

Be Ready

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[0 : 00] Now while the boys and girls are heading for their class, and perhaps you can turn in your Bibles, we're going to hear in just a moment from 1 Peter chapter 4.

And maybe as a reminder, so Bob's going to come and read for us, and then lead us in prayer. And just a reminder to students and young workers, there's a lunch fairly shortly after the service, and then Bob's going to share with us about the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

So please do stick around if you've signed up. If you've not signed up, please do come along anyway. And Bob will come and share with us. Thanks, Bob. Our first reading is from 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 7 to 11, and then we'll read from 2 Peter chapter 3.

These are two of many passages in the New Testament that remind us that we live in the present, in the light of future events that are sure to take place.

1 Peter chapter 4. The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind, so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[1 : 28] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides. So that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be glory, be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. And our second reading near the end of 2 Peter, 2 Peter chapter 3, at verse 8.

Do not forget this one thing, dear friends. 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, as some understand slowness.

Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come, like a thief.

[2 : 38] The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

You ought to live holy and godly lives. As you look forward to the day of God and speed is coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for these vivid and encouraging pictures of what lies ahead. Lord, so often we look at this world, we look at our lives, we look at the city in which we live, and we see so much that is dislocated and disjointed.

And we are promised that a day is coming when all that is wrong will be put right, when all that is evil will be judged and condemned, and that there will be indeed a new heavens and a new earth.

[3 : 53] We pray that in the light of what the Lord Jesus will one day bring to completion, that today we might live lives that are characterized by holiness and by love and by joy and by service.

We pray, too, that we would recognize that the Lord is not slow, but rather he desires that people would come to a living and permanent relationship with him.

Lord, we pray that today, if anybody here may be not yet in a relationship with Jesus by faith, that they might recognize that today is an opportunity, an opportunity to repent and to believe, and to recognize the one who has come and the one who will come again.

We thank you for those, as we were reminded, the many who serve within this congregation, and we pray that as we serve, we should do so, as those who serve with joy and serve with thanksgiving and serve with a glad heart.

We pray for this city in which we are met. We pray for this community in which we are located. And we recognize the beauty of the city, its history, and its heritage. A growing number of people want to call Edinburgh their home, a place to study, a place to live, a place to work.

[5 : 19] And we pray that we, as your people, and as members of your church, that we would consider ways of reaching this growing population from all different parts of the world, from all different parts of the United Kingdom.

We pray that there might be a church in every community, a place where people are welcomed, and a place where people may be introduced or taught in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So, Lord, you know each of our own individual lives. You know our story. You know the past. You know today. And you and you alone know the future. In a room with a gathering of this size, there are many issues and cares and concerns.

Most are unknown to us, but all are known to you. You know the very heart of each one of us. You know the joys and the sorrows. You know the anxieties and the fears.

And we thank you that we can come to you in the name of Jesus, to that throne of grace where we can receive help, where we can receive mercy, where we can receive grace, because this is our time of need.

[6 : 24] Hear us, O Lord, we pray, not because of who we are, but hear us because we come to you in the name of Jesus. And we ask that you would hear us because of who he is.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, before we turn back to Luke's gospel, we're going to sing again another section of a psalm, this time a section of Psalm 113.

We're going to sing the first six verses. And again, we can stand as we sing together. Amen. O praise you, servants of the Lord, sing praises to his holy name.

O blessed be the name of God, His praise forevermore proclaim.

From east to west the praise of God. Each day is to be spread abroad.

[7 : 54] The Lord is high above the earth, His glory far above the sky.

Who else is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high.

He is the one who stoops down low to look on heaven on earth below.

Now, again, if you have your Bibles, if you're using a church Bible, it's on page 1045.

It will be in Luke chapter 12, verses 35 to 48. We're continuing to follow the journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem.

[9 : 11] And the emphasis this morning is to be ready for Christ's return. Luke chapter 12, beginning at verse 35.

Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. Like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. So when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak. But understand this, if the owner of the house had known or whatever the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be ready because the son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Peter asked, Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?

[10 : 23] 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? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, my master is taking a long time in coming, and then he begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk.

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.

The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 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.

[11:32] Amen. This is God's word. Let me begin by asking a question. What connects the following three jobs?

The soldier on a tour of duty, the fireman or the firewoman, and a first century household servant. One sentence is one answer in two ways. It's the need to be ready. Each of those figures could be called into service at any moment.

And they need to be ready because they could face an inspection from the commander or master. Jesus, represented in our stories as the master, has been preparing his disciples, his servants, for the truth that he is going away.

He is on this journey to Jerusalem. He will go to the cross to die. Three days later, he will rise again from the dead, and then he will return to the glory of heaven.

[12:47] He has been preparing them for that, but now he prepares them for something else. He prepares them for his certain future return.

The Old Testament spoke of it as the day of the Lord. We hear it also in the New Testament. Perhaps we are familiar with the idea of the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

This is what Jesus is preparing his disciples for, saying, be ready. Be ready because Jesus is coming back. Be ready because Jesus will bring history to an end.

Be ready because Jesus will judge the living and the dead. Be ready because Jesus will either reward or punish.

So when we hear this repeated note to be ready in our text, we need to hear the urgency from Jesus so that we would let that certain future day shape how we live in this day.

[13:50] That it would shape our faith and obedience. It would shape our mission to make Jesus known, and it would influence us to trust in Jesus if we're not already his followers because he calls us to be ready.

We'll think about it in three different ways. Here's the first, be ready because Jesus rewards faithful servants. I don't know how many of you have watched Downton Abbey.

I imagine many of us are at least familiar with it. Downton was centered on the house of the Earl of Grantham. And living with the Earl and Lady Grantham and some of their children were this team of servants.

There was Bates, he was the chief valet, and there was others underneath. And those servants had to be geared up and ready to serve the Earl and Lady Grantham and their family day or night.

Downton's quite helpful for reminding us about the way things were in the first century. So the parable in verses 35 to 38 is something that would have been familiar to the people of Jesus' day.

[15:11] So the master has gone away. He went away to a wedding banquet. The servants are at home. And there is that responsibility for them to be watchful, to be ready, because sometime in the future, the master would return.

They needed to be ready to open the door, to be ready to have the house all set for his arrival. So verse 35 and verse 36 are very familiar.

But then you come to verse 37 in our text, and there is a huge surprise. We've said this before.

Whenever we're reading a parable that Jesus tells, always look for the surprising and the unexpected piece of the story, because that often leads us to what Jesus is emphasizing.

Listen to verse 37. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. And here's the surprise.

Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them.

[16:27] Do you notice the reversal that's happened? And what Jesus is saying is that he is the master who is ready and willing to reward his faithful followers in the grace of the gospel and in the promise that is in the Bible of an end of time, eternal feast.

It's what heaven is pictured as, and Jesus says he has come to serve. It's a theme we find in Jesus' words in other places. Mark chapter 10 and verse 45.

We read, The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus is the king of glory. And Jesus is our humble servant king. Jesus came to serve us by suffering in our place, by dying and taking on himself the punishment, the penalty, that our sin deserves.

He serves us by taking our spiritual debt and paying it in full and giving us his perfect righteousness and giving us true freedom.

[17 : 52] There's another passage where Jesus speaks of being a servant for his people. In John chapter 14, I think the words might be up on the screen or they should be, I think.

In John chapter 14, Jesus prepares his followers. He says, Do not let your hearts be troubled. And then he speaks about his father's house. So this is heaven.

My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you? Jesus goes to make preparation.

And if I go and prepare, I will come back and take you to be with me. So here is the picture. Jesus is returning to the glory of heaven. And he is going to make preparation an eternal home for his followers.

How does he make that preparation? By going to the cross to die for us, to deal with our sin that separates us from a holy God, by rising again, giving us who trust in him the promise of future eternal life and our return to heaven.

[19 : 00] Jesus prepares the way and he promises he will return one day and he will take us to glory forever. So Jesus picks up this language of serving.

And we also have within the word of God this wonderful promise of feasting within the Bible. So we began singing Psalm 23 and there in Psalm 23, we have the picture of the king.

The king who prepares a feast for his people. The king that gives grace to his people, giving us strength for our journey of faith until we are home, dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus rewards faithful servants then, but he also gives us grace upon grace today. Do you know that every time we gather together for worship or every time like last week, as the people of God, we share the Lord's Supper together, it's like we're having this appetizer.

Jesus invites us in and Jesus comes to serve us from his word and to give us grace, to feed us spiritually, all the time anticipating this eternal feast that's yet to come.

[20 : 24] Another way that we can see it, Jesus' first sign, first miracle, John chapter 2, his first sign that reveals his glory, it was providing wine at a wedding.

And we have this wonderful symbol of here is Jesus and he is the master of the wedding feast. He is the one who provides the overflow of the very best wine. He is the one who has come, the master who comes to bring joy.

And what Jesus does in this parable is he promises that to his disciples as he's on the way to the cross. Jesus is preparing an eternal, joyful feast.

He is the master who serves us in dying on the cross to forgive and to save. And so we have this promise that we're invited to be encouraged by, that when we are ready for his return, when we are trusting in him, when we are looking to live in faithful obedience to him, then we're promised a feast. We're promised a life of love and joy that we can hardly even begin to imagine when Jesus returns to establish his people forever in resurrection life in the new heavens and the newer.

[21 : 46] So what's the message for us? The message is, because Jesus is coming back again as judge and king, and because he does provide reward, we should be ready.

Today, we should be ready. Regardless of whatever anyone else is doing in our family, in our friendship group, in our society, be ready. All the time, be ready.

To receive this reward, how do we receive it? How are we to be ready? First, we need to put our faith in Jesus. The first thing we need is to be served by Jesus our master.

We need to trust that when Jesus died on the cross for sin, he died on the cross for my sin to bring me peace with God. We need to trust and submit to his authority.

So we must first be served, and then, to be ready, we must be serving our master, being ready for his return. What does it look like to be watchful and obedient as we await Jesus' return?

[22 : 55] That's why we read Peter's letter, 1 Peter chapter 4. So remember, Peter heard these parables, and these parables stuck with him. And as he called on the people to be alert and of sober mind, here's what he said.

Here's what readiness looks like. It looks like being a praying people. And it looks like loving one another. And it looks like showing hospitality.

And it looks like using our gifts to serve other people. In other words, being ready means living the faithful, ordinary Christian life that he calls us to. But we do that knowing there's this wonderful reward coming.

So be ready, because Jesus rewards faithful servants. Then in verse 39 and 40, the picture changes. But the call to be ready remains.

Be ready, because Jesus' return will be unexpected. So in verse 39 and 40, there is still a house in view. So let me read.

[24 : 00] 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. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

So now we're picturing a household, and this time the readiness is to be ready for an unexpected visit. Here's the picture of the thief in the night.

We need to be ready. And my favorite picture of this, and it's never too early to begin with Home Alone, is Kevin McAllister, the star of Home Alone. If you don't know the movie, you still have a few weeks before Christmas, you need to watch it.

But Kevin McAllister is a wonderful example of this, because he is on high alert. He is ready. He sets all kind of traps around his house, around his uncle's house, so that when the wet bandits or the sticky bandits come to rob the house or the toy store, they fail.

Because he is ready. But, here's the thing. the whole story of Home Alone only works because Kevin knows the exact time when the thieves will arrive.

[25 : 11] He overhears them. Now I can't remember what time it is. Nine o'clock, I think, is when the wet bandits are going to come to his house. So he can be ready. But the truth Jesus brings is that his return, while it is certain, the timing is unknown.

So we must be ready at all points as a matter of urgency because we do not know when Jesus will come again, when the Son of Man will come.

Notice the way Jesus talks about himself there in verse 40 as the Son of Man. We can skip over it, but it's important to stop and recognize here is a huge claim, actually Jesus is making about himself.

The Son of Man as we meet him in the Old Testament, this figure from the book of Daniel in chapter 7, he is a figure who appears in the throne room of heaven. He is given glory and authority and power to set up an eternal kingdom.

And so when Jesus says, I'm the Son of Man, he's saying he is the King of glory. He is the eternal King whose authority we need to recognize. He is, Acts chapter 17, Paul tells us, God's appointed King and Judge.

[26 : 25] He is the one who does have authority over our lives. He is the one who will come back at the end of history. He will bring in the new creation, having judged and condemned evil and having purified the earth.

So because of who Jesus is, we must be ready to meet him. We must be ready for his certain return.

And we need to be careful because the timing is unexpected, because his return, the time of that is unknown, we must be careful not to be complacent, not to be caught off guard.

A.W. Tozer, who is a Christian minister and writer in the post-war period, asked the question in one of his articles, what happened to the church's hope in the return of Christ?

And he was sort of examining, in this case, the West, Canada and the States particularly, but recognizing the danger there is when a society lives with a great amount of affluence and wealth and security and comfort.

[27 : 37] We can easily slip into the trap of thinking, this is it. We're living the dream right now. Last week, we met the fool who built bigger barns and said, oh, brilliant, I can store up for myself, I can eat, drink and be merry and lost sight of matters of eternity.

And there is a danger for us in that. Again, we can listen to Peter. This time, remember what he said in 2 Peter 3. He said, remember that just because Christ hasn't come back yet, it doesn't mean he's slow in keeping his promises.

Rather, it's a sign of his merciful patience. That Jesus hasn't come back yet has given us an opportunity to repent and to be right with God even today.

But he does remind us that day will come, will come like a thief in the night. Therefore, how should we live?

This time, the emphasis is on living holy lives, godly lives, as we look forward to the certain but the unexpected coming of the Lord Jesus.

[28 : 56] Now, before we move to our last point, I think it's worth pausing for a moment just to consider, I guess, a question that might arise or an objection that might come because these parables focus on the idea of Jesus as a master and we are servants.

Maybe we don't like that idea of serving anyone. Maybe that runs counter to what we're looking for, the pursuit of personal freedom. There's a couple of observations I was reading, I was dipping into a book this week, I don't do this very often, by a French psychiatrist and the book was called *The Weariness of the Self*.

Really interesting, not written by a Christian but he was arguing for a direct relationship between the modern view that we are self-made and we are self-sustaining, okay, so that and the one hand, direct line between those realities, those ideas and the rise of depression and anxiety.

In our day he was arguing that we're being told nothing is truly forbidden. You can be whatever you want to be, you can do whatever you want to do, and we're living with that language all the time, but we're also living with the reality that actually nothing is truly possible.

And he argues that's why people are exhausted, anxious, and becoming distressed, depressed.

Bob Dylan made the point in one of his songs many years ago, you've got to serve somebody.

[30 : 31] In his song he said, it might be the devil or it might be the Lord but you've got to serve somebody. Maybe nowadays it might be yourself or it might be the Lord. And the point that Alan Ehrenberg, that psychiatrist was making is when we live to serve ourselves, it strikes him and perhaps it strikes us that that can be a recipe for melancholy and misery.

And what we need to recognize is that as Jesus presents himself as a master over us, he is a far better master. He is a master who gives us grace.

He is a master who gives us himself. He is a master who gives us joy and life today and the promise of a feast of joy and life and love that lasts forever.

So when we recognize and submit to Jesus as a better master, we have the promise of hearing wonderful words and end to exhaustion and feeling condemned and feeling like we'll never be anybody.

We will hear from Jesus, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter your masters, happiness.

Jesus himself will welcome his people to that eternal home, that eternal kingdom, entry into a world of perfect love.

[32 : 00] And as we've seen in Luke's gospel, Jesus will be welcoming very unexpected people into his kingdom. He's a good master. He welcomes outsiders.

He welcomes outcasts. He welcomes great sinners. He welcomes the poor and the sick and the needy. And he can do that because he will go to the cross to pay for our sin.

He will go to the cross to show us amazing grace. There is no master like our Jesus. One last point is Jesus tells us to be ready.

Verse 41 to 48, be ready and serve responsibly. Peter asks a question in verse 41, Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?

Is this just for us 12, us disciples, who you have called to yourself? Is it for the whole church? And Jesus answered is, yes, it's for leaders and yes, it's for Christians and church members.

[33 : 05] This is for everybody. And so he returns to give us the picture in a slightly different form.

Verse 42, 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?

So this time the picture of the master has gone away again for an unknown period, but this time he's put someone in charge. A household manager is to look after the day-to-day running. And the question now becomes, when the master returns, will he find that that servant has been responsible and faithful or irresponsible and unfaithful?

And that will determine either reward on the one hand or punishment on the other. Let's focus first on the faithful and responsible. Verse 42 and 43, it will be good, 43 and 44 rather, it will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all of his possessions. And again, I would suggest that this is perhaps part of a story that we might expect. If a servant serves others well within a household, we might expect promotion and reward.

reward. We see it in the Old Testament story of Joseph. In our junior youth group last night, we were thinking about the story of Joseph. And Joseph, even when he's sold to be a slave, is found faithful in Potiphar's household and eventually receives rewards.

[34 : 41] We might expect this part of the story, but again, we need to pay attention to the next part of the story and to see a surprising detail.

As attention turns to one who is unfaithful and irresponsible, what does it look like? Verse 45, the servant says, my master has taken a long time in coming, and he begins to beat the other servants and to eat and drink and get drunk.

So he's abusing his power, he's drunk and he's unprepared, and the outcome, verse 46, the master will come, he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

Where's the emphasis falling there? A severe punishment, perhaps a shocking punishment, getting our attention. This isn't talking about ordinary, everyday things, this is talking about the reality of eternal judgment.

This isn't just a story saying, work hard at your job, so when head office comes, or the boss comes around, they will say, good job, and they won't say you're fired.

[35 : 52] No, this is Jesus is your king and your master, and he will come back one day, and we will stand before him on that day, and he will pass judgment on all of our lives, that will lead us to an eternal destination.

salvation. This is life or death, this is heaven or hell, this is eternal glory or eternal grief, and he tells us this and he warns us so that we would be ready, that we would resolve today to be ready, that we would be serving responsibly.

We come to the end of verse 47 and 48, and we're hearing all through the parables, these themes of responsibility towards the master, the reality of his return, and the realities of reward.

Jesus reminds us that this final judgment will be fitting, but I want us to recognize the words of Jesus at the end there, from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who's been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

The more privilege we have, the greater our responsibility. And I want us to recognize that because of this truth, that in our world today, there are billions, literally billions of people who as yet have not heard about Jesus.

[37 : 30] There are over 7,000 language groups in our world today that don't have any part of the Bible in their language.

In our world today, there are around about 700 million believers in the Lord Jesus who will experience persecution for their faith, and they don't have the freedom to have a Bible or to worship in a church like we do.

And I want to say that because compared to so many, we have been given wonderful gospel privileges. Those gospel privileges need to be enjoyed and also we need to live responsibly in light of all that we have been given that we will be fine serving Jesus and his kingdom.

So Jesus tells his servants, his disciples on his way to the cross, be ready. Today is a good stock taking moment.

Am I ready? Am I living today for Jesus as my master? Am I engaged in serving others in his name? Is the honor of King Jesus my main concern, my main motivation in life?

[38 : 59] And if it's not, let this be a day where we can repent, where we can seek renewal, so that we might live responsibly today in light of Christ's certain return.

Just like those jobs that require constant readiness, the soldier on tour, the fireman, the servant, to be a follower of Jesus requires us to be ready to serve him in our lives as we eagerly wait for his return, living today in light of eternity and of our return reward.

Let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you that when Jesus came, he didn't leave us in any doubt as to how the history of the world will play out and how it will draw to a close.

That gives us peace when we can be so anxious about wars and fighting or perhaps the climate crisis. Lord, we thank you that this world is in your hands, that you will bring it to an end when Jesus returns.

And Lord, we recognize again that Jesus was so clear that all of us will stand before his judgment seat and that we must be ready.

[40 : 27] And so we pray that you would, by your spirit, allow us to examine ourselves, that you would allow us to reflect on how good a master Jesus is, that you would allow us to reflect on the call to live as servants, so that each one of us would be found faithful, and to be watchful, to be found trusting in Jesus, our Lord, our King, our Saviour, our Master, our Friend.

We pray in his precious name. Amen. And now we'll close with a hymn, we will feast in the house of Zion, a great hymn reminding us of that eternal promise.

So let's again stand as we close our time together. we will feast in the house of Zion, we will sing with our hearts restored.

He has done great things, we will say together, we will feast and weep no more.

be burned by the fire. He is the Lord, our God, we are not consumed by the flood.

[42 : 28] upheld, we will upheld, we will be gathered up, we will feast in the house of Zion, we will sing with our hearts restored.

Lord, we will feast and we will feast and weep no more. Christ as new Lord, we will ausp tener on the earthstage and dile for eis afraid for the promised morning oh how long God of Jacob be my strength we will feast in house of Zion we will sing with our hearts restored he has done great things we will say together we will feast and weep no more every vow we've broken and betrayed you are the faithful one from the garden to the grave bind us together bring shalom we will feast in the house of Zion we will sing with our hearts restored he has done great things we will say together we will feast and weep no more we use these words from the end of second Thessalonians chapter 2 as we close may our Lord

Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word amen