

PM Luke 12:35-50 Living with Kingdom urgency

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Preacher: Rev David White

[0 : 00] Luke chapter 12 verses 35 to 50. The title at the beginning of this passage is You Must Be Ready.

Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning. 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.

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 the table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch or in the third and finds them awake, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left the house to be broken into.

You also must be ready for the Son of Man, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Peter said, Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?

[1 : 35] And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and wise manager whom his master will set over the household to give them their portion of food at the proper time?

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

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 food 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 does not know, and will cut him to pieces and put him with the unfaithful.

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.

But the one who did not know, and did what deserves a beating, will receive a light beating.

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.

[2 : 49] And from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. And then the section entitled, Not Peace, But Division.

I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress, until it is accomplished.

Not an easy passage for the staff. People thought it was post-traumatic stress, but actually it's something called moral injury, where we have an expectation that the majority of people will get better.

But in that situation, the majority of people who became seriously ill with COVID didn't get better. I think that during that time, people generally were more appreciative of the world in which we live. People took the time to go out and to walk and to exercise, and were more caring towards their relatives and friends.

[3 : 59] But post-COVID, it concerns me that... I think these are perhaps, in my lifetime, when I was 17 April, I think are perhaps the most challenging and difficult times in my lifetime for us as a country.

We see the financial situation becoming worse and worse. And we see people, I don't know, society generally, seeming to be less appreciative of what the government has tried to do in order to help them through COVID, and now hopefully will do, to help us to get through this shortage of this expensive fuel and so on.

Now, I'm the eldest of seven, and I grew up in West Yorkshire. My dad worked on the railway. We had very little when we were kids. But I'll tell you what, we were happy, despite the having very little.

And I think we've become... We've got to a stage where we seem to feel that we're entitled to better and more than we have.

And I think this is going to be a very testing time for people over these next couple of years. The war in Ukraine is clearly a large part to play in that.

[5 : 36] And these are Europeans. They're our neighbours. And we've had a lot of contact with them over the years. So these thoughts are the background to our prayer time this evening.

I'd also like us to pray for one another and for our families and for those who as yet have not come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have two boys, and neither of them have yet bowed the knee to the Lord. And I'm sure that you have relatives and friends that you would like to see come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we'll pray for those who are grieving and those who you may know who are sick. Let's bring them before the Lord as well.

So let's pray. A sermon, Living with Kingdom Urgency. Living with Kingdom Urgency. This morning we considered an incident which happened during the last week of Jesus' earthly life where Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed Jesus at a meal given in his honour in the village of Bethany.

[7 : 03] This evening we're focusing on part of Jesus' teaching as he made his way steadfastly towards the cross. Over the past few years I've taken up painting using acrylics.

Since 2017 I've attended art classes at Gracefield Art Centre. And instead of sketching and colouring in, I used to love when I was a kid, did you used to get those books painting by numbers? Did you used to get those when you were a kid? I used to love those. And that's when I first actually painted mountains. Because living in West Yorkshire, which was very industrial at the time, I'd never seen a mountain with heather on it or anything like that.

So it was just lovely to follow the guide and paint by numbers. But I learnt that that's not really painting at all. It's colouring in. And so it was really good to learn how to use light and shade and build a picture from there.

And in all forms of art, perspective is important. And it's been described as the art or science of drawing or painting objects on a surface or canvas so as to give the picture the same appearance to the eye as the objects themselves.

[8 : 26] This includes the effect of distance and the solidity of the subject matter. So I brought a painting with me this evening.

I'll come on down because you'll not see it from a distance. Perhaps you might be able to tell me where it is for a start. A picture. Yeah. It's local.

It's a church spire. Well, it's not a spire as such, but it's a church. It's the church roof. In the middle there. No, it's not. It's not the Crichton Church. Good guess. It's Trequea.

It's Trequea Church of Scotland looking across from our back garden. And you might think, well, that can't be real. Surely it wasn't like that at all.

This is just the artist in me giving the whole thing a bit more expression. But I'll show you the photograph from which it was taken. It was a most amazing sunset.

[9 : 37] And it's very small because you don't have a means of projection. But just to let you see that that's the photograph from which the painting was made.

It was just the most beautiful evening sunset that I've ever seen in Dumfries, actually. And I took a lot of photographs. I took the lamp post out because she can do that when you're painting a picture. So I made a few alterations. But that's what it is. And that just gives you perspective. It's from the photograph to the painting itself.

It's one of the wonderful things about retirement. I have time to do these things these days. So perspective is crucial.

And it's also crucial if we're to understand why we're going through particularly difficult situations, especially when everything seems hopeless and pointless.

[10 : 44] When I reflect back on my own life and journey of faith, it's only with hindsight that past events come into focus and the lessons God desired to teach me become clear.

Sometimes these lessons need to be repeated because I'm a very slow learner. But you'll find that if you reflect back on your first journey, you'll find that God's brought around situations again and again until we finally get it, as it were.

So perspective can also be prospective, meaning that we can look forward. And this can give us the ability to act now in light of what we hope will happen in the future.

So an example of this is when Paula and I, when we were both working, we put aside money towards our pension in the hope that we'd live long enough to enjoy some of the fruit of our labours. And I'm sure that can be, that would be echoed by many here. Currently, we're putting money aside for our grandchildren. Our grandson Finn is four years old and our granddaughter Alice is 18 months.

[12:05] And we're putting this money aside in the hope that it'll be used for their future education. Both of these examples are living prospectively, which requires faith and counts on events that have not yet occurred.

So living prospectively is very different from living strictly according to our present needs and gratifications. A lot of people these days live for today with no thought about the future. It requires foresight, and it also requires discipline. In this evening's Bible reading, Jesus tells three parables that underline the importance of prospective living.

The first is a parable concerning being prepared, verses 35 and 36. The second, the parable of waiting for the Son of Man, verse 39 and 40.

Thirdly, a parable of the different kinds of stewards and servants, 41 to 48. And then we'll bring our considerations to a close as we consider the baptism which the Lord Jesus would undergo, verses 49 and 50.

[13:27] Each one of these three parables causes us to reflect on our view of the future and the nature of that future. And it helps us to determine our present priorities.

In today's Bible reading, Jesus speaks about making the kingdom of God our primary concern. That's why the title is Living with Kingdom Urgency.

So let's think about the context for a minute. The Lord Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem for the last time. Repeatedly, he's told his followers that he would soon leave this world but would return in the future at a time known only to God the Father.

Matthew 24, 36. In the later chapters of Matthew, Jesus teaches about signs which will accompany the end of the age. And as in these parables, he teaches about being prepared and also about the coming judgment.

Christ Jesus brought in the kingdom of God at his first coming, making it a present reality in the church which bears his name.

[14:42] He also pointed to the future when he brings the kingdom to its fullness. We as believers must be alert and prepared to greet the risen, glorified Christ when he returns.

If Jesus is to be Lord and King of our lives, then he must control every aspect, be it work, play, plans or relationships. So what does the leadership of Christ look like for you?

Is the kingdom of God only one of your many concerns? Are you holding back any areas of your life from God's control?

Do you believe that Jesus will come again? And if so, are you ready? That's the big question. So let's have a look at these parables.

The parable of being prepared, verses 35 to 38. Jesus uses two metaphors. First of all, be dressed, ready for action. And secondly, keep your lamp burning.

[15:52] The New King James Version speaks about girding your loins. I love that. Basically taking the loose outer garments that they would have worn in those days and gathering them up around the waist to facilitate the ability to run and to work or to travel.

Burning lamps speaks about being watchful even in the dark hours of the night. I don't believe that Lord Jesus is saying that we should develop insomnia and not sleep.

But that we should be prepared. We should be, our minds, spirits should be ready if the Lord were to return during the night.

I remember a little prayer my grandma taught me when I was a child. When I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

And I think that kind of encompasses a preparedness, an awareness of the Lord. In 1998, I made my fourth visit to the Ukraine as part of a team to teach volunteers and open Bible staff members how to run the equivalent of Scripture Union camps and how to teach the Bible to young people.

[17:12] Just to give you a little bit of background to this, I was saying to Norman and Sheila at lunchtime, for which we were very grateful, thank you, that a guy...

Sorry? Is it not on? Yes. It's... And so... I've lost my place now. Yeah, so we were sharing about how I got involved in the Ukraine in the first place.

A guy called Danilo Gay, a Swiss Frenchman, came to speak at the SU Friends evening here in Dumfries. In fact, in St. George's Hall, just up the road.

And I grew up, as many of you did, through the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war. And this guy came and the Berlin Wall had come down.

Eastern Europe was opening up and this fellow was involved in going into Eastern Europe, establishing Bible study groups with the Christians that were already there. I need to make that point. We did not take Christ to the Ukraine.

[18:17] He was already there. You know, there's a lot of people who know and love the Lord Jesus in Eastern Europe and formed these Bible study groups and out of these Bible study groups grew Scripture Union, which is known as Open Bible in the Ukraine.

When we went in 1994, we went with four leaders and six teenagers. And Grigori ran a camp in Kiev, two camps in Kiev, and we ran a camp in Torres in the east, where we couldn't even go now because that's all been taken over by the Russians.

So we couldn't even go there now. And over the years, that's grown so that many thousands of children have learned about the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a permanent campsite at a place called Vosel, north of Kiev, which they're running camps at now, even though there's such a threat of war.

So committed are they to the work that they've been called to. So that's the background. And so I was there at Vosel helping these volunteers and Open Bible staff to learn how to teach the Bible to young people.

[19:27] And one of my sessions focused on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6, which we all know is entitled The Armour of God. And like here in the Ukraine, in the UK, Ukrainians eat a hearty breakfast, a hearty lunch, and with just a light supper later in the day.

And I have to say that whilst we were there, that was a very good way of taking in your food. Eat your food when you're going to use it, rather than having a big meal in the evening, all you're going to do is go to bed.

So it actually makes a lot of sense and aids your digestion. And the seminar that I was to lead started at 4 p.m. in the afternoon, which under normal circumstances is a low time of day for me. I don't know whether that's true for you, but 4 o'clock in the afternoon is low time of day for me. And the older I get, the more I need a snooze about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And as people gathered, it was immediately evident that some of the folks were drowsy.

And I found it really difficult to make a connection, especially communicating through a translator, a translator called Oksana. I would liken it to wading through treacle.

[20:40] And in verse 18 of Ephesians 6, Paul exhorts his readers to pray in the Spirit on all occasions and with all kinds of prayer and supplication.

And I found myself praying fervently. The text then goes on to say, to that end, be alert! And I just was moved by God to do that.

And what it did was it brought everybody, everybody became alert, awake. And as I reflected on that later, it occurred to me that our enemy, the devil, did not want those gathered that day to learn about spiritual warfare.

And he did his best to lull them into a false sense of security. And I remember that afterwards, Grigori, who's the leader of Scripture Union in the Ukraine, said to me, watch your back, David, because you've stepped into a dangerous place, taking on the powers of evil.

And sure enough, not long afterwards, there came some very serious attacks. So the key point, God desires that at all times, we're dressed, ready for service.

[22:01] That our lamps are primed so that the darkness, and I mean the spiritual darkness as well as the physical darkness, does not overtake us.

We need to be alert. In verse 36, it speaks about a wedding banquet and celebrations referred to in the verse. These could last for more than a week at Jewish weddings, often longer than that.

If we expect God to be ready to answer us when we knock at his door, so to speak, it's only right that we should be ready whenever Christ, metaphorically speaking, knocks on our door.

Luke 11, verse 9. Dressed and ready no matter what time of day or night. And then there's the parable of waiting for the Son of Man, verses 39 and 40.

Christ's return will be unexpected. Verse 39, But know this, if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

[23 : 14] When I owned and managed the pancake place, because the business didn't make the turnover we anticipated initially, we moved from Moffat to live in the flat above the shop.

And two small boys, both in their beds, wife and I went to bed, and during the night someone broke in to the flat and stole items from the living room and the kitchen.

And it's very unsettling and very disruptive when you really think about that. And those two boys were in a bedroom quite a distance away from our own.

And that's the nature of thieves, isn't it? They break in when you least expect them. And the thief in the night motive was a way of impressing on listeners the uncertainty of this kind of disruptive event.

1 Thessalonians 5, 2 Peter 3, and both these passages speak about the day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night. Revelation 3.3 also uses similar wording to the church at Sardis.

[24 : 35] 2 Peter 3, But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief in the night. Like people in the time of Noah who were caught unprepared for the flood, so it will be for many at the second coming of the Lord.

People will be going about their normal daily activities when the unexpected will overtake them. Not knowing when Christ will return is not a trick on God's part to catch us off guard.

In fact, delaying the Lord's return is so that more people have the opportunity to respond to the gospel. And I praise God that we still live in a day of grace where men and women and boys and girls can still respond to God's love in Christ.

Because when the Lord returns, that's it. no more opportunity to respond to the gospel. Peter writes to Peter 3.9, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you not wishing that anyone should perish, but that you should reach repentance.

Before Christ returns, we currently have time to live out our faith and to reflect Jesus' love as we relate to others. God exists in eternity.

[26 : 05] We're the one who measures everything in time. 2 Peter 3.8, But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day.

The Lord will return. And then there's a parable of the different kinds of servants. It's the view of most biblical commentators that this third parable, this is verses 41 to 48, is addressed to those with leadership roles in the church, whilst others believe it applies to all believers.

Verse 42, And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and wise manager whom the master has set over his household. The truth of the matter is that we're all, as believers, all of us have gifts that we can use for the kingdom.

And we may not be in positions of eldership or ministers, but if we're responsible for the children's group or the gathering of the seniors or whatever it is, then we're all using our gifts to the same end. I certainly have the belief that this applies to all believers, these words here. See, positions of leadership in any situation offer unusual temptation to abuse others and misuse power and influence.

[27 : 39] And I can tell you from experience that churches are not exempt. Leaders in the context of the kingdom of God have increased responsibility.

the faithful and wise manager is the person who faithfully and carefully cares for those for whom he or she is responsible. Church leaders in whatever context are to be like their lord, servants not lording it over others.

1 Peter 5, 1 to 4, So I exhort the elders among you to be shepherds of the flock of God, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly and God as God would have you, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

This is a high calling. If you're in that sort of position in the church, it's a high calling. One of the commentators says, the unfaithful and arrogant in power will be punished according to the nature of their behaviour, their knowledge of the Lord's will and the level of power and privilege they enjoyed. So it's a high calling. But God will not hold us responsible for gifts he's not given us. But all of us have been given enough gifts and responsibilities to keep us busy until he comes.

[29 : 11] The question is, are we using them? What matters above all else is that we have a servant heart. And Jesus graphically demonstrated his servant heart when he wrapped a towel around his waist and bent to wash his disciples' feet.

When we were at college, which for me wasn't that terribly long ago, we were split into small groups, the class was split into small groups, and we had to perform an act of service for our fellow students.

And one of those groups chose to wash the feet of everyone else. And I have to say to my shame that my immediate reaction was there's no way they're washing my feet.

And then it hit me, and it hit me hard, because that was Peter's reaction also. And it was a real lesson in humility. humility. And it was a real blessing to have that done to me by those who were training to go into ministry.

It was a lesson in so many ways, I can't begin to tell you. I wonder how you'd react if I brought a bowl of water and a towel this evening. But that's the nature of our Lord, God, that being in very nature God, wrapped a towel around his waist and bent and washed his disciples' feet.

[30 : 50] Many of you know that Paul and I spent four years in Fort William helping to establish a Baptist church there, and one of the elders would often say, we're saved to serve.

How we serve depends on the gifts and talents God has given us. 35 years I spent in catering, 24 years as the owner-manager of the pancake place.

So guess what my first job was when I got involved with them for East Baptist Church? Catering convener. But down through the years, opportunities to serve have changed from children and youth work to serving as a deacon and then called to full-time pastoral ministry and laterly to hospital chaplaincy.

And now I have these occasional opportunities to preach and to give a lead to seniors ministries at Dunfroise Baptist Church. So how we serve and the quality of what we do will be tested.

In 2 Corinthians 3, 12 and 15, everything we do should be done out of love for the Lord and for his glory and not for ours. And even when we're older and perhaps not as mobile, we can still be prayer warriors or offer a listening ear and life wisdom in a non-judgmental way to those who may need it.

[32 : 13] One of the people who was instrumental in keeping me on track in the early days when I came to faith was a lady called Mrs. Todd. You may remember Mrs. Todd.

I was trying to remember her first name. I never really knew her first name. I always just knew her as Mrs. Todd. And it was so helpful as a young believer to go and spend time with Mrs. Todd when I was finding it difficult and finding the walk difficult.

And she was such a quiet, unassuming sort of person. But she was a person that many people went to for support. And she was well in her 80s, 70s, 80s even then.

So I thank God for Mrs. Todd. Perhaps we could, some of us could be Mrs. Todd's to others. And so we come to these last two verses, verses 49 and 50, a baptism the Lord would have to undergo. The baptism which Jesus referred was his coming crucifixion. Great is my distress, he said, until it is accomplished. Jesus knew and dreaded not just the physical pain of being lifted up and nailed to a cross, but the spiritual pain of complete separation from God the Father that would accompany his death for our sins.

[33 : 43] I'm mindful of the cry of dereliction. Psalm 22 verse 1, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And when I think about these things, I think, what an amazing saviour we have.

One who is willing to bear the wrath of God so that we through faith will never need to. Christ died our death, took our punishment, so that we in the fullness of time will not die, but fall asleep.

In the New Testament, when people died, they often refer to it as falling asleep. And I mentioned Geoffrey Grogan this morning and Geoffrey Grogan was in hospital and a minister friend of his visited him, a chap called John.

And Geoffrey said to John, he said, John, they tell me that my condition is terminal, but you and I know it's only transitional.

I think that's wonderful. That was said at his funeral and that's really stuck with me. They tell me it's terminal, but you and I know that it's only transitional.

[35 : 04] For those who know and love the Lord, we transition into the new reality of the new heaven and the new earth. And when we consider the cost of our salvation, our response can only be loyalty and commitment to our Lord, sometimes to the point of severing relationships with others.

Certainly Paula and I have found it difficult. We're the only believers in our families. We're the eldest, me of seven and she of five. And often conversations become strained and tense and it does cause the disruption which this passage speaks about when the Lord says, I came to cast fire on the earth and with it it was already kindled.

People will make the choices they make. all we can do is continue to be faithful and be who we are. But no matter who we are or what we've done, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ demands a response.

It forces choices and family members will choose differently. Jesus' point in these verses is simple. We're to expect division. Opposition to Jesus is a given. Jesus said to his disciples, if they persecuted me, they will. They will persecute you.

[36 : 29] John 15 verse 20. So let's bring these thoughts, all these things together. This evening we worship a risen saviour and I increasingly ask myself, how long will it be before God calls time and before Christ returns?

Are we living in the last days? There are many markers that would suggest that we are. Our relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ must take priority.

Someone once said either Christ is Lord of all or is not Lord at all. And the Lord Jesus exhorts us to be in this passage to be dressed and ready to live prospectively, to be alert in the full knowledge that the Lord's return is much closer now than when these words were uttered.

Lord Jesus will be I pray that God would give us the insight to be able to interpret the signs of the times and may we live each day ever thankful for the sacrifice that Jesus made so that we know that we have a future.

we have the sure and certain hope that when we die, fall asleep, we will transition into the nearer presence of the Lord and one day he will come again and take those who are his home to glory.

[37 : 52] How urgent and important it is that we believers are found ready, making the most of the time left to share the wonderful gospel of salvation with those who have yet to hear of God's extraordinary love for them.

So are we modelling that love in our day to day lives so that it's not only told but felt. We all have a role to play, talents and gifts that can be used to extend the kingdom.

Being devoted, watchful servants, living in a moral and obedient way so that we not be anxious concerning our Lord's return, dressed ready for service, lamps burning, being salt and light in this perverse generation and praying for the salvation of those we love and those who persecute us.

The good works we do will accumulate as treasure in heaven. Look at verse 12, look at chapter 12, verse 33. And notice those servants who were awake to answer the door when the master returned. Chapter 12, verse 37. Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service.

[39 : 17] This is the master. Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at the table and he will come and serve them.

Wow. I have trouble getting my head around that. But if we are ready when the master knocks, the master will I just, it's incredible.

It's an extraordinary reward. The master serves us. There's no greater reward either in this life or the next than to hear Jesus proclaim, well done, good and faithful servant.

Come in to your master's rest. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.