate goal.

So when I think about having a successful career, making money, saving for retirement, buying a house, land, possessions, getting married, having a family, going on vacation, and so on – these are all things of this world. They're good things, and God doesn't forbid us to do or enjoy them. But we do have to be careful that they don't become our central focus. Our central focus must be on pursuing Christ and his kingdom, and carrying out his mission in our lives. And he wants us to use all the good gifts he's given us toward that end. To see them as opportunities to seek him, glorify him, and advance his kingdom. They should be a means to that end and not an end in themselves.

The life Jesus wants us to live is focused in him, not on obtaining worldly blessings or possessions. And after calling his disciples to live that kind of life, he went on to teach them how to prepare for his return.

Read Luke 12:35-40.

"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them

awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ *But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.* ⁴⁰ *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Jesus gives two pictures to help his disciples see how they should prepare for his return. The first is that of household servants whose master has gone away to a wedding feast. Alexander MacLaren, an English scholar who died about 200 years ago, gives a great description of what's going on: *"It is midnight, a great house is without its master, the lord of the palace is absent, but expected back, the servants are busy in preparation, each man with his robe tucked about his middle, in order that it may not interfere with his work, his lamp in his hand that he may see to go about his business and his eye ever turned to the entrance to catch the first sign of the coming of his master."*

Jesus was telling his disciples that they were to live like that. He is the master, they are the servants. He doesn't speak directly about his second coming, but the implication is clear. He wanted them to be actively prepared and always ready for it, and the question is, what does that look like in the life of a disciple?

Obviously, it doesn't mean being lazy – that's kind of the whole point of what Jesus is saying in these verses. The servants shouldn't be sleeping, they need to be carrying out their duties. So we need to guard against spiritual laziness and assuming that Jesus won't return in our lifetimes or thinking that we can just wait to get ready until we get closer to the end of our lives. Certainly that isn't what the servants were doing in Jesus' story. They were actively preparing and ready for his return.

But I want to point out another thing. They also weren't sitting around looking at their master's daily planner trying to figure out exactly when he'd get home. They weren't trying to decipher some kind of pattern from previous wedding banquets he'd been to, trying to predict exactly what hour he'd be knocking. They didn't prepare by trying to guess when he'd be back. If they did that, it would actually keep them from being prepared in the sense he wanted them prepared.

He wanted them to be active with their duties as his servants, doing their part to contribute to the operations of his household, and keeping in mind that he was

going to return at some point in the near future. That way it didn't matter when he got home – they didn't have to worry about that because whenever it was, they'd hear the knock and they'd be ready.

I think what Jesus was trying to point out was that he wanted his disciples to be purposefully walking in obedience to him and engaged in the mission that he had given them to do. He wanted them to be living the very kind of lives he described in verses 32-34, not being lazy, but also not being preoccupied with trying to predict his return. It reminds me of the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25 where the master went away and left each of his servants with talents to put to use in building up his kingdom. When he returned, those who invested their talents in the kingdom were rewarded, but the one who hid his talent was punished.

The implication for us is the same. We certainly shouldn't be spiritually lazy and caught up in living for the things of this world so that when Jesus returns we'll be caught off guard having given little to no attention to living for his kingdom. But we also shouldn't be caught up in trying to interpret all the little details of biblical prophecy and predicting when his return will take place so that when it happens we're actually neglecting the mission he's given us to do. In either case, we're off track and missing what he wants us to be doing.

And the second picture he gives ties in with that. The picture is that of a household master coming home to find out that his house was broken into because a thief came at an hour he didn't expect. If he knew when the thief was coming, he wouldn't have left. Jesus is like the thief and there are two points to it: one is that we need to be prepared because he will come at a time we won't expect. The other is that he will come at a time we don't expect, so it's pointless to try to predict when that's going to be. Jesus said in Matt. 24:36 that no one knows the day or the hour, except the Father. It's going to happen when we don't expect it, so if we expect it for a certain time, it's not going to happen.

Like the servants in the story, I think we need to keep an eye and ear attentive to Christ's return because it is going to happen. Jesus has told us of things that will happen immediately preceding his return and when those things happen, we can know it's very close. Matthew 24:32-36 says: *"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near."*³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the

very gates.” I believe those things could begin at any time. But I also think most Christians that are preoccupied with biblical end times prophecy are looking at the wrong things. The Bible doesn’t say Christ’s return is going to be preceded by obscure signs that are difficult to see and interpret. For those who are living for Christ, it’s going to be pretty obvious. Matthew 24:27-31 says: “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” We’re not there yet. That doesn’t mean it couldn’t start today, but it hasn’t yet.

Prepare for his return by being involved in what he’s called us to do. I think this teaching was and is for every disciple, but now I think Jesus deals specifically with those he’s called to be leaders in their homes and churches...

Read Luke 12:41-48.

Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” ⁴² And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, 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 does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ 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. ⁴⁸ 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.

I think what Jesus says here applies to his disciples first. They were the managers that the master (Jesus) set over his household. They were to be good shepherds of the flock after he left and if they were, they would be richly blessed with greater honor and responsibility in Christ's kingdom. But if they were unfaithful and abused and manipulated people for their own personal gain, like the Pharisees, they would receive a most severe punishment.

I also think this applies to leaders of local churches who have come after the disciples. I think he's saying that faithful pastors, elders, and church leaders will be richly blessed and given greater responsibilities. But those who abuse their positions of influence and manipulate people for their own worldly gain will be severely punished – some worse than others, depending on how much knowledge has been given them.

Whether you're a member or manager in Christ's church family, his return is not something we should treat lightly. We don't want to be unprepared or preoccupied with something else or lazy or wicked, or we will have much to fear. We want to be joyfully obedient, engaged in kingdom work in whatever we're doing in this life, ready and excited for when our Master is going to return to bring us home. If that is what we're doing, we can expect a warm welcome into his kingdom: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." (Mt. 25:21)