

Forgive us, Lord. Wake us up from our slumber. Make us good servants and good stewards of the gifts you have given us to serve our neighbors. Too often we live as if we are owners and not stewards.

Too often our sense of identity comes from what we do instead of to whom we belong. We are your servants and you are our master. Have mercy on us and forgive us.

[14:20] Draw our hearts to heaven, to your kingdom and your will, so that we can build our treasure with you and be ready for the hour of your return. Father, we praise you for the words of Jesus.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Thank you that you are a generous God and that giving causes you great happiness.

We praise you for your gift of forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross and the promise we have of eternal life with you. We thank you and praise you that you call us your little flock.

Thank you for gladly desiring to give us the kingdom of heaven and that when you give your flock the kingdom you are acting out of your deepest delight. We praise and thank you that this is the kind of God you are.

Amen. Let's continue our worship by singing. I know not why God's wondrous grace to thee hath been made known.

[15:39] Though I am worthy as I am he claimed before his own. But I know whom I have believed and have persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

I know not how there is saving faith to thee he did impart or how believing in his word brought peace within my heart but I know whom I have believed and have persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

I know not how the spirit moves convincing men of sin revealing Jesus through the word creating faith in him but I know whom I have believed and have persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

I know not what of good or end may be reserved for me of weary ways for golden days before this place I see but I know whom I have believed and have persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Thank you. You can be seated. So last Sunday we showed the premiere of the Life Group video.

[18:37] If you missed it you must see it. We encourage you to take a look at it either online on the website or it was sent out with this week's sheet on Friday.

You can take a look at it. Today we're going to continue talking briefly about life groups and why it's good to be part of one. So I'd like to ask Jen and Jamie to come up and join me.

We're going to grill them a little bit. Is this on?

Okay. So you're first. Hi. So Jen, you're relatively new to Union Baptist. Yes. How long have you been attending? Since January.

Yeah. And when did you join a life group? Since Easter time. So can everyone hear Jen? Yeah. Easter time. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

[19:36] So can you tell us why you joined a life group? So I was really new and the opportunity was offered to me and then which made me feel really welcome and then joining a group helped me to settle in church and fit in.

So yeah, that was great. Thank you. Yeah. Oh, great. Great. Well, Jen is in my life group and it's a real joy to have her with us. Actually, it's Ollie's.

Ollie is leading. I'm the co-leader. So how have you felt that you've grown so far? You haven't been in the group that long, but how have you felt you're growing in the group? Very slowly.

I didn't grow up in a Christian family. So this is new to me and I only came to faith 2015.

So I acknowledge my faith is weak and I have a lot to learn. So being in a group where I can ask questions freely and listen to the answers and the discussions, it really helps me to understand God's word.

[20:46] And being able to share openly and receiving prayers from the group members, it really helps. And also, thanks to Kathy for lending me books like Mere Christianity.

And yeah, it's been great. So I appreciate you. Thank you. Wonderful. And so, the hardest question probably, how do you feel like you're able to serve the others in the group?

Not much, I feel, but by turning up and probably where I can. Yeah. Yeah, well, and we really appreciate you, Jen.

Even when she's exhausted having stayed up with her child for most of the night and then has a full day of work the following day, she still turns up to Life Group and we really appreciate it.

And it's a great encouragement to us too. So thank you. Great. So Jamie, pretty much the same questions. How long have you been in a, you've been coming from? Several years now, I think.

[21:48] So, there was a time when we were doing our home groups or Life Groups sort of via video meetings as well. And then now we're meeting in person. So yeah, several years now.

Yeah. Great. Great. And so, why did you join a group initially? I just find like time at church together is relatively brief and just that being on a Sunday only, it's a great time to connect with, you know, a select few others and just to sort of dedicate another specific amount of time consistently.

I do find that sort of my own personal Bible studying, while I try to aim to do that daily, that sometimes doesn't always happen. So to commit to something every week with others is sort of a way for me to be more consistent.

Great. Great. And so, how have you felt that you've grown and are growing in your group? Yeah, it sort of varies week by week. Like, some weeks things can be, I just feel like the chance to pray together and pray for each other is excellent.

and then other weeks, sometimes when we go through like the Bible study that we're doing, just some things really speak out to me more than they did on the prior Sunday or something. So yeah, it's really helpful in that sense.

[23:05] Yeah. Great. Great. And so, how do you feel that you have been able to serve your group? I think just the additional time together because during the rest of the weekday we're in such a secular world so that time where we can talk about that a little bit and what we're working on within that really sort of brings me like along with my faith in that sense.

Yeah. Yeah. So you contribute to your group discussions and things. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Which is also a great encouragement and a way to serve your group. Yeah. Wonderful.

Great. Well, just to finish, to remind you that if you're a believer and want to be encouraged and supported to live in faith every day like Jen and, and sounds like Jen and Jamie are, please pick up a brochure today.

They're hot off the press. They're, you can find them up here or at the church entrance. And this brochure describes all of the different life groups as well as the course the Grow No course that we're offering and the mentorship availabilities.

And it's also available on the church website and it was sent out with the This Week sheet this past Friday. And we really encourage you to take a good look at this, to think about it, pray about it, seek God's will and guidance as to which group you can join where you'll grow the most as a disciple of Jesus.

[24:42] Take a look. The sign up, again, is from September 3rd to 17th. So, that's it. Thank you very much. Great.

I'd like to invite Sarah up, please. Thank you. Hello, everyone.

We just have to set up a lighthouse. So, can you think about lighthouses for a minute? Got some rocks.

Got some rocks. Okay.

So, so, lighthouses, where do we find lighthouses? I'm sure you've all seen a lighthouse somewhere or seen a picture of one. Where do we find lighthouses?

[25:43] A place in Cornwall. A place in Cornwall. Yes, I'm sure. In general, where do we find lighthouses?

There aren't any in High Wycombe. Yes, Elliot. We're by the sea. We do find them by the sea, don't we?

And you might have a picture of them up in your room somewhere. And they are to warn us, to warn ships, actually, of where there might be rocks. Now, these are our very dangerous rocks. You need

imagination.

And I have a lighthouse keeper here. And you need these. Now, a very, very long time ago, before there were electric lights and things like that, some lighthouses were actually very big fires.

You'll be pleased to know I'm not setting a very big fire in church today. But we do have a flame lantern, so you can pretend that that's a very large fire. And this is our lighthouse keeper who's in charge of keeping the fire going.

[26:47] So he has a lot of sticks to do that. Now, so, what's your job? To keep the lighthouse from all the fuel going and the fire to stay burning.

And why are you doing that? So ships don't crash into the rock. Oh, so you have to be ready for the ships? Yeah. Ah, now, later on in the Bible, we're going to read about when Jesus tells us to be ready.

Not for ships, though, but let's see. Okay, now, unfortunately, I think there's a bit of a storm brewing. So if you can make some storm noises, like winds, waves, and okay, and oh, I think I can see a ship coming.

Oh, dear. Are you ready for the ship? Oh, no. Our lighthouse keeper's collapsed. And our lighthouse has gone out. Oh, dear. I don't know what's going to happen to the ship.

Can it find the way? Oh, no, it didn't. Oh, no. Hey, you didn't do your job. You, hey, you didn't do your job.

[27:50] You weren't ready. Sorry. Okay, right. So he's getting back. So try and get to the harbour now. This is the way to go. Okay. All right.

Now, are you going to be ready now? Yeah. Okay, he's going to be ready. Okay, okay, there's still a bit of a storm. Here's another ship coming. Phew, this one's got through.

Can you say that? Well done for keeping the lighthouse shining. Thank you. Okay, so now both ships are safe. Now, the lighthouse keeper had to be ready for the ships no matter what.

And, um, we have to be ready, not for ships. We have to be ready for Jesus, don't we? We're waiting for Jesus. But we're not just going to sit back and relax like this lighthouse keeper did at first.

We've got to be busy. We don't have to keep a fire going. But we do have to choose Jesus every day. Choose to love him. Choose to serve him. Choose to enjoy him.

[28:48] So, are you ready? Now we'll just dismantle the light. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much, Braveweight family. That was fantastic. The children and young people are going to leave during the next song, but let's pray for them first.

Father, thank you for our children and young people. Please bless them in their groups today. Help them to know and love you more and help them to grow into young men and women after your own heart.

We lift up the group leaders. Please fill them with your spirit. Help them to see each child and young person through your eyes and listen to them with your ears. Shine your light and your love through them.

Amen. I invite you to stand for the next two songs. Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one King reigning over all.

[30:27] So I will not fear, for this truth remains that my God is the Ancient of Days.

none above Him, none before Him, all of time in His hands, for His throne it shall remain and never stand.

All the power, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul, He is here with me, I am not alone.

I am not alone. Oh, His love is sure, and He knows my name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

[31:55] none above Him, none above Him, none before Him, all of time in His hands, for His throne it shall remain and never stand.

all the power, all the glory, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

though I may not see what the future brings, I will watch and wait, for my Savior name, then my joy complete, standing face to face, in the presence of the Ancient of Days.

none above Him, none above Him, none before Him, all of time in His hands, for His throne it shall remain and never stand.

all the power, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

[33:44] for my God is the Ancient of Days. from our long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free, from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.

is there strength and consolation, hope upon the earth Thou art, dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring, by Thy own eternal Spirit, born in all our hearts alone, by Thy own all-sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Please be seated. Gary's bringing us our intercessions, but he just needs a moment to get down here, multitasking today.

Good morning church.

[36:23] Good morning. Good morning. So Matthew 18 verse 20 says, For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.

What a wonderful image that is. So with that image in mind, I want to encourage you to join us on the first Saturday of each month, when we have a prayer meeting from nine o'clock to 9.45.

Now, I know how scary it is to go to a church meeting. I used to not go because I had this fear that I wouldn't know what to say.

But note what verse I read said. It says, when we gather in His name. It didn't say you had to say anything. It didn't say you had to do anything.

All you need to do is gather. So I want to encourage you to come and gather in the Lord, in His name. And what more wonderful thing is there than to be in the presence of the Lord.

[37:31] So let's move on to our intercessions. So as I was preparing for this, and also for the prayer meeting a couple of Saturdays ago, I was, to be honest, distressed at the number of people in our church who are in need of prayer.

For the last year, Malcolm has provided some guidance and wisdom that we should avoid watching the news, listening to the news, because sometimes the bad news just wears on you and it wears you down and you become despairing.

But this is different. These are people that I know. These are people within our church who all need prayer for themselves or in situations.

And that doesn't come in, and not to mention the challenges that Judith and I have within our family and our friends circle and the prayers that I needed there.

So, as I said, I became distressed, even despairing, even indignant. And I said to the Lord, why? This isn't fair.

[38:55] But the Lord is good. The Lord is kind. The Lord is gentle. And he brought three verses to me that I want to share with you, which are the three verses I use for the context of our prayers this morning.

The first one is from Job 1, verses 6 and 7, where it says, One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.

The Lord said to Satan, Where have you come from? And Satan answered the Lord, from roaming throughout the earth, coming back and forth on it.

The second verse is John chapter 10, verse 10. And reading Jesus' words, it says, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. And the third verse is Ephesians 6, verse 12, where it reads, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

[40:15] So, I invite you to join me in prayer. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for being our Lord and Savior.

As our Savior, you took the punishment we should have received. By your stripes, by your wounds, by your blood, we have been washed clean, sanctified, and saved.

Through your death on the cross, through your death on the cross, you have won the victory over death and over Satan. And we thank you. We ask you, Father, to help us to live in that victory.

At times we forget and we feel defeated and discouraged. Your word tells us that the devil is constantly roaming on the earth, seeking to kill and destroy and to steal.

And we ask you to refresh and renew us through the power of your Holy Spirit, so that we can stand firm, dressed in your armour.

[41:18] The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of truth, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Remind us that the victory is won. Hallelujah. Remind us that you gave us a new command, that we need to love each other and keep on praying for each other.

And therefore, I want to lift up those in our congregation who need your healing hand, your strength, your peace, your comfort, your wisdom, and even in need of a miracle.

But nothing is beyond you, Father. So we ask. We come before you in faith, humility, and adoration.

And here I want to just pause for a few seconds, to allow you within your hearts to raise the names of those who you know need help and need prayer.

And Father, for those in fear, Psalm 27 tells us that the Lord is our light and salvation, that you are the stronghold of our lives.

[42:45] So why should we be afraid? Take away our fear, Lord. Psalm 23 tells us that even in the valley of the shadow of death, you are there with us, that in the presence of our enemies you prepare a table and our cup will overflow with goodness and mercy.

Hallelujah. Psalm 23 also tells us that you will lead us beside quiet waters to rest and restore our souls. So I pray for those who need rest and restoration, that they will accept your guidance and accept your yoke because it is easy and light.

So I pause again to give you the opportunity to bring your burdens to the Lord. The Lord is gentle. And humble in heart. And therefore in closing, it fills my heart with joy to repeat the words of David from Psalm 27.

I remain confident of this. We will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Amen. Thank you, Gary. We're going to have the reading and then Malcolm's going to preach, but let's pray for the reading and sermon first.

[44:24] Lord, your word says, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Lord, we thank you so much for your word.

Lord, we praise you that your word never comes back empty. And Lord, we pray for the passage that we're studying today, that you would fill us with your spirit as we listen to your holy word.

Lord, please shine your light into our hearts so that we can discern your word and understand it the way that you want us to and help us apply it to our lives.

And Lord, we pray for Malcolm. We pray that you fill him with your spirit as he teaches on this passage. Let your words be his words. And Lord, may it touch our hearts.

May we know and love you more today. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

[45:34] It would be great if you could follow along with this reading. So it's on page 1045 in the Red Bibles. Luke chapter 12.

Luke chapter 12, verse 35 to 48. This is Jesus speaking.

Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly, I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak. But understand this.

[46:50] If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Peter asked, Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone? The Lord answered, Who then is the faithful and wise manager whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly, I tell you, he will put him in charge of all of his possessions.

But suppose the servant says to himself, My master is taking a long time in coming. And he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat 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 is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

[48:19] The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.

But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.

And from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Well, good morning to you all.

I bring you greetings from Pam and Stuart Burt in Sheringham. Dawn and I were with them this last Sunday at Lighthouse Church, and the minister there brought greetings to you too.

So that was a lovely time we had there. And also the passage we are looking at is about a wedding. And yesterday a number of us were fortunate enough to witness Johnny and Lizzie getting married, which was fantastic.

[49:35] And the first dance brought tears to Dawn and my eyes. We were very, very wet by the end of the dance. It was lovely to see them married.

So, yeah, we just remember them this morning as well as they go on honeymoon. Let's come to this word and ask the Lord to illuminate our hearts as Kathy's already prayed, but let me pray.

Father, we marvel and delight in your first coming as a humble child to Bethlehem. And we eagerly anticipate, dare we say it, your second coming.

May we be found ready on that day. Amen. I don't know whether you know, we don't often promote this, but at the final page of the This Week sheet each week, there are these notes which are used in life groups, but also can be used just for you to sort of dig deeper into the text.

And I'm so grateful to Rachel Dillon, who produces these for us each week, and I commend them to you. So you might want to sometimes print one out, bring it to the service, see if you've got some of the answers from the sermon, and obviously then go deeper in your life groups.

[50:59] This particular sermon starts off with what one described as a narrative. I don't often do this in a sermon, but it just seemed fitting for this particular passage. So the first part of it is kind of trying to give you a picture of the first part of this passage, which has been read to you.

You might find it helpful if you're not going to fall asleep, just to close your eyes, and to picture what is happening. And then I'll tell you when I'm into sort of what you might describe as a more normal sermon mode, if that makes sense.

So, picture the scene. The master would be returning late. So most of us took a siesta in the afternoon to make sure we were ready to receive him on his return.

We were his servants, our life was in his hands, and we would be ready for him when he came. He was attending a wedding banquet. They could last for days, and we did expect him back tonight.

During the evening I spoke to Marcus, another one of the servants, about the banquet our master would be enjoying. The best of everything would be served. Lamb sprinkled with herbs, freshly baked bread, choice wine in silver goblets, a feast fit for a king.

[52:27] Our stomachs rumbled as we spoke. We busied ourselves around the house, robes tied up at our waist to keep them from the ground, as we swept and washed the floor.

As dusk fell, we lit the lamps and kept them trimmed and topped up the oil. It wasn't easy to relight these lamps in the pitch dark, and we had to be ready.

We had to be ready for his return. We would not let the light go out. Later, we turned down the bed. No doubt, he would crash out soon after his return, and then we could all rest easy and expect a late start the next day.

As we looked out at the night sky, the moon shone down on the shimmering, clean marble floor, and the stars shone like jewels on velvet.

Despite the distant sound of the wedding banquet, the black sky seemed to bring a stillness to the night air. He was a good master, and despite the long hours of service, we were his servants, and we knew that we were blessed to be in his service.

[53:52] Out of this stillness came a disturbing, yet long-awaited call for our attention. Who could this be knocking at the door? We expected the master to call out so that we knew it was him.

A quick peep from the window, and yes, yes, it was him. We trimmed the lamps and opened the doors. We were ready to serve. We bowed as he walked in.

But it was strange. He didn't seem ready to retire that night. We weren't sure what to do, so we waited for his command.

He then found a belt and tied it around his waist. What was he doing? Only servants or slaves gird up their clothes.

No master had any need to do this. He then summoned all the servants to be seated at his table.

[54:54] We did as we were told, but we felt quite uncomfortable. Then he went back to the door and brought in jugs and bowls.

A few of us moved to help, but one looked from him and we sat down. Then our master gave thanks and passed around lamb and freshly baked bread.

He must have brought it from the banquet. It was fantastic. So unexpected, heavenly food. Most banquets we ever saw were eaten by others.

Just a few humble meals we made for ourselves, but this meal we had done nothing for. And yet here we were eating a plenty. The lamb melted in your mouth.

Then he poured the wine and served each one of us like an expert wine waiter. It was unheard of. A master might serve his guests, but a master might occasionally eat with his servants, but this master was serving us.

[56:06] What could all this mean? None of us, none of us will ever forget that night. We've been ready to serve the master, yet the master chose to serve us.

Ever since then, no one, no one has shirked the evening shifts in the household who knows when he will next return so unexpectedly.

Well, that's the end of the narrative bit. This is a very striking parable. And the focus I'm going to give to this parable is on verses 35 to 40.

Jesus is urging you and me to be ready for his second coming. Get ready. Be alert.

Can't you see the signs all around you? Wars and rumours of wars, pestilence covering the earth, men doing what seems right in their own eyes.

[57:28] These are the signs, the Bible says, of childbirth. And truly, the birth will come. The arrival is close, even if it seems like we are waiting a long time.

Surely we're in the late night watches, aren't we? Perhaps the second or third night watch. So be alert. Be ready, says this parable to each one of us.

Now, just in case you were wondering whether this is an unusual passage in the New Testament, the New Testament has 318 references to the second coming of Jesus.

It's not a side offering. It is a central truth that Christians should give attention to and should eagerly anticipate and be ready for.

These accounts like this one reveal great blessing for those who are ready and, frankly, awful judgment and loss for those who are unprepared.

[58:40] The parable tells us to do certain things and I want to focus on three things that the parable tells us we should be doing. Verse 35, in some versions, it says, gird up your loins, get ready to serve.

This means that servants of Jesus should always be ready not to be served but to serve. I wonder what distracts us from being ready to serve.

Interestingly, as you go back in the passage to what Mike very kindly stepped in to preach this last week, it was talking about greed and anxiety. These things can distract us from being ready.

Don't focus on what you can get in this life, what service you can receive. Instead, be ready to serve.

Don't be distracted by life's worries. There are many of them. About what you can eat or drink. Be ready for the treasure which will be ours in heaven.

[59:51] Where there will be a banquet that even surpasses Johnny and Liz's yesterday. Get ready to meet your master, says Jesus as he tells this parable.

Going on in verse 35, and so brilliantly portrayed by Sarah and the Braithwaite family. Keep your lamps burning.

As we go about our lives, keep your light shining brightly. Allow the light of the Spirit of God to constantly illuminate your lives.

We're told to be filled continually with the Holy Spirit of God. As Ephesians 5, verses 8 to 14 says, For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Live as children of light, for the fruit of light consists of all goodness, righteousness and truth. And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

[61:05] But everything exposed by the light is visible. And then finally in this little section, verse 36, Be ready to open the door.

You'll know the passage in Revelation 3, verse 20, where you get this picture of Jesus knocking on the door of the church. He says, Here I am, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Now I know some of you quite like text messages. I'm not a great fan, but I know they're kind of useful.

Now you're not going to get a text message for his coming. Just to let you know, it's not going to come like that. It's going to be sudden, and it's going to be at the door of his church, and all will be aware.

We need to be ready when called. Be sure of this, that those who are ready will be ready to open the door to a great blessing. Those who are ready will encounter the Lord himself, not as a humble servant, but as a glorious, glorified saviour.

[62:23] We then get to a very strange part in the passage. I don't know whether you saw it as strange when it came. You've got this fascinating getting ready for a return from a banquet. And then in verse 39, we're told this, but understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

So we've gone from a banquet return to a burglary. Fascinating extra mini parable within the parable. It's a rather disturbing situation.

Just imagine your house to have been broken into, unexpectedly, at night. It's not a nice thought, is it? Somebody going through your things, taking stuff.

That's the picture. A thief coming in the night. Now this picture of a thief in the night, back when I was, I don't know, teenager, generated a film being produced.

Does anybody, this probably shows your vintage, does anybody remember the film, A Thief in the Night? A few of you do. It took a pre-millennial view, if you're interested, ask me afterwards what that means.

[63:46] Which is basically, all the Christians go first, and the world is left without any believers around. And at the time, I wasn't a believer. And I was shocked that I might be left, left to a world without goodness and love of Christians around.

It was part of my coming to faith. If you're not a believer this morning, there will be a day when a thief will come, and we all need to be ready.

We need to be ready for the Lord. Another little story might help to press home this point. When I was ministering at Cheney's Baptist Church, there was a lady called Jane, not Jane Boughton, but

Betty Boughton, who is related to Jane Boughton, a member here. And she was telling me about a story about an encounter with some relatives of her in Watford High Street. Anybody been to Watford High Street? I quite like going there. It's closer to my old patch kind of thing. And she saw her friends across the way and waved to them. Now, I don't know what you'd expect as a response if you see some friends and you wave to them, but this is what these friends did.

[65:02] They kind of waved back, pointed to the sky, and said, we're waiting for the call. Across Watford High Street.

Now, you probably think that's very strange. Is it strange, is it strange, having read this passage, that a Christian might remind another Christian that they're waiting for the call?

Do you follow me? He will come as a thief in the night. We are called to be ready. And then we get to the bit we like, or the bit earlier we like, where this master comes and unexpectedly serves.

The long-awaited one returns, the master is here, the servants are ready to serve and do his bidding, yet the master makes a request. He doesn't make a request for a nightcap, no order is given for him to recline at table, but the master calls them to do that.

He asks them to sit down. He wants to serve them, who have been serving so faithfully for so long. Can you imagine?

[66:25] Your glorified Saviour calling you, asking you to sit down, serving you personally, it would feel awkward to begin with, and then wouldn't it feel glorious?

It's a startling reversal of status, isn't it? The serving master is described by some as an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Surely he is no master at all who has to serve.

But didn't Jesus say that he who wants to be great has to become the servant of all? We see his greatness, don't we?

The master in our parable shows that he invites these waiting servants to recline at table, that he is the servant of all.

What will they eat? What will they eat? They haven't cooked anything. There is no suggestion that the slaves have been producing another banquet.

[67:38] No, no mention is made. The master scurrying and putting together a meal. I've suggested in the narrative that I started this sermon that the meal had come from the heavenly banquet.

In the narrative introduction, we see the master offering the very best to his servants, wedding food for those he loves.

He could have organised somebody else to collect and to serve, but he chooses to serve. This master serves. He is lowly and humble in heart, and those in his service find rest for their souls. So, be ready. Be ready for the call. Keep your light shining brightly. Be ready to open the door to your Saviour.

He will come as a thief in the night. Blessed are those who are found ready to receive him. Shall we spend a moment in prayer, quietly to begin with?

[68:57] Thank you. Lord Jesus, we are waiting for your coming.

We wait for lots of things. Some of us, perhaps, are waiting for the day when we might die, or a loved one might die.

But in your word, you repeatedly ask us to wait for your coming again. May we talk much about this. May we be ready. Keep us steadfast in our service, walking always in the light. May we each live with eager expectation of you coming as our master and servant of all.

May we be ready. May we be ready. May we be ready. What are you saying to us, Lord Jesus, through this parable? May we find us faithful at your return.

[70:56] Even so, come, come, come, Lord Jesus. Thank you.

Please stand for our final song. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I treasure you all
I King of Heaven When victory's won May I reach heaven's joy My love will so Adore my own heart
Whatever before Still be my vision O ruler of all Adore my own heart Whatever before Still be my
vision

[75:14] O ruler of all Please receive the blessing from 1 Thessalonians 3.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen. Please be seated. There are a few announcements.

There is a missions prayer meeting tomorrow night Monday evening which the McNulty's our missionaries from France are joining.

If you would like a link please contact either the church office or Roger Mundy. Next Saturday there is an outreach planned on the Rye from 2 to 4 p.m.

[76:27] please contact the church office or George Haynes or Mike Birmingham for more information on that. And finally there is a pastoral friends meeting that we want to remind you of anyone who's a pastoral friend Tuesday evening at 7.30 here in the Hub.

Also lastly there's coffee as normal in the main hall and ice lollies it's not raining ice lollies outside so please go get a coffee and then go get an ice lolly.

Thank you very much. God bless you.