

The King is Coming; Be Ready!

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Date: 09 June 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together now to Luke chapter 12 and this passage from verse 35 down as far as verse 48. If you had been at the General Assembly or if you are watching the General Assembly online, you would have noticed that in order to receive the Lord High Commissioner's visit, that the Assembly halted well in advance of the time that the Lord High Commissioner was due to visit, which was at quarter to twelve.

We finished half past eleven or twenty-five to twelve. And the reason for that was that, well, we didn't want to have him arrive at the Assembly and those who were going to greet him in the lineup were not in their place.

Or even that he would arrive at the Assembly and find that the door was still shut. That would have been even worse. It's not for who the Lord Commissioner is in his own person, but in the fact that he is important because he is the Queen's representative to the General Assembly.

As he represents Her Majesty, then we would not want, as a General Assembly, to be in any way unprepared for his coming, his arrival, in anything of the proceedings leading up to it.

Now, it wouldn't have been of any eternal significance if we hadn't had everything in place, or even if we had forgotten altogether. It wouldn't have had eternal consequences.

[1 : 3 4] But it is not like that here in this passage. Because the passage is dealing with the return of Jesus Christ the King. Some commentators suggest that it's not, in fact, to do with the Lord's second coming, but rather something ahead of that, and the blessing of the Gospel is coming in the Gospel, and various ideas like that.

But it is almost certainly the case that that is not a right way to look at the passage, and that what Jesus actually meant when he said, here in verse 40 and all the other verses around that, you must be ready also, for the Son of Man is coming, and now you do not expect.

And that fits with many other passages in the Gospels and in the New Testament that speak about the return of Christ in very similar terms. The King is coming, and it will be more than embarrassing if we are not prepared and ready to welcome him at his coming.

This flows from the previous section that we looked at, where you remember we saw how Jesus emphasized the need to set our treasure in heaven, to invest in salvation, to invest in the treasure that we have that must be set in heaven, in God's own provision of eternal life for us.

We invest in that when we accept Christ, when we put our faith in him, when we accept Jesus as God's provision for us, God's saviour, God's way of redemption for us.

[3 : 1 3] That's how we come to invest in heaven to begin with, and from then on we continue to invest in it, in terms of living the kind of life that the Lord requires of us, and also the kind of life in this passage that prepares, it includes our living the kind of life that prepares, and is then going to be ready when he comes.

In other words, it's living prospectively. Very often we live retrospectively, we live reflectively, and there's nothing wrong with that, looking back to things that have already happened in our lives, or even beyond that.

We sometimes live, and indeed we have to live each day, looking at the things that are presently the case with us. We look at things as they are now. But it's so important for us in this life to look forwards, to anticipate what is yet to be.

Not in the sense in which any of us, of course, knows what's going to be in our providence tomorrow or next week, but what I mean by the things that are yet to be, is what the Bible tells us will certainly take place in the experience of every one of us, and these great things are, of course, set around the Lord's return.

We have to live prospectively. We have to live, if possible, every single day, thinking upon those issues that have to do with the return of Christ, and where that affects our lives as his disciples.

[4 : 48] It's very easy to dwell on the things of the present, or even on the things of the past, in a way that draws you away from looking towards the future and remembering that there is an eternal dimension to our lives.

That human life is not life for this present world alone, that we are indeed designed for, and will find ourselves one day in eternity.

So that's the kind of emphasis that you find throughout this passage in Luke 12. To live prospectively and to look in anticipation as we live to the return of Christ the King.

So you could say that the passage is really about the King coming, and our need to be ready for that coming. Now, the passage uses three illustrations, if you like, to try and put across this point to us.

And that's so often the case with the Lord, when giving his teaching, and especially on things that are of such critical importance eternally, he uses illustrations that help us understand the kind of emphasis that he himself is setting before us in these words.

[6 : 10] And the three illustrations, first of all, there's a wedding reception described in verses 35 to 38. And then in verses 39 and 40, just these two verses very similarly to the previous ones, there's an account of a break-in, of a burglary, or a break-in, that the person was not ready for.

And finally there's an illustration that we can call the house manager, the steward, or what's in mind there, is the person that's given responsibility, as would be in those days, over the whole of the household, so that the other servants as well would be under his governance, or under his, or her control, usually male under his control.

But like the butler in the old style days, Downton Abbey, butler, whatever his name was, all the servants under him, and that really is the kind of idea in the house manager that you find there in verses 41 to 48.

And that's the third illustration that the Lord uses to present this important teaching to us. And as we go through these three illustrations, let's think about how they are designed to teach us to look and to live prospectively, forward-looking in our lives to the return of Christ.

The wedding reception then in verses 35 to 38. Stay dressed for actions, or gird up your loins for action, for activity.

[7 : 43] And that's a description, as you know, of the kind of garments that would have been worn in the days of Christ, still worn in these countries, long, flowing, loose garments.

Perfectly understandable in the kind of climate and environment that is lived in there for coolness at some times. But when you come to do something in a hurry, they're rather dangerous, because it's so easy to trip over them.

And if you really have to gird yourself up for action, if you know there's some really strenuous activity about, like running or whatever else, very often what they do is they tuck up these loose folds and tuck them into their belt.

So that the garments are no longer around their ankles and they're not actually in danger of tripping over as they do whatever activity they have to do. Well, that's the kind of thing that's in mind when you say stay dressed for action.

Let your garments be in such an order, such a way of ordering your garments, that when the action you need to take comes, you're not going to be unready for it.

[8 : 49] You're going to be prepared for it. And it reminds us in a way of, way back in the Old Testament days of Israel and Egypt. I remember that the Lord told them through Moses that he was going to come into the land of Egypt in judgment.

That the angel of death, and the Lord represented in the angel of death, was going to come into the land of Egypt and every house where there was not the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts and the lintels, there would be a death, the death of the firstborn in each of these homes.

And they were told how they were going to eat the Passover. And one of the things that the Lord specified was that they were to eat it in haste, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hands.

They were to have to eat the Passover meal, looking forwards, looking for an event that God had told them about that was going to happen shortly, when the Lord was going to come.

When the Lord was going to come in his judgment into the land of Egypt, these people, although they were safe from that judgment of death in their homes, through the blood of the lamb, they were still told, you have to eat this with your loins girded, you have to be ready when it happens.

[10 : 16] Because you have to go out of here, and you have to go through the desert with this God. You have to follow him. There's the event that God told them about.

There's something that they knew was going to happen. Something that God had specified clearly for every single person of Israel, this is going to happen.

And it came to the night itself. This night, the Lord will pass through the land of Egypt. Therefore, be ready when it comes. Do everything that God says you need to do.

And one of the things is, let your loins be girded. Stay dressed for action. Don't be inhibited when you need to move. And he's using this illustration here for us, so that we will actually be ready in a state of preparation when the Lord comes.

If he had come yesterday, would I have been ready for it? Would I have been expecting it? Would you? Just think of what you were doing yesterday.

[11 : 30] Go through in your mind from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. How many times did you think of eternity?

How many times did you think of what you were doing in relation to the return of Christ? Were you prepared for that? Had it happened? Well, here's the Lord saying to his disciples, Be ready for this.

For at such an hour as you do not think the Son of Man is coming, you must be ready for the Son of Man when he comes. And the second thing he says, with your lamps burning.

Now that reminds us of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25. Some had oil in their lamps and some didn't have enough oil in their lamps. And their oil ran out and their lamps went out.

And of course you know the story yourselves. The point is, they knew something was going to happen that they needed to be ready for. Half of them did not prepare properly for that event, for the bridegroom to come.

[12 : 40] The other half, they did. They made sure they had a vessel of oil along with their lamps so that when the oil in the lamp began to run out they could top it up. And therefore they had enough left to make sure that the lamp did not go out until the bridegroom arrived.

And it's the same sort of idea that you have here in this passage. What the Lord is saying is, you know that this is going to happen. You know that the day is coming when I will return.

When I will come back to judge the world. When the king himself will arrive. And what he's saying is, just like those who need to keep lamps burning until something happens that God or whoever's promised will happen until it happens.

That you've got enough light to last you until that happens. So he's saying, with your life, keep thinking of this event. And keep thinking of it in such a way that you do not find yourself unprepared before this takes place.

And when it takes place, that you will be prepared. And then he moves again to speak about changing the imagery a bit. You must be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast.

[14 : 01] So that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. It's helpful to know something of the custom of the times. When you read things like that in the Bible, to illustrate just the background to the kind of comments that you find there, especially to do with weddings and wedding feasts.

We have our own practice, our own tradition perhaps for weddings and for wedding receptions afterwards and do things in pretty much a standard way.

In those days, and maybe even still, but certainly in the days of Christ, the wedding feast or the wedding reception, let's call it, however long it would last, the bride and the groom would be there.

And at a certain point when the reception was just beginning to wind down or come to an end, there was a certain man who was called the friend of the bridegroom.

Let's just call him the best man. And he, along with other select dependable people, would actually take the bride out of the reception and escort her back to the home that she and her new husband were going to live in.

[15 : 13] And they would actually wait there because the bride, the bridegroom had to wait at the reception until it was all over. And then, he would make his way back to the bridal home to move into the home to be with his new wife.

Now, the person that came to take the bride out of the reception, along with some other dependable people, they were actually responsible to see that the bride came to no harm and that they looked after the house until the bridegroom came back because it wasn't unknown for brides even to be stolen by people before the bridegroom came back.

So, the person, the friend of the bridegroom, and he usually stood outside the house actually, but the imagery here is inside, but it's the same idea.

They have to keep a very careful watch on things until the bridegroom returns. Every single moment until he returns, they are responsible to look after the bride and to make sure that nothing happens to her.

And the only time they're released from that responsibility is when the bridegroom comes and knocks and says, that's it, I'm here, you can go home now. And that's Jesus using that as an illustration to say, you're waiting also for the bridegroom to return.

[16 : 40] The Lord's people are coming to, coming to, towards that time when the Lord returns. They have to maintain their watchfulness.

They have to make sure that they keep on preparing themselves for the return of the king. So that when he comes, they're not found asleep or unwatchful or careless or negligent spiritually or morally, but that they're ready to welcome him when the knock comes to the door.

And all of that, these three images there in terms of the wedding reception especially, is God's way of demonstrating to us or illustrating for us the importance of looking forward daily to the coming of Christ.

And of saying to ourselves, even if he doesn't come today, I must be prepared for him. I must prepare myself for his coming in case it should in fact be today.

Blessed, he says, are those servants whom the Master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table. Now, blessed, that's much more than being in an emotional state of happiness.

[18 : 00] When the Bible talks about being blessed, it actually includes happiness, but it's far more than that. Because when God comes to save his people, when God comes to save you and I's individuals, that salvation is a lot more than just making you happy.

It's bringing you into a state of blessedness. It's putting you into a right relationship with himself. It's placing you under his complete favor. It's making you completely acceptable to him in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessedness. It's putting you in fact in a state where death will no longer invade and be able to claim you as its own.

Somebody once put it as a definition of blessedness. That blessedness is the state in which there is no death. And that is certainly one of the ways in which you can describe blessedness.

Even though we die in the physical sense and our body comes to be laid in the dust. That's as far as death goes for God's people.

[19 : 17] And that body itself is united to Christ and will rise in the resurrection so that once again body and soul they will be together with Christ.

Blessedness. A state in which there is no death and from which death has been removed. And he says blessed are those people.

But you notice what he's saying and it's a wonderful glimpse into what's going to happen in the final arrival of Christ and what he's going to be and to do for his people.

It's not what you might expect. He doesn't just say he's going to take them in and they're going to serve him. He is the king. He's going to return in all his splendor when we look forward to the coming of the king.

We're not looking forward to the coming of the son of God in the same manner in which he came the first time. Where he was born in a low condition as the catechism puts it.

[20 : 20] Where he was born into a state of servitude. Becoming a servant. Giving himself to service, to suffering, to temptation, to everything that you read of in the Bible leading up to his awful death.

That's not how he's going to come. The Bible tells us every eye shall see him. Not many people saw him come the first time.

But every eye shall see him. And he will come with the holy angels as a king has a retinue, an accompaniment of important people with him.

So the king of kings brings a multitude of angels with him and his people. people. No, no, when we come to see Christ we will see the king in his beauty, in his splendor, all the magnificence of the king of kings.

And yet what you read is that he will come and make them recline at table. These people will be blessed, who are ready for his coming, and he will come and serve them.

[21 : 36] How wonderful is that? If you go to a banquet hosted by royalty, the one thing you do not see is that royal person, whether it's the queen or whoever it is, taking you in, welcoming you, sitting you at the table, and then going to the kitchen and bringing in the food.

Somebody else does that for them. But what you find here is the king himself personally comes to serve his people. He served them the first time he came by giving himself to the suffering and death that he died.

He serves them the second time he comes by dispensing to them the salvation that he bought for them the first time. Because that is really what heaven is about.

Whatever else it is, and there is much else besides, it will be the king himself feeding his people, pastoring his people. Remember how Revelation chapter 7 really puts it so wonderfully there as well.

In the description that's given there of the people who have come to be with Christ, with the Lord above, they are before the throne of God, they serve him day and night, they have washed their robes, made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

[23 : 05] Therefore, they are before the throne of God, they serve him day and night in his temple, and he who sits on the throne will pastor them, he will be their shepherd, they shall hunger no more, for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

one of the most wonderful experiences of heaven, will be receiving from Christ's own hand, the very life, the very sustaining spiritual food that he will keep feeding us with forever more, that he purchased for us while he was in this world previously.

what a thing to look forward to. How could we not live prospectively, when we realize that not only is the king coming, but the king is coming in order to look after his people, in order to bring them home to be with himself, in order to be their pastor shepherd, in order to lead them to these fountains of living waters, and every single moment of eternity keep looking after them and feeding them from his own hand.

What an experience to look forward to. Will it be yours? Are you anticipating it? Are you in such a relationship with Christ that if he does come tonight, that's what your future is going to be?

Have you invested in heaven? Is that where your treasure is? Or is he still a stranger to you? Other than what you read him in the gospel?

[24 : 57] Because that's really what the passage is saying. Will he be a stranger to us when he comes? We will know who it is. We will all know who it is.

The Bible makes it clear that everybody will realize this is in fact Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of Kings. But it's quite another thing to say, I know who that is.

That is my friend. That's my eternal shepherd. That's the one who died for me. That's the one in whom I put my trust. That's the one that I was looking forward to meeting above all other people.

That is my Savior, my Lord and my God. So there is the first thing, the wedding reception. And then he moves to speak about a break-in just very briefly.

Know this, he says, he changes the imagery a bit. If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

[26 : 10] Now, in those days, of course, many of the walls still to this day of homes in these lands would be made of clay or clay bricks. And it's relatively easy to break in through a wall that's just made of hard clay bricks.

So you would have to have a certain amount of watchfulness and security against thieves breaking into your house. And if you weren't very watchful, it would be very easy for a thief almost unnoticed just to quickly break through the wall of these houses, steal something and make his way out again.

Jesus is saying that if you think of somebody living in that sort of house, and he's told a thief is going to come at such and such a time tomorrow, and you find the person whose house it is saying, well, that's all right, and then he just goes to sleep and carelessly doesn't bother to secure the house, you would call that person a fool.

If the man, he says, the man of the house, had known what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into, but you also must be ready, because he's saying, you do know, you don't know the hour he's coming, but you know he's coming, and therefore, because you know he's coming, he's coming, you have to prepare for that above all other things.

Let me just tell you a little personal story. It has a touch of the amusing about it, that's not why I'm telling it, but while it has that, it has a very serious side to it as well.

[27 : 52] So the camp, a church camp, many years ago when I started doing camps, and doing it firstly as a leader rather than being in charge of the camp. But in the dorm that night, the camp overall leader had been giving a talk, and that talk had been about the second coming of Christ.

And he had very simply, very plainly said before the boys of the camp that Jesus was going to return, that he would be returning at a time when nobody really knew, but that the Bible said that we had to be ready for it, just as you find in this passage.

And then in the dorm afterwards, as I was trying to explain this to the boys, and they were asking questions, this lad looked rather curious about the rest, and this was on a Friday evening.

Monday was the day out for the camp, and the camp was down in Ayrshire, and the Monday day out to the camp was going to be a trip to Butlins in Ayr.

And this boys face, as I was trying to describe the second coming of Christ, and go over what the camp leader had said, all of a sudden he blurted out, could he come any time?

[29 : 04] And do we know when he's coming? And I said, no, we don't know when he's coming. All we know is that he's coming and that we need to be prepared. Could he come tonight? I said, well, yes, he could come tonight, we just simply don't know.

And of course he then said, well, I hope not, he said, that means I won't get to Butlins. Now that's the amusing side of it, but think of the serious point. There was somebody for whom the whole future really revolved around Butlins and the excitement of getting to Butlins and having a day in Butlins and all the activities of the fairgrounds and all the things that Butlins had for little boys of that age.

Wonderful. And it loomed on his horizon in a way that was far, far bigger than anything to do with the return of Christ. But that's how you and I sometimes are.

such is the hold that this world has of us. That we find ourselves so reluctant to leave it and so reluctant at the prospect of having to leave it, even if it means exchanging it to be with Christ, which the Bible tells us is far better.

When I look into my own heart, often I have to say, why am I so attached to this world? I need grace to actually slacken my grip on this world and on the things of this world and especially when I'm told by Jesus himself, I am coming as the king of kings and you have to be ready for me.

- [30 : 42] That itself should be enough for me tonight to say to myself, don't let the things of this world look bigger than the return of your Lord.
- don't let the things of this life be more important than the return of the king. You also must be ready.
- You also must hold the things of this life in a secondary place compared to the primary place that we must give to the Lord and to his coming.
- And that's true. Every single person in this building tonight. The wedding reception, the break-in, briefly the house manager. Peter said, Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?
- And you see, again, the Lord, as you often find him, he doesn't answer the question directly. The Lord just simply went on saying, who then is the faithful and wise manager whom his master will set over his household to give them their portion of food at the proper time.
- [31 : 55] There's an illustration of somebody that has been set over a household by the owner of the household family who's gone for some reason away for a time.
- And he's employing this manager to look after the house while he's away. and he expects this manager while this householder, house owner is away, he expects him to look after the house properly, to feed the family at the right time, to manage the resources of the house in a way that is proper and fitting in such a place as you've been given.
- Blessed, he says, 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, and he goes on to speak about two kinds of abuse of that privilege. If the servant says to himself, my master is delayed in coming, and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink, and to 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 in 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. This doesn't mean that disciples in the sense of God's saved people can suddenly lose their salvation when Christ comes, if they have not prepared adequately for it.
- [33 : 34] remember that disciples, in every case, does not mean the saved. John's gospel, chapter six, many disciples stopped following Jesus, they no longer accepted his teaching, and they went away.
- They were called disciples, but they were disciples only in the sense of following outwardly. Their heart was not right in accepting the teaching of Christ, or being saved and converted under his ministry.
- That's what the church is still like. You are all disciples tonight, in the way that there were disciples following Christ, outwardly, openly.
- Every one of us is a disciple in that sense. The whole visible church of God is made up of disciples in that sense. But there is a mixture, because among the disciples, there are the saved and the unsaved.
- There are those who are getting ready for the return of the king, and those who are not. Those who are not preparing for it. Those who are even careless, or despise the very thought of it.
- [34 : 51] And that brings up a very difficult subject. It brings up the subject of punishment. Punishment on the part of Jesus when he returns.

A lot of people nowadays don't like that. They think we shouldn't preach about punishment and the return of the Lord and the kind of judgment that will punish those who have not accepted him or lived the life that he himself required.

But there it is. I haven't made it up. And if we were left just to pick passages of the Bible to preach from ourselves, we would not very frequently preach on passages dealing with punishment, or this emphasis in relation to the return of Christ.

But let's be clear about it. every single person who meets Christ in an unsaved condition will receive punishment.

After all, it's what we all deserve. And it's what's right and fitting, especially if we have refused Christ's offer of himself as Savior.

[36 : 19] We don't do anybody any favor. by changing the Bible to pretend that actually this is no longer relevant. How could I go home and face God tonight?

If I had kept from you all the truth about Christ's return. If I had placed your soul in jeopardy just because I had chosen not to speak about this part of the passage that deals with punishment, the punishment of those who do not love Christ.

That is what he himself said. This is the Lord's own teaching. This is his infallible word. Well, what does he say? Well, he says that there are various degrees of punishment.

There are some that knew about his coming and abused the very thought of it. They mistreated even those in the house. There are others that did not do according to his will, though they knew he was coming.

They are going to get a severe beating. There are those that didn't know he was coming and deserved a beating but will receive a light beating. In other words, the Lord's judgment is always just.

[37 : 39] It is just of him to bring his people to enjoy eternity with them. That is what Christ has achieved for them. That is what they have received by faith. It is fitting that that is the kind of judgment with which they are judged.

It is fitting too that it is in accordance with what we have been given. Everyone to whom much was given, of whom much shall be required.

God's justice is exact. You do notice that in the return of Christ and in his judgment, it is not just punishment in terms of things that people did.

It is also punishment, which includes this, it is punishment for what we did not do. They knew about it, he is saying, they knew the Master was coming, but they did not prepare for that event.

You know that he is coming. all you have to do to come under eternal punishment is to do nothing about it.

[38 : 51] But please don't do that. The appeal of the Gospel is, as Jesus himself put it, you must also be ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man will come.

May you and may I, may we finish tonight's service, and may it be a note in our lives from now on, what John himself said as the final words of Revelation, and therefore the very final words of the Bible.

Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus. Let's pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we do give thanks that you have revealed to us so clearly of how you will come again to this world.

Help us, Lord, to believe the reality of that event. And help us not to be like so many who dismiss it out of mind, or some even who think it fanciful and not worthy to be believed.

O Lord, we thank you that your word reminds us so often of events that took place, even as they were foretold by God through his servants, that were dismissed by human beings from their thoughts, and yet they took place as had been told.

[40 : 30] We think of Noah and the time of the flood, when he built the ark and so many scoffed at him, yet the rains came as you had foretold.

So, Lord, we thank you that in telling us of your coming, you also tell us to be ready, and you place before us in the gospel all the means available to us to prepare for that great event.

We pray your blessing to accompany your word, O Lord, to that end, that we also may be ready when you come. For your glory's sake we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen.