

YOU ALSO MUST BE READY

Luke 12:35–48

Key Verse: 12:40

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Have you ever been caught unprepared? If you have, you know the feeling, and it's not good, is it? Sometimes we're unprepared because something happens we totally didn't expect. Or, maybe we're unprepared because we've just been negligent. In contrast, it's such a great feeling to be ready for something, like being ready to bring our new baby home. In today's passage Jesus tells us that the Son of Man is coming. It's an essential element of our Christian faith. The only thing is, we have no idea of when he's coming. Wait—Christians have to live in a state of constant readiness? What does that even look like? How can we possibly live like that? And why should we? May God speak to us through his living words today.

In this travel section of Luke's Gospel (9:52–19:27), in the span of just ten chapters, Jesus tells a total of 20 parables.¹ That's a lot of parables! Parables are illustrations taken from ordinary life. And Jesus is such a master at it. In all his words he mentions all sorts of personal effects, places and household objects,² living things,³ and people from all walks of life,⁴ engaged in various activities⁵—and a few of these people

¹ 12 of them are unique to Luke's Gospel

² *Personal effects* like moneybags, knapsacks and sandals, armor, robes, rings and shoes, purple and fine linen clothing; *places* like houses, inns and palaces, private rooms, cellars and housetops, storehouses, barns, ovens and towers, fields, the temple, synagogues, marketplaces, banks, roads, streets and lanes, highways and hedges, graves and tombs; *household items* like oil and wine, beds and doors, tables and seats, lamps, baskets and stands, cups, dishes and herbs, leaven and flour, eggs, mustard seeds, salt and a manure pile, debts, bills, interest, wages put in savings, millstones and needles, burdens to carry, pennies and silver coins, crops and grain, an inheritance, possessions, goods and treasures

³ *Living things* such as lambs and wolves, serpents, scorpions and fish; sparrows and ravens; lilies, grass and moths; pack animals, oxen and donkeys, a mother hen and her brood, sheep, fattened calves, young goats, dogs and camels, a fig tree, mulberry tree and sycamore tree, and even weather conditions

⁴ *People* such as Jewish or not, religious or not, men and women, old and young, including infants, fathers and mothers, wives and children, brothers and sisters, in-laws, rich neighbors and poor beggars, masters and servants, kings, noblemen and citizens, tens of thousands of soldiers, the prominent and those living out on the streets, friends and strangers, healthy and sick, thieves, robbers and victims, prostitutes, judges and widows

⁵ *Human activities* such as sleeping and staying awake, eating and drinking, reclining at table, gardening and farming, toiling and spinning, sowing and reaping, baking and building, sweeping the house, searching and grinding, buying and selling, storing up and doing business, digging and begging, plowing and keeping sheep, working for someone or managing workers, going to the bank or to court or to war, getting married and hosting guests, breaking in and stealing, beating, finding something or someone who's been lost, celebrating with music and dancing, adultery and divorce

are in great physical pain.⁶ Jesus' words describe our common human experiences in such touching and familiar ways. It shows how deeply he understands our lives at home and at work, our family and civic responsibilities—and our religious hypocrisies. He captures the whole range of our human emotions⁷—and our foolishness. For many Christians down through the centuries, these chapters have been some of the most loved parts of the whole Bible. Through these parables Jesus is challenging us to have real faith, not abstract or compartmentalized faith. He wants us to integrate our faith in him into every area of our lives, every relationship, all that we're doing, every day. He's not calling us to hide from the world; he's preparing and equipping his disciples to go into the real world each day with our eyes wide open and set on him and his kingdom, with kingdom priorities and values.

In today's passage Jesus tells two parables. The first is a parable of servants, awake and waiting throughout the night for their master to come home. The second is a parable of a manager appointed to care for a household. Through these waiting servants and this manager, Jesus is showing us how to be ready. Ready for what? Ready for when he comes.

He mentions his coming here ten times (36,37,38,39,40,43,45,46). It's a future event like no other. Earlier he told his disciples that "the Son of Man" is going to come "in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (9:26). On earth he was a suffering servant of all, who, in the greatest injustice, was rejected and killed. But God the Father is going to send him back with power and great glory (21:27). "...and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" (Rev1:7). We call it "the Second Coming of Jesus." It's also called "the Great Reversal," when the most humble One is going to be the most exalted One (1:52; 14:11; 18:14b; Php2:8–11). When he ascended into heaven, two angels told his disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Ac1:11b).

His coming is the real hope of all believers. Living in this fallen world, we long for that day (17:22). On that day, unlikely people are going to come from all over the world and join his kingdom (13:29). It's going to be like a great banquet (14:17), and, like lightning that flashes and lights up the sky (17:24). Later Jesus predicts that when he comes, people will be so engrossed in this world, they won't be ready (17:26–30). He says that when he comes, he'll be looking for "faith on earth" (18:8). At the end of his journey to Jerusalem, he tells one more parable to show us how to live until he comes (19:11–27). And just before his death, he says more about how to be ready for that final day (21:25–28,34–36). But in today's passage Jesus just says, "You also must be ready" (40). He means, "You, too!" Then he illustrates what he means, in two ways.

First, awake and waiting (35–40). Read verses 35–36. "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come

⁶ Such as someone beaten and left half dead, with open wounds (10:30,34), and someone covered with sores (16:20)

⁷ Such as joy and rejoicing (15:7,6,9,10), compassion (10:33; 15:20), mercy (10:37; 16:24), anger (14:21; 15:28), shame (14:9; 16:3), fear (18:2,4), contempt (18:9)

home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.” After a long day of work, these servants could go to bed, but out of loyalty, they choose to stay awake and be ready for their master as soon as he comes home and knocks at the door. “Stay dressed for action” in Greek literally means, in today’s language, “Keep your pants on!” To stress this readiness, Jesus adds, “...and keep your lamps burning.” Lamps are burned at night, because night is a time of darkness. It’s a metaphor for the spiritual darkness we all live in. And in this verse the Greek emphasizes the word “your.” In the dark night, a servant can’t borrow somebody else’s lamp (cf. Mt25:1–13). He needs his own, in case everybody else has fallen asleep, so he can see how to get to the door and open it to his master. A lamp burning symbolizes personal faith, eager to serve our Lord Jesus, at any time. It means having a personal prayer life, focused on Christ, depending on him, and actually “waiting” for him. It means we *want* him to come.

Read verse 37a. “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.” The word “awake” is key (37–38). It’s more than not sleeping physically; otherwise, we should never go to sleep again. The Greek word means “watch,” which is how it’s often translated.⁸ Some Bible versions translate it as “be alert.”⁹ To be “awake,” to “watch” or “be alert” is a spiritual state. In this parable it means to have the hope to see our Lord Jesus himself. It’s what we’re waiting for. But *are* we? The Bible encourages us to long to see him “face to face” someday (1Co13:12), and with this hope, to watch ourselves (Lk17:3) and struggle to grow in purity like him (1Jn3:2–3) through the Spirit’s help (Lk3:16; Ro15:16; 1Co6:11).

How will such servants be “blessed”? Read verse 37b. “Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.” Talk about a reversal! If he finds us awake and waiting, he’s going to dress as a servant, invite us to sit at his heavenly banquet table, and come and wait on us (13:29; 22:30; cf. Isa25:6; Rev19:9). His grace, humility and love for us are mind-boggling! He’s inviting us to hold onto this promise personally.

And he says more. Read verse 38. “If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!” The second or third watch of the night were in the deep-night when everyone was fast asleep. Jesus knows it’s going to be hard for us. He may be a long time in coming. But however long it takes, however spiritually dark the times are or how lonely it gets, he’s encouraging us to stay awake and waiting, believing he’s coming again.

He concludes with a warning. Read verses 39–40. “But know this, that 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. So you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” The Bible repeatedly warns us that Jesus will come again like a thief (1Th5:2–3; 2Pe3:10; Rev3:3; 16:15), meaning unexpectedly. Jesus is saying to be prepared for him at any hour, any day. We’d like to know precisely

⁸ (Mt25:13; 26:38,40–41; Mk14:34,37–38; 1Pe5:8; 1Co16:13; Col4:2)

⁹ (NET, NRSV, HCSB, NASB)

when he's coming, so that we can take it easy until then, and repent at the last minute. That's our smartness, our desire for control and our sinful nature working against us. Jesus is warning us all not to do that. He wants us to be ready always, and not depend on ourselves, but totally depend on him.

Second, a faithful and wise manager (41–48). Look at verse 41. “Peter said, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?’” It's a rare moment when Peter speaks up. He's confident of his relationship with Jesus. But as Jesus warns he'll be coming like a thief, Peter wonders if he's talking only to the uncommitted crowds.

How does Jesus respond? Read verse 42. “And the Lord said, ‘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?’” With the words “Who then,” Jesus is speaking both to Peter and the disciples, and to anyone who seeks this noble task to care for God's household (1Ti3:1a; Eph2:19). “Who then is the faithful and wise manager?” He's asking an incisive, sobering question. In Greek, “manager” literally means one who gives things out to those in a household. In Jesus' parable here, it's “their portion of food.” He's not talking about a cook handing out food rations, or a business manager handing out paychecks. He's talking about making sure people are getting spiritually fed on a regular basis, and at crucial times in their lives. None of us can survive spiritually on bread alone (4:4); to grow as a healthy person in Christ, we all need to feed on the word of God. God, in his sovereign will and purpose, sets his servants among his people to carry out this holy task.

Currently Peter has only a dim idea of what Jesus has called him to do. Later he would learn that Jesus called him to feed his sheep (Jn21:15–17). Still today, our Lord Jesus himself is calling his servants and holding them accountable for feeding his people with God's word. We can't do it if it's only before people, for our own honor and glory; we've got to be feeding people the word of God before God himself, as our most solemn responsibility.

Paul wrote his spiritual son Timothy: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2Ti4:1–2). We need to be feeding people with God's word in the holy presence of God himself and of our King Jesus, as those who will be held accountable to him. As servants of his word, we need to always keep the reality of his appearing and his kingdom in our hearts.

Paul also uses our Lord Jesus' words: “be ready.” He tells us not to give people our own ideas, but to “preach the word.” He says, “reprove, rebuke and exhort.” “Reprove” means to convict; “rebuke” means to censure severely; “exhort” means to come alongside to comfort, and even beg. Again, we do these things not based on our own ideas, but based on God's word. Just before this, Paul writes: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (2Ti3:16). To help people with God's word as Paul

describes here requires “complete patience.” If we’re feeding people with God’s word faithfully and wisely, it’s another way to be ready for Jesus’ coming at any time, and we’ll be greatly rewarded in heaven (43–44).

Look at verses 45–46. “But if that 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 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.” It’s a warning that if we ignore Jesus’ coming, our sinful nature can take over. It can turn us into abusive and self-indulgent persons. If we persist in living that way, in the end we’ll come under God’s judgment.

Jesus concludes by telling us that there are many kinds of servants, but God’s judgment is fair. Read verses 47–48. “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. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. 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.” The point here is: God judges based on what we know. The more we know, the more he holds us accountable.

Read verse 40 again. May God help us to be spiritually awake and waiting for our Lord Jesus to come again at any time. May God help us to grow as faithful and wise managers before him, who give his people the word of God at the proper time, with the hope of his heavenly reward.