

Luke 12:41 – 48

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I think we all feel a little bit ground down by COVID-19. If you don't, you're a very unusual person.

But this morning, as well as feeling a bit ground down, I feel a little bit giddy. This is the first time we've been able to meet in person here in church, 63 weeks as we begin a gradual return to real people meeting in person.

Not that you're not real if you're at home, but you know what I mean. And in today's passage, we're reminded that Jesus is talking to real people. It begins in verse 41 in Luke 12 with an interruption from the apostle Peter.

Jesus has been talking with beauty and clarity and wisdom about the time between when he goes into heaven and he comes again in glory.

And he's dealt with persecution and poverty and affluence and the anxieties that we have day by day. What it means to put him in first place.

[1 : 0 9] How he is going to serve us when he comes again. And suddenly Peter interrupts. Verse 41, he says, You're talking to us? You're talking to all these people? Who are you talking to? And I don't know why Peter says it, but I'm very grateful that he did.

Because it reminds us that Jesus is speaking to real people with real questions. And as usual, Jesus does not give a cold, dogmatic answer.

Instead, he comes back to Peter and to us with a real question of his own. Because he wants Peter and those of us today to enter into this, to think about the implications of what he's about to say, what it means for us.

And he goes right into speaking about leaders in his church. But as you'll notice, by the end of the passage in verse 48, he then addresses everyone.

This is the real Jesus speaking to real people. And he uses the familiar picture of the household of God, the master going away for a duration and returning.

[2 : 1 6] And last week we saw, remember, that that means that everything we do here and now is focused on the returning master. And we need to be awake and ready for when he returns.

Question, what does it mean to be ready and awake? Well, Jesus moves from what he is going to do for us to what he expects his leading servants in the household to be doing during the delay.

And you can see this from what Jesus says, his question in verse 41. Who then, he says, is the faithful and wise manager who the master will set over his household to give them their portion of food at the proper time?

He's saying everyone has a spiritual responsibility in the household of God. But he's particularly looking at leaders, not just clergy. Every small group leader, every prayer leader, every volunteer in children's ministry, every parent, everybody who bears the image of Christ to work.

And what is the task? What is the job that Jesus leaves us? The answer is very simple. It is to feed others in the house with the food that the master supplies at the right time.

[3 : 35] Remember when Jesus rose from the dead? After Peter denied him three times. And he appears to these apostles on the beach. And he takes Peter for a walk on his own.

And three times he says to Peter, Peter, do you love me? Three times he gives them a chance to come back from the three denials. And every time Peter says, I love you, Lord.

You know, I love you, Lord. I love you, Lord. And each time Jesus says in answer to that, feed my sheep. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

So here is Jesus' picture of the church as the household of God. And our supreme task is to bring to each other the healing, saving, cleansing, strengthening word of God faithfully and wisely.

And what also is wonderful about this passage, it's not just the real Jesus talking to real people, but he gives us a dose of realism. I mean, you might hope that this is going to be good news. Great leaders.

[4 : 37] But Peter tells us about four different servants with four different responses and four different outcomes. And here's the thing. Three of the four completely fail to do what the master wants.

So as Jesus looks down the long history of the church between his ascension and his coming, fully three out of four church leaders are not doing what he expects.

Either deliberately or just failing to do what he wants or being in a position of leadership and not really knowing what to do at all. Interesting, isn't it?

It's the same statistic on the soils. Three out of four bad soils, one good soil. Because if things are going to go wrong in the church, they usually begin with the leadership. And Jesus' realism is a bit sobering here.

So what we're going to do is this. I want to fly over the passage and just look quickly at these four different responses and four different outcomes and see who he's talking about. And then reflect on a number of real life applications for us.

[5 : 42] Number one, the first picture. Here is a good servant, verses 43 to 44. Now Jesus reserves a special blessing for the coming of his, when he comes for his first servant.

And the reason for his blessing is very simple. In verse 43, the master finds his servant literally doing this when he comes. He's doing what the master wants him to do.

Faithfully and wisely dispensing the word of God. Feeding others with truth and grace. Which is exactly what Jesus is doing here and has done throughout his ministry. Sacrificially serving up the bread of heaven so that we'll get a taste of the heavenly feast when he comes.

So in Jesus' view, this work of feeding at the right time is so vital. It's faithfulness and wisdom that he's after.

It's not being a three-star Michelin chef. It's not having great gifts or drawing a crowd or being very clever. But it's making sure everyone in the house is fed.

[6 : 48] That is the person who the Lord is going to come and bless. Leader number two. This is the spiritual leader from hell. Verses 45 and 46.

Now here is a person in spiritual responsibility. It could be a missionary or a pastor or a bishop or a trustee or someone who leads a committee. But they're in it for themselves. They utterly disregard the expectations of the master.

They are happy to trample on the needs of others. They're fearless of God and careless of others. They're overbearing. They're unbelieving. And it's far too common in church history. We know what this looks like.

Leaders who say they believe but consistently behave in abusive, selfish and egotistical ways. And it's not just a few bad popes or disgraced pastors or megachurchers.

It's everyone who builds their ministry thinking it's about me. Who pushes others down to build up their own ego. Who fleece the sheep and consume the gifts of the master, not feeding or caring for others.

[7 : 55] People who are drunk on their own authority, who make their own rules. Who serve themselves really under the cover of serving the church. And with a false sense of independence of Christ.

They really don't care and believe that Christ is coming. We read astonishingly that they beat the male and female servants. The word for boys and girls. They beat the boys and girls and they eat and drink and get drunk.

And the coming of Christ is a terrible shock for them because it exposes what's really going on. Verse 46. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him.

And at an hour he doesn't know. Cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. The word for cutting in pieces is the word dichotomy. What happens at the second coming is that God will show the split that is there.

And the reason I called him a leader from hell is because he or she will be put with the unfaithful. They will be literally cut off entirely from the people of God forever.

[8 : 58] The third spirit is strong, isn't it? The third spiritual leader is the one who deliberately neglects their work. In verse 47. Here is a leader who knows what they should do.

They have a belief system. They know that Jesus expects them to bring out the food at the right time. But they just don't do it. Not really told the reason for it. They're entrusted with responsibility and they're not cruel or vicious or abusive.

They just don't do anything with the responsibility that God has given them. They neglect what the master wants. They do nothing leaders. Fully competent, maybe even well trained.

But out of fear of what others think perhaps or just they want an easy life. They don't work hard in preparing the food for others and feeding them. They don't get ready for Christ's return or act according to his will.

They just keep the doors open. These are leaders who are never going to rock the boat, never take any risks, never give any offense. They're certainly never going to teach the gospel of repentance. And Jesus says that when the master returns in verse 47, this servant will receive a severe beating.

[10 : 09] And I'm not sure exactly what that means. But I think probably this is a person who is saved. But when Christ comes again, their works will be burnt up, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3.

That they've built their ministry on straw, not gold. And they'll suffer loss. That they will be saved, but as through fire. And fourth and finally, this fourth servant is close to the third.

This fourth servant shows unconscious neglect at the beginning of verse 48. The one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a lighter beating. They did not know.

Therefore, they did not do what the Lord required. And here's the point Jesus is making. That ignorance in spiritual leadership is no excuse. And when you go to court, try ignorance of the law.

It's not going to fly as a defense. And there's more mercy in this punishment. But if you are in spiritual leadership in any capacity, you need to find out what God's priorities are.

[11 : 16] You need to be trained. You need to grow. You need to humble yourself and find out what the Lord expects of you. One of the most amazing things that used to happen when we did preaching conferences before COVID was over two days, we'd cover the very basics of how to teach a passage.

You know, context and details and that sort of thing. And on the final day, when there was feedback, there was usually a pastor who would stand up and would say something like this. I've learned more in these two days than I ever did at seminary.

My three years at seminary. Which I think is probably a terrible exaggeration. But they do have a sense that the work that Jesus has given them to do has never really been very clear.

And it's great that they come to preaching conferences. Finally, Jesus opens up to everyone and says, verse 48, 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. So what I'd like to do just for our last few minutes together is stand back a bit and reflect on what Jesus is saying.

[12 : 22] And I want to make five direct applications. There are many, many more. Here are just five for us to think about. Number one. The first is just how precious the household and the people in the household are to this Lord.

You can see this from the severity of the punishment Jesus speaks about. Yes, the negligent leaders three and four may be saved. But God takes very seriously the needs of his flock.

If you want to see how deeply God feels about his people, remember that whatever those punishments really are, they are from the lips of the Lord who has come from heaven to give his life for his people.

The same Lord who a sentence or two before has talked to us about it's the Father's delight to give us the kingdom and he wants to serve us. He cares so much for his household that he entrusts his household to leaders to feed and care those in the household.

Very interesting. In that verse where Jesus talks about the delight of the Father, he calls us his little flock. Because God holds those who have authority within his flock to a particular accountability.

[13 : 36] He always has. Back in the Old Testament, in the book of Ezekiel, the shepherds of Israel were not doing what God wanted. Listen to this from chapter 34.

Thus says the Lord God, Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the sheep?

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand. I will put a stop to their feeding the sheep.

No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. Well, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

[14 : 51] So here in the very same chapter in Luke 12, where Jesus warns us of persecution, he gives us a small glimpse of how strongly he stands against those who harm or divide or damage his people, particularly those who are spiritual leaders within the church, because of how precious his people are to him.

That's the first thought. The second thought from this passage to reflect on is the household of God is meant to be a spiritual hospital, where people get well.

Now, it doesn't come across so well, but the word that Jesus uses for household in verse 41 is literally a place of therapy. Therapist, really.

It's a highly unusual word, and it's a place for treatment of the sick. It was used back in Luke 9 in the verse where it says, Jesus cured those who needed healing. So what the leaders of the household are meant to be doing is not just bringing out food, staples, and throwing them on the table.

They're seeking to heal and mend and restore the people in the household through the feeding and teaching of the word. So the church is not meant to be a place where we have it all together.

[16 : 09] You know, I can't allow someone to see the dent in my armour. It's for the sick, the broken, for those who need rest and restoration. It's why Peter, the apostle, says in his first letter that we want leaders who lead not unwillingly, but eagerly.

Not for money or greed, not for an ego trip, not those who like the sound of their own voice and influence. And I think this is so important as we come to the end of COVID.

Because to just get through the last year or more, we've developed ways of living and being that we're going to have to break out of for our healing and for the healing of others.

Instead of avoiding everyone else and holding them at arm's length, worrying that connecting with them is going to make us sick, we're going to have to begin embracing each other, knowing that it's by connecting that we are going to be made well, and they are made well.

And the picture here is bringing the word, the healing word of God to others. I can't say what a relief this is as a spiritual leader. We're not all meant to be brilliant strategists or organisational giants.

[17 : 21] We're meant to feed others, to bind them up, to bind them together. And I'm so grateful we don't have to invent the food. The master has given it to us just as he's given the house.

The sheep belong to the master, not to the leaders. It's to be the ambition of all spiritual leaders to move people toward the true shepherd and strengthen the weak as they go and strengthen the connection with each other in the household, which is why it's so dangerous in a church for people to have other agendas which are not about Christ and caring for each other.

The third point of application is this. Jesus' household is a household of doing. We know there's a delay in Jesus' coming, and the waiting and looking for him is not passive inactivity.

It's the opposite. What is going to please the master when he returns is finding us doing this, feeding and caring each other. That's why Jesus is so strong about neglect.

The church is not about maintaining an organisation. We're meant to be driven by the urgency of his coming, seeking to build each other up and feed one another. And I think this too is a word for us as we come out of COVID.

[18 : 46] You know, we've been 14 to 15 months apart from each other, and we are all going a little bit crazy. I certainly am.

And as we come back together, if we're not doing the serving thing for others, you remember what happens in the Bible? The next step is usually grumbling or finding ways to complain about the fact that you're not being properly served.

So I want to encourage you to take this question and think about it. What is it that the Lord wants me to be doing in this next season? For each of us, he has something for you that he wants you to be doing.

Fourthly, seeing that Christ is the master of the house, we desperately need his help and we need to pray. We have to pray for our leaders because human shepherds are sheep too, you know.

We are also in the house for healing. We need feeding and care as well. So please pray for your spiritual leaders. Not just the clergy, but the other leaders in the church.

[19 : 57] And pray for the wider church. That God in his mercy would give leaders and shepherds who would feed his house at the proper time with wisdom and faithfulness.

How encouraging it has been to see Willie Shane and Tom Dowse grow in character over the two years of Artizo. How thankful I was for their words today. If the church does not have faithful and wise leaders, we're just going to look like the world around us will be completely powerless.

In the fall this year, our Anglican network in Canada will choose a new bishop. And then next year at the same time, we'll choose a second. We need to begin praying that the man of God's choosing will be elected.

Someone who's proven to be faithful and wise. Pray that God would raise up and send out evangelists and pastors into the harvest. That people would arise here in Vancouver, even in our congregation, and that they would be trained effectively.

And finally and fifthly, I want to commit this to your thinking. All of us are accountable to the chief shepherd when he returns. And I think that's the point of verse 48.

[21 : 09] Look at the way that Jesus says that you and I have been given much.

We have been entrusted with much. And the Lord expects us to be doing and using the much so that there might be more. Not that we, with our cleverness, construct more blessing than he first gave us.

But as we use what he has given us, the Lord spreads his healing grace through us to others. He multiplies his goodness and he gives us greater capacity to receive and give his grace away.

If we receive the grace of God and just hold it in our hands to ourselves, it turns to dust. So God has given every single one of us something to do to help others in the body. And we will each have to give an account to the Lord when he comes for what we've done.

And because the Lord delights to give us the kingdom, he will also delight to welcome us with blessing when he comes again in glory.