

Be Ready... For Christ is Coming

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[0 : 0 0] closed due to unforeseen circumstances, or so the sign in front of the fortune teller's tent at the local circus said, despite what they may say, no one knows what the future holds.

Could any of us predict it, that we'd spend the whole of 2020 in a national lockdown? No one would have bought a ticket for the Titanic's maiden voyage if they'd known what the future held for her. No one knows what the future holds. But that's not entirely correct. In Luke chapter 12 and in verse 40, Jesus says, the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

While people are going about their daily business, King Jesus will come again. The master of the house will return and call us to account. And as disciples of Jesus, this is a truth which must shape our lives.

We don't know what the future holds, but we know this, the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect. Well, in Luke chapter 12 verses 35 to 59, having concluded a section where he encouraged his disciples to provide for themselves treasures in heaven by putting God first in their lives, Jesus now calls his disciples to look ahead and to live in the constant awareness of his unexpected coming.

The majority of the section consists in Jesus speaking privately to his disciples. Only towards the end does he begin to include the crowds. So it's we as Christians who are most to take on board what Jesus says here. And this passage is a warning to us as Christians to be ready for the return of Jesus.

[2 : 0 9] Jesus, the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Does the return of Jesus factor at all into our minds such that it shapes and transforms our lives?

Well, for the sake of his disciples, in our passage today, Jesus issues commands in verses 35 through 48 and details consequences in verses 49 through 59. Commands which we are to obey and consequences of Jesus' second coming in glory. The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect, Jesus says.

Christian, do you believe this? How is it shaping our lives to know that he will come at an hour we do not expect?

Are we ready for his return? First of all then, we have from verse 35 to verse 48 commands.

Commands. Now put yourselves in the disciples' shoes. Up until this point, they'd heard little to nothing about Jesus' second coming. They didn't even believe that he'd leave them by dying on a cross, let alone return in glory.

[3 : 3 6] It's not so surprising then that at this stage, they didn't really understand what Jesus was telling them. It was only later, after Jesus had risen from the dead, they remembered what he'd said on this day and knew what it all meant. The two connected parables Jesus tells in this first section are dominated by implicit commands. First in verse 40, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. And secondly in verse 48, everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand all the more. And we can summarize this teaching in two commands.

Be ready, first of all, in verses 35 through 40, and be faithful in verses 41 through 48. Be ready and be faithful. As we live in the expectation of Christ's return, we must be ready and we must be faithful. We must be ready, first of all. We must be ready. Jesus tells a parable about a master and his servants. The master is attending a wedding feast, and he leaves the care of the house to his servants. They must be ready for his return by keeping the lights on, protecting it from burglars. The Jews split the night up into three sections, the first, second, and third watches. Now, these servants didn't know what time of night their master would return. The wedding feast might be short, or it might be long. But rather than sit back and enjoy their own feast, the servants must be ready to

hear the knock on the door of their master. The absence of their master does not give the servants freedom to enjoy themselves and get on with what they want to do. Rather, they must eagerly await his return. Rather than themselves eat, drink, and get drunk, they must keep the lights of the house on and protect it from burglars. His absence does not give them an excuse to leave the house in darkness and unprotected. It's not an opportunity for them to go out and party, lest when the master returns, he finds his house empty, both of his servants and his possessions. If the master returns and finds his servants busy about his house rather than asleep and uncaring, Jesus says in verse 38, blessed are those servants. The roles shall be reversed, for even at this late hour, the master shall put on the clothes of a servant, and he shall lay out a feast for them. The master shall reward their faithfulness to him and to his house by going above and beyond what a master is supposed to do.

Jesus concludes this short parable by saying, you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Jesus here is casting himself as the master of the house with his disciples as his servants, and he's calling them to be busy about the work of the kingdom of God because they do not know when he shall return. Blessed will they be if when he returns he finds them busy in his service, for then they shall be richly rewarded.

My middle brother James was never far from trouble. One occasion when he was a late teenager, my parents went away for a couple of nights, just like Anne was saying, and left him to look after the house. My parents returned a bit early from their getaway to discover the house in a mess.

[7 : 42] My brother, in their absence, had arranged a party, and when my mom and dad returned, there were hungover teenagers sleeping in every bed and every couch. There were empty beer bottles everywhere, and the place reeked of cigarette smoke. My dad hated fags. You can imagine the guilty look on my brother's face. You can imagine the trouble he got himself into. It was the proverbial, while the cat's away, the mice will play. My brother wasn't ready for my parents' unexpected return and thought he had more time to tidy up the house and get rid of his hungover pals and freshen up the fag smoke. Jesus tells us in black and white, he is returning at a time we do not expect.

And the question for us here today is this, are we living for ourselves and enjoying our pleasures rather than attending to his service and being faithful to him? Meantime, what will he find us doing when he returns? Shall he find us busy about the work of his house, the church, preparing for his return by serving others? Or shall he find us absent without leave, doing our own thing?

Be ready, Jesus says. Second, verses 41 through 48, be faithful, be faithful. In the world of Jesus' day, the master of the house appointed a manager or steward who was to govern all the affairs of his business. Think of how Joseph was Potiphar's manager, steward. Potiphar left all the affairs of his affairs of his house in Joseph's hands. So, the steward was to look after the master's family and all the other servants, making provision for the whole household to be fed at the appointed time. In a parable, rather like the one before, if a master went away, he would expect his steward to run his household well. After all, the household did not belong to the steward, it belonged to the master. He did not expect the steward to begin to act like he was the master. He did not expect the steward to start looking after himself, but ignore the needs of the other members of the household. Worse still, he did not expect the steward to act like a tyrant, to beat up the other servants, and to throw a party for his friends. The master has given the steward the ultimate responsibility of looking after, in his absence, all the affairs of his affairs of his business. It's a great responsibility, bearing great rewards for faithfulness and great consequences for unfaithfulness. If, when the master returns, he finds the household prospering because his steward has taken the responsibility seriously, he will be rewarded with even greater responsibility. But if, when the master returns, he finds his household beaten and starving, while the steward is hungover from partying, the punishment will be more severe. The master shall beat the steward like the steward beat his servants. The master shall dismiss the steward from his service. Even ignorance is no defense, for it's impossible for the steward to be wholly ignorant of his duties. And Jesus' message is this, 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, verse 48. Remember, Jesus here is speaking to his disciples, and he's telling them, I've given you a great responsibility that when I go away, you should act as stewards of my house, the church. Not masters, but stewards. It's my church, not yours, your stewards.

Be busy about my business. Make sure the other servants are fed. My absence from you does not give you license to neglect, to abuse, or misuse other Christians.

[12:06] You are my apostles, and I have sent you to mind the affairs of my church by caring for, loving, feeding, and serving my people.

The greater the responsibility, the greater the accountability. Ex-Prime Minister Liz Truss made a really bad mistake in her economic policies.

She paid for it by losing her job. But you know, we all make mistakes in our job. The doctor misdiagnoses. The teacher loses her temper.

The cashier gives the wrong change. But their mistakes, while earning a reprimand, don't lead to sacking. The greater the responsibility, the greater the accountability.

Liz Truss had the greatest responsibility in our country, and therefore her lack of judgment cost her dearly. Apostles of Christ, to whom Jesus is speaking here, have a greater responsibility to serve the church well.

[13:10] Those whom Christ has called to serve His church, have a great responsibility not to use the church to their own advantage, but to serve it as Christ's stewards.

In James 3 verse 1, we read these words, Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

And the message of this passage is, Whatever role Christ has called you to play in His church, be faithful to Him in it.

Whatever role Christ has called you to play in this church, be faithful to Him in it. Because this is not our church, it's His church, and we must serve Him well.

Christ has called you to serve our children by teaching them, do it faithfully. Christ has called you to welcome people into our church, do it faithfully.

[14:10] Christ has called you to oversee the finances of our church, do it faithfully. Jesus' absence doesn't give us carte blanche to use the church for our own advantage or to play fast and loose with our service.

Rather, when He returns, shall He find us faithfully serving His people, loving them like He loved us?

A challenge for each one of us here today. If Christ should return today, would He find us diligently using the gifts He has given us for the service of His household, the church?

Or would He find us using the church just as one other club to which we belong, letting others burn out in Christ's service while we ourselves lie back, criticize them, and let it happen.

In the Apostles' Creed, which all Christians hold as the basis of their faith, we confess, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

[15:25] Christ shall come at an hour we do not expect, but we do know He shall come. Shall He find us ready? Shall He find us faithful? Commands.

And then secondly, from verse 49 to 59, and more briefly, consequences. Consequences. These are some of the hardest verses in the New Testament, not just to understand, but to swallow and accept.

We can only understand them correctly if we take them in the context of the certain but unexpected second coming of Jesus. And they refer to deeply personal issues.

None of us like being challenged in these personal areas of our lives. We're quite happy to keep Jesus at a distance, but when He gets up close, we're uncomfortable, and you know rightly so.

The consequences of Jesus' second coming in these verses are three. First, get your priorities right, verses 49 to 53.

[16:32] Second, second, get your timing right, verses 54 through 56. And third, get right with God, verses 57 through 59.

Our faith in Christ must change everything about us, especially that which is most deeply personal, or it changes nothing. First of all, get your priorities right, verse 49 through 53.

In these verses, Jesus is still speaking only to His disciples. This teaching shatters the image we so often have of a Jesus as meek and mild.

But He tells us His coming brings fire and division. He describes how His coming will pit family members against each other and divide homes. No one said Jesus' teaching is always easy to accept.

But this, this is the impact of Jesus' call to radical discipleship upon His people. Their faith in Him may divide them even from their closest relatives.

[17 : 37] As a teacher of His day, Jesus is using hyperbolic language to describe what the impact of being a disciple of Jesus shall be. There will be family members who do not accept that having now become a Christian, Jesus must come first.

Even if we take our discipleship in Christ seriously, even those who are closest to us may turn their backs on us. Now, this is unlikely to happen in our society, but it happened a lot in Jesus' day. When a Jewish man became a believer in Jesus, his closest family threw him out of the house and out of the community. His wife divorced him. It happens today in many countries like India and Pakistan.

To become a Christian leads to you being disinherited and losing your rights within a family. The early 20th century Indian evangelist Sadhu Sundar Singh, you can read his biography, upon becoming a Christian was beaten by his father and thrown out of the family home.

Jesus' point in these verses is this, in the light of his second coming, we must get our priorities right because when push comes to shove, Jesus must come first.

[19 : 00] There's no black and white here. The cost of discipleship is deeply personal. It's not a price any of us want to pay, but it's a price for the sake of Jesus and his gospel.

We may have to pay, but Jesus must come first. Second, verse 54 to 56, get your timing right. Get your timing right. From speaking only to his disciples, you will notice now in verse 54, he begins to include the crowds, but he's still speaking about his second coming.

And he's talking about interpreting the times. As Jesus often does, he refers to things common people would have understood. So, they saw clouds in the west and they knew that rain was coming.

They saw the south wind blowing and they knew there'd be scorching heat. The people of Jesus' day knew how to read the appearance of the earth and the sky and on that basis were able to plan their activities correctly.

[20 : 04] They saw a cloud in the western sky and they knew it was going to rain, so they planned what they were going to do in their fields accordingly. Today's not a day for the harvest. And they felt the south wind blowing.

They knew it was going to be a scorcher, so they wore the appropriate clothes and they didn't go outside in the hottest times of the day. But these weather phenomena are superficial.

What about altogether more serious matters? The most serious of all being the judgment of God. Jesus has come as the Messiah, but the crowds don't understand what this means.

It didn't change the way they lived their lives and they crucified Him. How much less will they understand His second coming and judgment? How much less will the second coming affect the way they think and behave?

In light of the coming judgment of God, they should repent and believe in the gospel now, but they didn't and they won't. Hypocrites, He calls them, because they know how to read the weather and act accordingly, but they do not care about the coming of the Son of Man such that they should repent and believe in Jesus as Messiah.

[21 : 23] And we're back to the point Jesus made earlier. Be ready for Christ's return. Get your timing right. He could return any time before the end of this service even. And if you're not a Christian, you are not ready to recognize Him as Savior, Lord, and King.

You are not ready. Third, verse 57 through 59, get right with God.

Get right with God. On the surface of things, these last three verses seem to be about the common affairs of business and justice. A man is accused of wrongdoing, perhaps defaulting on a debt. Rather than take the case to court, the accused man, whom Jesus assumes is guilty, should try and settle with his accuser on the way, rather than leave his fate to the judge.

After all, the judge has the power to hand the accused over to the officer who will put him in prison. But that's just on the surface of things. In the context of Christ's second coming, which is what this passage is all about, the judge is God.

[22 : 35] The accused are those who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and the accuser is Jesus. They have wronged God. In particular, in context, they have committed sin against Jesus by not believing in Him as the Messiah.

On the last day, God will condemn them for all the things they have done wrong, and to use Jesus' words, you will never get out until you've paid the very last penny. The Jewish leadership failed to believe in Jesus, and on the day Jesus returns, they will be judged by God and condemned.

Should they not, Jesus argues, rather than wait for that last day, settle with God now? Should they not, rather than waiting for judgment, settle with that accuser by believing and trusting in Jesus? This is the meaning of this small passage. It's not about the common affairs of business. It is about the greatest of all business, that of being in a right relationship with God. Are we in a right relationship with God?

Have we settled with Jesus by putting our faith and trust in Him today, so that when He returns in glory, we will have nothing to fear from the final judgment?

[24 : 00] Have we repented of our sin? Have we believed in Him as Lord and Savior? Have we got right with God by trusting Him? what Jesus says in this whole passage is an awful lot to take in.

There's much hard teaching here which might seem to us difficult to swallow and accept. It challenges our picture of who Jesus is. We need to be ready for His unexpected return.

We need to get ready. We need to be faithful. We need to get our priorities right, our timings right, and get right with God. As I say, it's really hard teaching from Jesus.

So, what does this all have to do with the good news of His grace? What does this have to do with the good news of His grace? In verse 50, Jesus says, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished.

How great is my distress. Given that Jesus is saying this in a passage dominated by judgment, the baptism to which He defers is a baptism of judgment.

[25 : 19] He is fully aware that at this stage in His public ministry, He's on His final journey to Jerusalem. And when He gets there, He's going to be betrayed, arrested, tortured, and executed.

Jesus, the innocent one, will be crucified for the guilty ones. Jesus, the righteous one, will be executed and endure the judgment the unrighteous one deserves.

To go back to verse 59, with His lifeblood shed on that cross, He will pay the last penny of our sin and guilt, of all the honor we owe to God.

Jesus will settle our debt. Jesus will pay the price of our sin. Jesus will be judged in our place.

Jesus will be lifted up on a Roman cross and subjected to the punishment we deserved.

Here's the gospel in Luke chapter 12, verses 35 through 59. And this is how today we are to be ready for His second coming. By putting our whole faith in the Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us on the cross.

[26 : 43] If we have not yet done that, we are not ready. Not ready. But if we should put Jesus first in our lives now, even as He put us first in His death, we will be fully ready for that great and awesome day when the glorious Son of Man will appear.

My final question, rhetorical question perhaps, but it doesn't have to be. Are you ready for Christ's return?

Are you ready? Are you ready?