

The Virtue of Watchfulness, Part 1

Luke 12:25-40

We are back in Luke, chapter 12, right in the middle of this amazing chapter, and today we're looking at verses 35 to 40. Some powerful perspective setting, priority setting, teaching from our Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of every year, I find myself looking back on what's happened over the past year. And this year is no different. I reflect on events, take stock of what the Lord has done, maybe trying to even think about significance and meaning in all that's happened. And this year has been a very different sort of a year for all of us.

I'm grateful to the Lord for giving the church a gift, the great reset for the church. The social, political, and moral situation in our country is causing many Christians, I think, to conduct a healthy self-examination. Many churches, to conduct a healthy self-examination, to reflect on what's truly important. And to take this God given opportunity to reset their hearts, their minds, and to reestablish some godly priorities in their life.

And in the sense, that's what Jesus has been doing in his teaching here in Luke, chapter 12. Ever since the beginning of the chapter, and even before that, as he confronted the scribes and the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy, he is calling for self-examination here. To leave worldly mindedness behind, no more fear of man, no more covetousness, no more worry, no more anxiety.

He's calling his disciples to live their lives in the fear of God. To rest in his care, his provision, his kindness, compassion, and to seek his kingdom. And Jesus has effectively reset for us some godly priorities. He says in Luke 12:33 to 34, "Sell your possessions, give to the needy, provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So having established for his disciples about what not to fear, about what not to chase after, what not to worry about, he's told us whom to fear and where to fear God and God alone.

But now as he turns into this latter half of Luke, chapter 12, he's telling us what to worry about. He's telling us what we

should be concerned about, what we should be preoccupied with. He has set his disciples free from any human fear, every anxiety or worry about physical things. And starting here, in verse 35, Jesus tells us what should be our preoccupying thought. The mindset of every Christian should be like this, and if we're to worry about anything, setting aside all worldly and earthly cares. If we're to worry about anything here it is. This is what we would be concerned about and preoccupied with. Our Lord's return. Also known as the second coming of Christ.

Look there in verse 35 to 40, "Stay dressed for action. And keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed 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, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds him awake, blessed are those servants!

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let him, 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." For those of us who fear God, for those of us who follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the only thing that we need to be concerned about in this life is this.

We need to be ready and waiting for the Lord's return. The Lord is coming again, and only those who have a heart to be ready and waiting will enter into the blessedness that he's describing here. Just two points for this morning. They follow the simple pattern of the text, the parables of the text, be ready and be waiting. Be ready and be waiting for the Lord's return so that when he comes, whenever he comes, we can enter into the blessedness and the joy of the Lord.

Jesus speaks to this audience, on this occasion, at this time, in this place, and as he speaks to them, he's exhorting them to be ready and waiting when the Son of Man comes. Now, did the Son of Man come during the lifetime of anyone in this original audience? No, he did not. The bible tells us that the Son of Man was rejected by his people. He was crucified on the cross. He was buried in a tomb. He was resurrected the third

day. He ascended into heaven forty days later. That's where he is now, bodily at the Fathers' right hand. Jesus, the Son of Man. He still has not come back. He has yet to fulfill the promise of this text.

So, a good question to ask and an understandable one to ask, is how does this exhortation, be ready, be waiting, how does this have any force or weight for this audience? When the Father has yet to authorize the second coming and send Jesus to return to earth. We get asked the same question really for ourselves too, as Christians, the readers of Luke's Gospel, we who are members of Christ's church, here, in the church age. Because if we understand the prophetic timeline correctly, doesn't the rapture of the church occur before the second coming? If so, how does this text apply to us, the church?

We can return to the original audience who heard Jesus this day, teaching most of whom did not make it out of the first century, but died before seeing him return. How does Jesus's exhortation here, to stay ready, to keep waiting for his return, how does it compel them? How does it compel us? Maybe it's just the case that we've misunderstood everything prophetically,

right? Maybe we just need to adjust our prophetic timetables.
No, that's not the case. We haven't misunderstood.

We do understand that correctly. That the rapture is the next event that we are waiting for and looking for. It's a signless event. There's nothing in the way preventing the Lord to return and call his church to himself. Coming of Christ to retrieve his bride is imminent. But we're gonna wait until next time to talk through that prophetic timeline.

As we look at verses 35 and 40, notice there, just by way of observation, there are two exhortations. You see an opening one or, or grouping of exhortations in verse 35 and beginning of verse 36 and then a closing one in verse 40. You see in the middle there, there are two short parables. There's one in verses 36 to 38 and another in verse 39. And the bulk of that first parable consists of another beatitude from Christ. Using that familiar word, *makarios*, blessed, blessed are those servants. He says it twice. Blessed are those servants. The ones who were found waiting.

In these parables we have two kind of contrasting elements. The first parable emphasizes the element of certainty about the fact of the Masters return. The second parable, about the thief in the night, emphasizes the element of uncertainty about the timing of his return. So, when we think about the second coming in this doctrine, the return of Christ to earth, there is an element of certainty, what we bank on. And there's an element of uncertainty as well about the timing. And though these elements are not contradictory, as we're going to see, they are held in tension, certainty and uncertainty. And as we wait for him, holding these two elements in tension with one another, God produces within us the precious virtue of patience.

As we await Christ's return, we learn to exercise the godly virtue of waiting righteously, of waiting productively, of waiting virtuously. We're learning in this time to wait well, which means we produce the virtue of patience and endurance.

Later in the twenty first chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives an exposition of the end times. It'll be a bit before we get there, so listen now. Jesus tells his disciples there, he says, "by your endurance," your *hypomone*, your steadfast

patience is another way to put it, "by your endurance you will gain your lives." There is a salvific element to this patience and endurance being produced in us. It's a very important virtue. This virtue of patience, learning to wait well, learning to wait virtuously.

Patience is a virtue that I want to see characterize my life. Patience is one of those fruits of the spirit. And I regret that patience has, rather ironically, had to exercise patience as it grows to maturity in my life. Lord planted the seed in some stubborn soil. I have to say, but by the grace of God I can tell you that, that fruit is growing. My family is even noticing just a little bit so.

As we take our place among all believers, of all time, waiting on the Lord, that's nothing unique to us. We're all waiting in all times of church history. We're waiting, and this waiting is a time of testing. As all of us in the church of Jesus Christ, all of us individually, collectively, we are caught in the tension about the certainty of the Lord's return. Watch for it, look for it. It's right around the corner. It's imminent. And yet, the uncertainty about his timing of his

return. When? It hasn't happened yet. So when? It's on purpose. The spirit is maturing the fruit of patience within us.

So, let's look at the text and get into the outline. First point in your outline, just two points today, but first point; His coming is certain, so always be ready. Always be prepared to serve him. And be patient for the opportunity to do so. In this section, there's this short parable, short beatitude. Let's just start with the parable, verses 35 to 36, which calls us to readiness. Jesus says, reading it again, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks." That's the parable.

First, Jesus says, "Stay dressed for action." Literally, he says, have your loins girded up. It's not something we use commonly today, but we understand the sense. It's an idiom that refers back to those, the first century clothing. Where those, they wore those long flowing robes, and if they left those robes hanging loose, doing work was impossible. So, whenever they were going to work, or whenever they were thinking about moving

quickly, going to war, whatever it was, they would gather up all that loose fabric, tuck it in, bound it, bind it with a belt around their waist, and then get to work, go to work, go to war, run whatever they're going to do. So, the image of a girded, belted servant was the picture of readiness or preparedness.

Same thing in Ephesians 6, with a girded, belted soldier, who is tucked up all the loose ends of his garment into a belt, and he's gonna to go to war and face the enemy. Same thing here, preparedness, readiness. Peter uses the same imagery in 1 Peter 1:13, he says, "Therefore, gird not your loins, but your minds. Gird your minds for action, keeps sober in spirit. Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Jesus portrays here a servant who never needs to be told to get ready. Because he's always ready. Next idiom, verse 35. Jesus says, "Keep your lamps burning." Here, it's in the present tense so it's always burning. So, the emphasis is on continuousness. It's something constantly attended to. Wouldn't do us much good as servants if we're all dressed up and ready to

go. And then once we hear the master arrive and start, we start fumbling around the dark.

Where's that lamp? We spill the oil, Oh no, and, and you can't get lit. A servant who's ready, prepared for action, he stays attentive to the lamp because in order to act and move and serve, you need light. You need to be able to see, so you keep plenty of oil in the basin chamber of the lamp, you keep a trimmed wick. You never let that flame dim because once that master arrives, it is go time.

Lights his lamp. He keeps it lit because he wants to be ready to do the master's will at the very moment that he arrives home. You might look to girding up the, the loins as salvation, what we've done in the past. You might look to keeping your lamp lit as sanctification, something you're continually attending to.

We come to a third imperative in verse 36 where Jesus says, he says "stay dressed for action, keep your lamps [lit]," and then this. "Be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so that they may open the door to

him at once when he comes and knocks." We got several clues here from the Lord. Jesus gives, to help us discern the attitude of those who stay ready, those who are always dressed for action, those who are continually attending to their lamps. What is it that motivates these servants? What does Jesus picturing there? Here's the answer. He's picturing servants, whose hearts are filled with love, with affection. Jesus is portraying the kind of love relationship that exists between a loving, caring master and his affectionate, attentive servants.

Notice here, verse 36, Jesus calls them men. That's there in the Greek, *anthropos*, men, they're not servants, they're not slaves, they're men. They're anthropoid. They are men who are waiting. Now Jesus is not shy about referring to his disciples as slaves. The word for slaves, *doulos*, is right there in verse 37 here, though he's intentional about using the word men, verse 36. The image he wants us to see here is that these are men who are waiting.

In a world that viewed slaves as nothing more than animate tools. They were not required to think independently. They were not, a, they were just there to simply serve the purpose of

increasing the productivity of the master and the household. They just did what they were told. They were there to increase his wealth, increase his holdings, increase his protection. Thus, if they were defective, not doing his will, they could be sold at the drop of a hat. They could be bought and sold at his will.

And that image does not explain what we see in verse 36. It doesn't explain the attitude of readiness and eagerness in these servants. They don't stay ready because they're cowering, like slaves who fear being beaten for their disobedience, sold off like a defective and useless tool. They're staying ready because they are men and they are thinking men. Men who have exercised their will. Men who've chosen to stay ready and wait for their master because they want to.

These men, verse 36, they weighed with a purpose. look at it there, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. That's a *hina* purpose clause there, explaining the purpose of their waiting. It's so that they could be right there to open the door. No waiting around. Jump to it, get to it, open the door, start serving. This, this is moving beyond just a

picture of preparedness and readiness, portrayed already in verse 35. This verse is revealing the attitude that's behind it. This is eagerness. This is enthusiasm. This is excitement over the master's return to the house.

And when he knocks they open him at once. It's the word *eutheos*, immediately, right away. They're so excited to receive him. Why are they so excited? I mean what's, what's got him all stirred up here? Notice the masters returning from a wedding feast. Now Jesus does not specify whose wedding he was attending. Let's hold on to that thought. Put a pin in that. Come back to that next time.

For now, it's enough to know that he's attended a wedding, in the illustration, in the parable. And he stayed. The master stayed for the feast and the festivities of the wedding. It's a celebration that could last for quite some time, maybe several days, even up to a week. And in any ordinary, master slave relationship, the expectation of, expectation of a master returning to his home, from a wedding, a long time there, coming back in the middle of the night, would be, I'm tired and I'm going to bed.

That's a master slave relationship, especially if he came home in the middle of the night, he might awaken a servant or two, to prepare a midnight snack for him. A, any normal master, though, would expect his servants to facilitate his immediate rest and refreshment. Take my bags, get some food, prepare my bed, that's a normal master slave relationship. But Jesus shows us, reading ahead a little bit, Jesus shows us this is no ordinary relationship at all. These men, they're not waiting like slaves, they're waiting like men, eagerly, excitedly, because they're anticipating here a joyful reunion with their master. A master that they love. Jesus portrays him as the kind of man who rejoices in being, in being with them. He's the kind of guy who brings them into his thinking, into his heart. He's the kind of man they love because he's loving to them.

I know you realize this. You've been in the company before and you have somebody you can tell, they really don't want you around. They're kind of like being polite, hemming and hawing. Conversation drops all the time. You know conversations, like a tennis match. You hit the ball over the net and they hit it back and it goes back and forth and a good conversation is like a good tennis match. It goes back and forth, back and forth, back

and forth. Someone who doesn't want you there, they're serving the ball into the net. They don't even wanna, they don't even want you there.

That's not the sense you get from Jesus. The sense you get from Jesus is he loves people. And the sense you get from him, especially, is that he loves his people. He loves his servants. Doesn't matter, verse 38, if the master arrives in the middle of the night. This is the kind of master who's worth losing sleep over. He's worth being inconvenienced for.

He's of such a nature, his goodness is so characteristic of him that their efforts to stay ready, dressing for action, being dressed for action, their lamps well supplied, always, lit, continually. They don't even notice that. Doesn't even register. Preparedness, diligence, alertness, attentiveness, to listen out to his arrive, for his arrival. This is no trouble at all, really. What I have just described here, folks, which comes directly from what Jesus has taught us here, this is the Christian virtue of watchfulness. Watchfulness. Watchfulness is a virtue that is the spiritual byproduct, the spiritual fruit of other virtues.

You could say it's the byproduct of three of the most foundational Christian virtues, and you know them faith, hope, and love, these three. Faith, hope and love. And as those three virtues, faith, hope, and love grow in your life, you will see this virtue of watchfulness grow as well.

If, staying dressed for action, perfect tense, something that happened in the past with results continuing in the future. If that's like your salvation, if keeping your lamps lit, light burning brightly is your sanctification, well, think of watchfulness as your growth in Christian graces. And the more you grow in Christian graces, the more watchful you'll be. The less you grow in Christian graces, the more dull and sleepy and distracted you will become. If you find yourself a dull, sleepy, distracted Christian, listen to this 'cause we're gonna talk about the remedy.