

Be Ready!

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[0:00] The focus of what we've been talking about in our sermon series through Luke for the past number of weeks. Of course there are many things we could say to answer that question. We've heard from Luke that Jesus doesn't want us to live as hypocrites like the Pharisees.

He doesn't want us to live for greed, seeking after the stuff of this earth and how to please ourselves to the max. We've heard that he doesn't want us to be anxious about what we need. And these are all the ways that he doesn't want us to live. But how does Jesus want us to live? Well we've heard from Luke that he wants us to be honest and sincere.

That we are to fear God and live for his approval instead of the approval of people. To be rich toward God.

And to trust God to provide for our needs. And then last Sunday we heard that Jesus wants us to seek God's kingdom.

[1:13] And to store up treasure in heaven. Well Jesus continues on with this theme of how we are to live as his followers in Luke chapter 12.

So we're going to pick up his words in verse 35. And Jesus gives us three analogies in the passage we're looking at today. That just sort of are illustrations of how he wants us to live.

Let me start by reading the first one. Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. Like servants 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. 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 have them recline at the table. And will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready.

[2:23] Even if he comes in the middle of the night. Or toward daybreak. So this first analogy that we get is of a servant that's ready and waiting.

Jesus tells his disciples to be dressed. Ready for service and keep your lamps burning. Like servants waiting for their master to return.

From a wedding banquet. He gives them this illustration. And probably at first if we're honest this illustration might not feel as illuminating to us.

As maybe it did to them back then. Because of all the cultural differences. Back then many households had slaves. It was embedded in the culture of Jesus' day.

And there was different reasons a person might find themselves in that position. Some sold themselves into slavery. To pay off debts. Others surrendered themselves to it after being conquered during war.

[3:33] Some were born into it. And it was even regulated by the governments. And by the laws of the day. Many households had slaves. And of course the obligation of a slave was just to do the work that the master assigned to them.

And a good master would look after them. And provide for their needs. And in a sense they'd be considered members of the household.

But basically their role. Their job was just to serve their master. Now of course we all know Jesus isn't endorsing slavery here with this teaching.

He's not saying that it's good for society to have it. But he's using something that everybody in his day would understand as an illustration. He gives them this scenario.

Think about a slave or a servant who has been given the job of watching and waiting for his master to return. The master is going out to a wedding banquet.

[4:39] Which just like today can go well into the evening. And of course back then they didn't have cars or electricity. They didn't have street lights or light bulbs.

And so the servant's job in this situation was to keep the lights on at the house. Until the master returned from the banquet. Just imagine yourself coming home in the night. It's late. It's dark. There's no street lights. There's no headlights. There's no flashlights. And so it's difficult to find your way. But if the lamps are lit and burning. You can see them. And where the house is in the distance. And you can find your way. It was also customary back then to bolt and bar the doors. Of course thieves and thugs came out at night. And many of us lock our doors at night too. And so the servant in this story is assigned that job of opening, unlocking the door for the master when he returns.

[5:46] If the banquet goes late, everybody else in the house may be asleep. And so there's need of at least one person to wait up, keep the lamps lit, unbar the door when the master returns.

And who knows, maybe when the master returns he wants to wash his hands or feet or something in some hot water before bed. So the servant's job was also to wait on the master until he went to sleep.

Now this is all analogy. Jesus tells his disciples, Be dressed, ready for service, And keep your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return.

He goes on in verse 37. He says, It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.

Why would it be good? Because that's what the master asked them to do before he left.

[6:57] It's not quite the same, but I think of this in context of family life. Mom or dad sends a child to a room to clean up a mess that they've made.

And maybe ten minutes later we wander by that room to check on the progress. It will be good for that kid whose parents find that the cleaning is either in progress or done.

It will not be good for that kid if there's even more mess and nothing's been done. You could also think of this in the context of an employer and employee relationship.

You're paying that employee to do a job for you. And so it will be good for that employee if when you swing by to check on them, they've done it or they're at least in the process of doing it.

And of course we can flip that around too. If you work for someone else, then they're paying you. And it will be good for you if when they come, they find that you've made progress since their last time checking in with you.

[8:08] Whatever the case, whether slave or free, child, parent, adult, it is commendable to do your work. It's commendable to look after your responsibilities.

Even in the shows that we watch and in the books that we read, we think well of that character who is faithful to do the thing that they were assigned to do or given to do.

I haven't watched any kind of Batman show in a long time, but my favorite character in the show isn't Batman. It's the butler, Alfred.

Alfred's always thinking ahead to what Bruce Wayne might need. He keeps the house running like a Swiss timepiece. He's always ready to stitch Batman up when he comes home bleeding.

He faithfully guards Batman's secret identity. He's a true hero in the story. And just think of where Batman would be if it were not for Alfred, his faithful butler.

[9:15] Whether servant or the head of the household, it's commendable to do your work and to do it well.

It will be good for that servant whose master finds him watching when he comes. But then Jesus says something unexpected here.

He says, Truly, I tell you, the master will dress himself to serve, will have the servants recline at the table, and will come and wait on them. Now I think at this point, all who are listening probably went, Wait.

What? Because this is not how things usually go between master and servant. Between master and slave.

I mean, imagine this. The master comes home. He says, Oh, I've had plenty to eat and drink already. I just came from a wedding banquet.

[10:20] But since you guys are such good servants, always looking after me. Here, give me that apron. You go sit down at the table. I'll get you something to eat and to drink. I'm sure the people listening were perplexed when Jesus said this.

Because this just never happens. And so this analogy starts with something really familiar. But then it ends with this surprise. And we're going to unpack that surprise and the meaning of the twist in just a minute.

Verse 38. So back to the servant for a second.

Can you imagine him just sitting at the door, waiting for hours? It's getting darker. It's getting later into the night.

In this part of the world, midnight happens about six hours after sunset. And so if the master returns at midnight, we're talking six hours of refilling lamps and just sitting there by the door, waiting and watching.

[11 : 35] How easy would it be to just sort of lay down on this couch and maybe just take this little cushion and nestle it under my head a little bit and take a little nap?

But then what if I fall fast asleep and the lamps go out and I wake up to the pounding of my master's fist at the door? Or worse, what if it takes me a few minutes even just to hear that he's knocking? Jesus says it will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready even if he comes toward daybreak. Yikes.

What if the master stays out nearly all night at this banquet? Does he still expect the servant to have the lights on and to unbar the door in the wee hours of the morning?

Yeah. Yeah. Because that's his job. And it really doesn't matter when the master comes back, how long he's out, what time he arrives.

[12 : 42] The point is that his job, his assignment as a servant is to be ready and watching for the master's return. And it's at this moment Jesus shifts very quickly to his second analogy.

Verse 39. He says, 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.

What's the point?

The point is that people usually don't know when thieves are going to strike. If they knew the thief was coming at 3 a.m.

on Friday night, they would do whatever was needed to prevent the robbery. They would be ready. But since people usually don't know when thieves are going to strike, they must in a sense be ready always.

[14 : 08] It's why we lock things up as habit when leaving valuables unattended or when going away on vacation. It's just part of being ready because we don't know when the thief will strike.

Maybe it won't be tonight, but maybe it will be tonight. Well, finally, Jesus gets to the point, verse 40.

He says, You also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.

This is the statement. This is the big point that ties everything together. It helps us see what these illustrations apply to. Just like the servant didn't know when his master would return from the wedding banquet, just like the homeowner doesn't know when the thief is going to come, there's coming a day, says Jesus, when the Son of Man will return.

He will come and we, his followers, don't know when that will be. Jesus is saying, I'm going to come at an hour when you do not expect me.

[15 : 30] And so, what does Jesus want his followers to do? Be ready. Be ready. And, more specifically, be ready always.

at all times. That theme of always runs through both of these analogies.

In that first analogy, the servants didn't know when the master would return from the wedding banquet. Would it be in two hours? Would it be in four? Would it be at midnight? Would it be almost in the morning towards daybreak?

They didn't know when, and so they had to stay awake. They had to stay alert. They had to keep the lamps burning at all times until it happened. The homeowner didn't know what day or hour the thief is coming and so he has to be prepared in one way or another for that visit every night.

But what does it mean to be ready for Jesus' return? he's the son of man. How do these illustrations relate to that?

[16 : 56] Well, one thing that we can pick up on here is that servant idea. Jesus uses the analogy of a servant and a master.

And there's a sort of relation, there's a reason I think it relates to our relationship with him. All of us who believe in Jesus are servants of Jesus. He is the Messiah, he's our king and so yes, we are servants.

He is the master and when Jesus says, be dressed and ready for service, he really does mean that we, his followers, should be ready to serve him with our lives, to do things for him because he is our master.

father. I think too that we can also remember that that word as I mentioned earlier is more accurately translated not servant but slave.

Yes, the Bible does describe our relationship with God and Jesus as that of a slave. We're not merely employed by God but we belong to God.

[18:13] Now, we shouldn't just take everything bad that we know about slavery from human history and read it into this because remember the twist in the analogy at the end.

What does the master do for his slave if the slave is found watching when he returns? Jesus says, truly I tell you he will dress himself, the master will dress himself to serve will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.

And so Jesus is not like the slave owners in human history. He loves those who belong to him.

Even though we're lower than Jesus in status and under his authority he has promised to serve us, to wait on us when he returns provided that we've kept watch as he asked us to.

And I'm going to be honest here, I'm not even really sure what this part of the analogy is pointing to specifically. We do see a little picture of this later on in the story when Jesus takes up the servant's towel and gets down and washes the feet of his disciples the night before he dies.

He really is a good master. The kind of master who would humbly and lovingly scrub the dirt off our feet. Not because we deserve it, but just because that's the kind of person that he is.

[19:56] But this is talking about the future when he returns. There's coming a day when he will come back to this earth. And if we have been ready to serve and done what he assigned to us in some way, figuratively speaking, he will seat us around his own table and do for us what we have done for him.

He will serve us. What a thought. And it won't mean that he's any less the king or that we're any more than subjects.

not but he has promised to serve his servants as a reward for their faithfulness to him.

This is a promise that we can cling to, especially when life is hard or when we're tempted to sort of take it easy in how we serve the Lord.

We can remember he is coming back and he will reward us specially for being vigilant and faithful. Let's move on now to the third and final illustration.

[21:14] This one's a little bit longer and has a little more detail in it. And then we'll talk more about what it really means to be ready for Jesus' return. verse 41.

Peter asked, Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone? 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 he then 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.

[22:35] So this third illustration is similar to the first. We got a master and a slave again, but instead of being tasked with keeping watch for the master to return and opening the door, we have a different situation here.

In this one, the master will be gone for a while. And while he's gone, he's put one of his servants, again literally slaves, in charge of the household.

And this one slave's job is to be the steward or manager of the household while the master is gone. To ensure that the other slaves receive their food at the proper time.

And so we might envision it as he gets the key to the storeroom of the house where all the food and all the wine and perhaps even the money probably are kept.

And Jesus frames this in the form of a question. Who then is the faithful and wise manager manager in a situation such as this?

[23:51] And the answer is the faithful and wise manager is the servant who does what his master asked him to do while the master is gone.

And Jesus again uses that same language we heard before in verse 43. It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

And then listen to the outcome for this guy if he's faithful and does it. Truly I tell you says Jesus the master will put him in charge of all his possessions.

So he's proved himself trustworthy wise faithful and he gets entrusted with more. I'll never forget what it said on the back of my old boss's business cards.

He had a quote there and it was the reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more. And it took me a while to understand that because of course in my late teenage years I couldn't figure out how the opportunity to do more work could be a reward.

[25:09] Like who wants to do more work? That's like a punishment isn't it? But of course there's some truth to it. Those who can be trusted to do the job well are often sought after by others.

People are even willing to pay a little more for their services. And then with that comes more freedom, more profit, more privilege, more honor. Think of the slave for a moment in this situation who's been manager.

His master comes back, he's done a good job of everything, no longer is this guy just carrying water and cleaning the chamber pots for the master. He's now second in command over the whole house. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. And so Jesus wants his followers, he wants us to know that he will reward us for our faithful service of him.

All we do for Jesus in this life will not go unrecognized or unnoticed. It will be rewarded. The things that we do here and now will matter big time on the day that Jesus returns.

[26:32] if we have proven faithful and wise with the life that he's given us, he will give us even greater things to do for him in his kingdom when he comes back.

Now, down here on earth, the way things are, that may not always sound like a blessing to be responsible for more. but when Christ comes back, that's not going to be the case.

Everything's going to be made new. There'll be no more sin. There'll be no more frustration. Serving the Lord with greater responsibilities will be glorious and deeply satisfying.

let's come back to that question of what it means to be ready for Jesus' return.

What it means to keep the lamps burning for his arrival. I think as Christians sometimes we get some wrong ideas about this.

[27:45] Maybe we think that being ready simply means feeling ready for Jesus to return. having a peace in our hearts about it. But I don't think that's what Jesus means here.

I don't think he wants us just to be cheerful and accepting of that truth that he's coming back. We should be, but there's more to being ready than just feelings about it.

Another way we sometimes get this wrong is that we think being ready for Jesus and keeping watch for him means staying on top of the news and watching for signs of the end.

And Jesus did tell us that there will be signs and that if we're wise we will discern the nearness of his coming by them. But knowing that his coming is near is not the same thing as being ready for it. look at the first analogy again of the master who went to the wedding. The point is not that we should be literally dressed all the time, have the lights on always, and be watching out our window always as followers of Jesus.

[29:08] Being ready is related to what was asked of the servant. all the master was away. Did the master find the servant doing what was asked of him when he returned?

That's what it means to be ready. To be found doing, to be doing what was asked when he returns. We see it again in the third example.

The master who left the servant in charge of the household, they gave him those specific duties to ensure the other servants in the house got their portions of food from the storeroom at the proper times.

And we hear that same thing again. It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. And so this is what it means to be ready.

This is what it means to be faithful and wise. it means that while Jesus, the Son of Man, is away, we are busy doing what he has asked of us.

[30:23] And since like the thief, we don't know when he's coming back, we are to always be ready. We're to always be busy doing what he has asked of us at all times.

because Jesus really will return. And when he does, it will be obvious what we have done or what we have failed to do.

This is where even Jesus' illustration has a limitation. It's not as though he doesn't know what we're up to right now and he'll see it when he comes back, like in the examples here.

He sees everything that we do constantly right now from his throne in heaven. But he will come back and we will give an account face to face for what we have done, for whether we have done what he has asked us to do.

Unless, of course, we die before he returns, in which case we'll have to give that account even sooner. are you ready for Jesus' return?

[31:41] For that face-to-face meeting? Are you right now every day busying yourself with doing what Jesus has asked you to do?

Are you pouring your effort and your time and your attention into obeying the commands that Jesus has given? Into obeying the master's instructions?

Now, that's kind of general. That's not very specific. You might wonder, well, what is it that Jesus wants me to do? What are we talking about here? And I'm not going to spend too much time on this, but the short answer is that this book contains it all.

It explains the master's will. It has his instructions for us. It tells us what our priorities should be in life. And just as a quick summary, our lives are to be spent for God's glory, worshiping him, praying to him, gathering together regularly, loving each other, spreading his good news, making disciples for Jesus, doing our work, whatever it is, with all our heart, is working for the Lord, showing hospitality to others, living holy, pure, and righteous lives, raising our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord, being good husbands and wives, as Christ has commanded us.

And the list goes on. It covers every aspect of our lives. We learn all of this in the Bible. God has made his will clear and he shows us plainly what he's commanded us to do.

[33:41] Well, what happens if we ignore all this? And just sort of do whatever we feel like doing? Jesus tells us what the outcome will be for us.

But suppose the servant says to himself, my master's taking a long time in coming. And he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk.

So the picture here is of this wicked, selfish, indulgent man who just kind of takes over as the new master of the house. After all, he's got the key to the storeroom, right?

So he decides to have a little fun with it and to enjoy his authority and his position and to lord it over the fellow slaves. He decides to indulge himself with the master's food and drink and acts as a glutton and a drunkard.

And Jesus says, 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.

[34:49] That word unbelievers can also be translated as the unfaithful. Faithful manager, unfaithful, same word just negated in this part.

Cut him to pieces is probably a figure of speech. If it's literal, it's kind of an interesting sequence. First you get cut to pieces, then you get assigned a place with the unfaithful, and then you get beaten with many blows.

So I'm not sure how that works, but we do this all the time. You know, when Bob backed into Steve's car, Steve came out and ripped him to shreds, we'll say.

Well, of course it's not literal, but it means he was furious and he gave him a severe tongue lashing. Jesus will not be happy.

In fact, Jesus goes on to describe what would normally be done to slaves who did such things as this back in those days in verse 47 and 48. 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.

[36:03] 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. So the master would see to it that the punishment fit the offense.

And of course he would take into consideration whether the offense was deliberate and defiant or whether it was due to ignorance. In the same way Jesus will judge our actions when he returns.

sins. But if we have been faithful, then we have nothing to worry about. We'll be rewarded by him. But if we've been unfaithful and if we have persistently acted selfishly, sinfully, wickedly, then Jesus will give us what we deserve.

He will pour out on us the punishment that fits and will assign us a place with the unfaithful. And I think yes, Jesus is talking here about heaven and hell.

[37 : 18] The mark of every true believer in Jesus, every genuine follower of Jesus is persistent faithfulness. Not that we live perfectly, it's not perfect faithfulness of course, but that we press on continually in obedience to Jesus, doing what our master has asked of us.

We regularly confess and repent of our failings and we strive to obey Jesus as much as possible in every area of our lives, to do our master's will.

That's what true faith in Jesus leads us to do. Because at the end of this world story, Jesus really is coming back. And there are only two outcomes here.

The outcome of the faithful and the wise, being entrusted with all his possessions, or the outcome of the unfaithful and the foolish.

Are you ready for Jesus' return? Are you busy doing what he has asked? let's pray.

[38 : 34] Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for these words, and I pray that our hearts would be open and receptive to them. Convict us of the sins that we have committed recently in our lives, where we have been like that wicked, unfaithful servant, and bring us back to walking in the light with you.

Even the things we've done right, Lord, we give you the credit and the glory for that. It's your spirit in us. And we thank you that there is coming that day when you return and when you reward us for everything that we have done, even though we don't deserve it.

We long for that day, Lord. Come quickly. In Jesus' name, Amen.