

Luke 12:35 – 40

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[0 : 0 0] Luke 12, 35 to 40. Let me remind you that the day that happens very different than today. You're sitting at home watching this likely, but on that day Jesus is at the centre of a massive crowd. Thousands and thousands are pressing in and around Jesus is the small group of disciples and Jesus is teaching his disciples in front of the watching crowd, preparing them for a life in front of the watching world. And he prepares them for the fact that he is going away into heaven at his ascension and that he will come again as judge of the living of the dead. And between his going into heaven and his coming as judge, there's going to be a long period of delay. And throughout chapter 12, his second coming comes into the foreground and background, but really comes into focus brilliantly here. If you look at the last verse, verse 40, Jesus says, you must also be ready for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. And the main way we are to be ready is to stay awake and to look for his coming because there are so many things that make us spiritually sleepy and lethargic. I mean, that's part of what's been going on. That's how anxiety or hypocrisy or greed, that's what they do. They put stuff in front of our eyes, not Jesus in front of our eyes, and so we gradually grow sleepy. And you can tell you're growing sleepy if the coming of Jesus becomes just something you say in the creed, but not the driving reality that gives purpose in our daily doings. These six little verses, Jesus mentions his coming seven times. And he shows us what it means for us now in this life and amazingly what it means in the future when he comes again.

And this is where he's been going all along. So if you've been tracking with us in Luke 12, and you ask the question, what does it actually mean to be rich toward God? What does it actually mean to seek the kingdom of God? Jesus doesn't give us a list of do's and don'ts. He gives us this massive wake-up call in these six verses. Not just some light breezy advice, but he says, I am going to reorder your life here in this life, and I'm going to reorder it in the life to come. And they're the two points. Number one, Jesus reorders this life, verses 35 and 36. And if you have a Bible in front of you, Jesus uses this very familiar picture of a household. The church is the household of God, but he restructures and redefines the relationships in the household. So the way we enter into that household is that we become servants attached to a master who wants to serve us. So what does the reordering look like? Verse 35, I'll just read it again. Stay dressed for action, keep your lamps burning.

Be like those who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Jesus is talking about the time between his ascension and his second coming, and it feels like he's away. We know, of course, that he's with us, but he's not with us in the way that he was when he was first here on earth or the way that he'll be with us in the life to come. And during this time, Jesus is saying it's not Jami time. He doesn't want sleepy servants. Sorry, Jami time comes from our household because we've got a two-year-old granddaughter.

He wants us dressed for action with our lamps burning, with our eye on his return, looking and longing. Here is the key thing. It's the relationship between the servants and the master is one of unique closeness and anticipation. The servants aren't there just waiting for knock-off time.

They're not just trying to get the job done. They are looking for a person. And the slightest sound of his coming, they race to the door and open it and welcome him in as though they've been bereft without him, as though their whole world and happiness is entirely caught up in his presence. They don't live for the house, but they live for him. And he says, I want servants who will be waiting.

[4 : 4 2] This is not quite the way we use this word. It's not passively sitting there, you know, catching up on some reading or building bigger barns. Nor is Jesus talking about frantically working, working, working, clean, clean, clean. Jesus is coming as though we have to be at full stretch all the time. What he means by waiting is that all the things we do, small and large, are focused on him.

But our deep longings and our deep ambitions and our deep hopes are focused on the Lord to be ready when he comes. I once saw a t-shirt that said, Jesus is coming soon, look busy. That's not what Jesus is talking about. This is a hard thing.

So here are two different people giving money to charity. One does it because he wants his tax return to be bigger and some recognition from the charity of what a good person he is.

The other prayerfully considers the charity, gives themselves first to Christ and then gives gladly with a sense of privilege, a little more than they can afford, storing up treasure before God.

Same action, different heart. Two different people see someone struggling with a load. One goes to help that person because they feel good about helping other people. The other one does because that's what Jesus would do.

[6 : 06] So you see, the issue though is not so much what we do, but who we do it for. And if we miss this, we miss everything. What's so helpful to us is that Jesus has explained the dressing and the lamps already in chapter 11.

Back in chapter 11, verse 34, Jesus said this, your eye is your lamp is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. When it's bad, your body is full of darkness. So be careful therefore, lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light. So when Jesus talks about keeping your lamps burning, this is what he's talking about. You can have a healthy eye or a sick eye, depending on what you look at, depending on what you fill your vision with. A healthy eye will draw light into our lives.

A sick eye will draw darkness. So inner darkness will come from having our eyes focused on growing our finances only or greed or selfishness or sexual misbehavior. That's the work of darkness.

But inner light comes from having your eyes fixed on Christ and his kingdom, on generosity, on the good pleasure of the Father. And darkness, as we know, is the power of Satan.

And here's the strange thing that the more we allow the darkness and the power of Satan in our lives, it more and more blinds us toward the Lord Jesus Christ. But the more light we allow into our lives, the light is the power of God, it enables us to see Jesus more clearly.

[7 : 54] So keep your lamps burning means have your eyes fixed on Jesus more than money or more than approval or more than anxiety. Don't allow the cares of this world to darken or dull your vision of the coming Lord. This is what he's saying. I just want you to, I'm reordering your life and what you hope for around my coming. Now this week, Josh Drury, who's an Artizo apprentice, told me a story of a YouTube clip, which I then went and looked at, of course, of a squad of firemen in Croatia, about 10 guys.

And they're in the squad house, they're in the fire hall, and they're watching Croatia in the World Cup soccer final. And they're right near the end of the game, and there's just one penalty kick that Croatia has to finish the game. And the game hangs on this last kick, and there are seconds to go. And they're all leaning forward, looking at the TV. And just before the guy goes to kick the ball, the alarm goes off.

And they jump up and race into their uniforms. And I think it takes about eight seconds between the alarm going off and the trucks with sirens exiting the firehouse. It's a brilliant picture of readiness.

But I want to turn it around and I say, I think our situation is a little bit more like someone who is actually in a fire, whose house is on fire, whose brother works at the fire station.

That video clip, I understand, is a fake. It's an ad made for the Croatian fire department, just in case you got too moved by that. Just stay with me for a moment. So there you are in a fire.

[9 : 35] Your brother works in the fire department, the fire hall. And gradually your house is consumed with fire and the smoke of the fumes is making you increasingly sleepy. And so you grab your cell phone and your brother says, go to the door, but don't open it. Get down on the ground, whatever you do, stay awake, stay awake, stay awake, and respond when the firemen take the door down. They're on their way now. You need to be ready. Here's the thing. As you wait for your brother and the fireman to come, everything in your life is reordered about that rescue. Yeah? And the colour of the curtains is no longer all that important, is it? You know, the food in the fridge, your wine collection is just not all that important. And I know that sounds a bit drastic, but it's not because Jesus is talking about life and death here. And he wants to reorder and restructure and recast our lives so that we live toward him. Now, as we get to the halfway point, we stopped for questions in the eight o'clock service, but we can't do it online. If you were Jesus Christ and you were the Lord of

life and death, you could just as easily command your disciples to wait and then move on, but he doesn't.

He gives them a motivation. And I move to my second point, and the motivation is that he reorders the life to come as well, verses 37 to 38. And I find these verses simply mind-blowing, not just because Jesus talks with such confidence about the future, but because of this astonishing picture he gives us of what he's going to do when he comes. So track with me, the master in these stories just loves feasts, banquets, and parties. I mean, he's come home, he's just come home from all day at a wedding feast, maybe all week at a wedding feast. And instead of sending everyone to bed for sleep, he makes a banquet for his servants. And he gives them the best seats, and then he serves them.

He provides them with a feast. The master of the servants becomes a servant. And you ask, why on earth would this master humble himself to serve his servants? And the answer is, that's who he is. And that is why we wait for him. And that is why these servants have been so keen for him to return. Just look at how Jesus describes us. He says, we're doubly blessed. Verse 37, blessed are those servants who the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I tell you, he'll dress himself for service and have them recline at table. He will come and serve them.

Doesn't matter if he comes in the second or third watch, finds them awake. Second time, blessed are those servants. I think this is a complete reordering of the way we think about the coming of Jesus. We think about the coming of Jesus as the final judge to rule, and it's true, that will happen. But when he comes, and when he begins his rule, he treats his servants like royalty.

He loves nothing better than to serve us. And his serving of us didn't finish the day he ascended into heaven. He didn't come to earth just for 33 years to serve and then head back to heaven, you know, to the hammock for a big rest. I mean, we know by the Holy Spirit that he intercedes for us, that he is a merciful and faithful high priest, that we can approach the throne of grace any day we like, any moment we like for his help. But here Jesus teaches us that when the Son of Man comes again, he's going to serve us in a whole new way, and he's going to continue serving us for all eternity.

[13 : 30] And what might that look like? I've been thinking about this. If you go back over Luke's gospel, in chapter four, when Jesus announces his ministry, he does so in terms of freedom, right? Freedom and release and liberty to the captive. And I think we're pretty good at talking about what we're free from. I think most of us could say that in Christ, we're free from sin and condemnation and death and Satan. But I'm not so sure we're really good at speaking about what we're free for, either in this life or the next. In some ways, Luke 12 has been all about what we're free for in this life.

We're free for seeking his kingdom, laying up treasure in heaven, confessing Christ before others, having no fear. But in the life to come, as Jesus continues to serve us, our freedom and our release will also continue to grow. In other words, our freedom is not a static, standing, stagnant point that we reach, but a dynamic, growing, increasing experience of what Christ has done on the cross. It's not just that we're free of death. It's that we're free for life, the life of God, that new wine that multiplies itself and gives life and blessing. So the freedom Christ has come to give us in this life will continue to increase in the next as he continues to serve us and become more than we can possibly imagine. He's serving us at the heavenly banquet means giving us capacities for the glory of God. And the key is that he will serve us as we serve him throughout the life to come. That's a reordering of our understanding of the life to come. The view that perfection is a static state you reach and never move on from, that's a Greek philosophical idea. It's not the Bible idea. The Bible idea is more like a tree with fruit. It doesn't stop growing and doesn't stop bearing more fruit. And in the life to come, we will continue to grow in our love for him and for each other. We will not stand still, but we'll increase and flourish. Our capacity for satisfaction will be so strengthened, we will learn more of what it means to be satisfied in him, even in ways we didn't know we needed. We'll grow in rejoicing with the angels at the sheer grace of our creation and salvation as it shines brighter. Now, why is this here?

Why does Jesus say this? And I think he's giving us this picture as the reason to be ready. Being ready in this life, waiting for him, looking for him through the ordinary circumstances of our lives. It's not a grim and cheerless business, wait for Jesus. But it's having our eyes fixed on the one who's coming, who served us by giving us his life in the past, and he's coming to serve us forever, and not letting ourselves be deviated or distracted by building bigger barns or opinion polls or anything like

that. And no wonder he calls us doubly blessed. We're uniquely blessed by his seeking and saving us.

I'm amongst you as one who serves, Jesus says later in Luke. The Lord of life and death becomes a servant for us, humbling himself to death on a cross. We're uniquely blessed. But we're doubly blessed second in the kingdom of glory, where he will continue to serve us. And that is why he is coming.

[17 : 26] He's not just coming to put down all evil. And that is why we need to stay awake and look for him. And I think it explains something of the warning in verses 39 to 40, just that little story of someone who's not ready, not looking for Jesus to come. The picture there is not that Jesus is a thief or his coming is sneaky. The point is simply that Jesus' coming is certain, but the when is not.

Here is a person who takes their eyes off the coming Lord, who's not ready, who's not prepared, who's allowed all sorts of secondary things to become primary. And for that person, Jesus' coming will be judgment. He finishes this little section by saying, you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. I've been asking myself this week, and I think we should ask ourselves this question, am I ready? Am I waiting? Am I awake? Or am I sleepy?

Pandemic time is a time to be sleepy, isn't it? Am I really seeking Christ in what I'm doing? Or am I just getting things done? And I think this applies both to the ordinary things and to extraordinary things. So let me talk about ordinary things. It changes ordinary things. I'll give you a great illustration. This weekend we've had our youth group All In. The preparation for this has been extraordinary and I think very creative. We're still in lockdown, so the All In retreat has to happen online via Zoom. So 90 swag bags were prepared and delivered to the houses of 90 young people. And in those bags were marshmallows and schmores and a little electric candle so that they could have a Zoom campfire pretend treat together. They also had candy, which is pizza flavour and hot dog flavour, as well as devotional material, of course, and all the right stuff. It's been preceded by prayer and it's been followed by prayer for the kids to have unity in the Holy Spirit and the reality of Christ. Now, I just want you to think about that hot dog candy in there, hot dog flavoured candy. It sounds absolutely disgusting, doesn't it? But here is a little tiny ordinary thing that through prayer and preparation becomes an extraordinary burning lamp for Jesus Christ. That's how we seek Christ in the ordinary, through prayer and through preparation and through love for others. But it also makes our lives extraordinary day by day. Every day that we live, Jesus' coming is closer. The good news gets better.

This is what the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 13. He's just finished talking about how we ought to love one another, which is the fulfilling of the law. And then he says to encourage us, the hour has come for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Let's cast off the works of darkness, put on the armour of light. Then he lists out a bunch of the works of darkness.

[20 : 46] Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. In 2,000 years since Jesus ascended to the glory of the Father, he has not returned yet.

But all over the world, there are Christian communities, living Christian communities, where people are rich toward God, seeking the kingdom, helping each other with greed and generosity, encouraging each other to shine for Jesus and trying to fill each other's hearts with hopes.

And when Jesus comes again, he's going to find them awake and waiting. And there are many other communities in the world that have taken their eyes off Jesus, where all sorts of secondary things have become primary.

And there's lots of activity and programs and buildings and money and organisation, but there's no joy or life, little witness or struggle or purity.

There's no looking for Christ and seeking his kingdom. And that's the difference between the living church and the dying church. It's this, it's the place Jesus holds in the affection of his people.

[21 : 51] So, Jesus coming not only makes the ordinary different, but it makes our lives extraordinary. Today, the good news is better than it was yesterday.

Salvation is one day nearer. The light is almost here. And that's an encouragement. Now, Louis.