

“Live Ready” // Luke 12:35–47 // In Step #3

We’re coming up on the Christmas season--Nov 1 seems to make the officially sanctioned day that we’re allowed to put lights up and the Hallmark Channel is allowed to start its movie marathons.

One of my favorite Christmas movies--a true classic--is Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*--the one with George C. Scott, not Mickey Mouse, though that one is good, too.

The gist of the movie is that Ebenezer Scrooge is a greedy, heartless man; he’s a workaholic, a miser; he scrimps on paying his workers and looks down on the needy. He despises Christmas because he thinks of it as a sentimental holiday for freeloaders.

But that all changes one night when he gets visited by 3 ghosts: the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future. All have an impact on him, but it is his vision of the future that transforms him. With that one he gets a glimpse of the impact of his selfishness. He hears how people regarded him--his grave is abandoned and the only emotional response comes from a poor couple who are actually elated he’s gone.

(Some of you are like, “Well now you totally just spoiled the movie for me!” Listen, the story has been out for 180 years. Don’t tell me, “Oh, I was gonna go home and read it tonight.” That’s not my fault.)

That movie illustrates the power of pressing fast forward in your life occasionally to see things from the vantage point of the future. *Things in the present look different from the perspective of the future.*

We know this don’t we? Ever seen a really suspenseful movie for the second time? Your experience the second time around is so much different than the first, because you know what’s going to happen.

Or how many of us saw the gripping documentary, *Free Solo*, about a man who scales mountains with no ropes or harnesses? I remember being so nervous as he scaled this one mountain that I actually paused the documentary, went online to see if he’s still alive, and then returned to watching the movie in a much calmer state. Pressing fast forward was helpful!

In Luke 12, Jesus tells his disciples to **press fast forward for a moment** and think about their present lives from the vantage point of the end (so if you have your Bibles, turn there; we’re going to pick up where we left off last week). *Write this down:* **It is only by thinking clearly about the future will you live wisely in the present.**

That’s **probably why Jesus talked about it** so much. **Did you know--**the 2nd coming of Christ is the most talked about doctrine in the Bible? I know that’s a big statement, but it’s true.

Works consulted:

Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke, commentary, Thabiti M. Anyabwile

“Forward-Back Living” (Luke 12:32–46), Tim Keller

“The End Is Near. Are You Ready?” (Matthew 25:13), John Piper

“Waiting for the Master’s Return, Part 1” (Luke 12:35–40), John MacArthur

“Waiting for the Master’s Return, Part 2” (Luke 12:35–40), John MacArthur

“Reward and Punishment at Christ’s Return” (Luke 12:41–48), John MacArthur

- In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to it. (That means one out of roughly every **dozen** verses.)
- For **every 1 prophecy** in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are **8** that talk about his second. (We have a **whole holiday** celebrating his first coming but barely even mention the 2nd!)
- Furthermore, **NT writers** use the 2nd coming to motivate obedience to almost **every moral command** found in the NT. IOW, you gain the strength to obey the commands by reflecting on how close eternity is.

Now, the church I grew up in was a little **obsessed** with the Second Coming. We talked about it all the time.

- We had our **rapture board games** and **rapture bumper stickers**: "*In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned.*" And we made rapture jokes like there was no tomorrow.
- Our annual **prophecy conferences** were the best attended events of the year, and for **special Sunday night services** we **watched the Billy Graham movies** about the Tribulation.
- On our Sunday School walls we had **posters of timelines with dates** and **pictures** of dragons matched with names of contemporary **politicians**. And you think I'm making this up. I'm NOT.
- My pastor would often end our services by saying, "**Maranatha,**" which is Hebrew for, "The Lord is coming," and then he would say, "**And beloved, it may be today.**"
- And I believed it. **Illus.** As a kid, I lived in a perpetual state of anxiety about Jesus coming back and me not being ready. So, if **for any reason** I called out to my parents and they didn't respond, I'd run through the house panicked, just sure I'd find my mom's clothes somewhere fallen neatly into a pile on the floor as she ascended to be with Jesus and I'd been *left behind*.

We may have gone a little overboard, but my church did have something that I think we lack in ours; something I think may be lacking in this **whole generation of Christians**, and that is **the earnest expectation of Jesus' return**. *It could be today! Do you think that?*

Listen to how Jesus instructs his disciples in Luke 12. We'll begin in vs. 35: "**Stay dressed for action...** This is the first of 4 images Jesus uses to communicate a posture readiness. If you're taking notes, write down: **(1) Stay dressed for action** (At least, that's what it is in English. Unfortunately, our English translations don't translate the Greek literally here, because what Jesus says is so much more colorful in Greek. The Greek reads literally, "keep your loins girded." **In those days men wore robes**, which of course were comfortable and stylish and breezy but not at ideal if you were going to work, run, or fight. So for those occasions men would put on these belts that would tighten things up down there so that they were ready for action. Jesus said, "Let that be a metaphor for how you live."

Don't live in a posture of leisure; stay in fight mode.

Kids (how many kids we got in the house?), it's sort of like that game musical chairs. Any of you all played musical chairs? We know how this works. You get a group of people, and set out some chairs, and there's always one less chair than the amount of people in the game. **As you are walking around the chairs**, you've got to be ready for that music to stop so you can scramble for a seat. It usually ends up in a shoving match!

****The point is, if you're walking along in leisure you're going to be out!** 'Musical chairs' is based on the idea that the music WILL stop (that's certain!), but you don't know when it will stop, and because of that you've got to live ready. **That's basically what Jesus means by "keep your loins girded."**

Here's the 2nd image, continuing in vs. 35: **...and keep your lamps burning,³⁶ 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. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!

- **In those days, when a rich man went to a wedding, none of the servants** knew how long he'd be gone, and that's because you never knew in those days exactly how long a wedding would last. People would get delayed in coming, so the event could last 1 day or it could last several days--**you'd find out when you got there!** And because they didn't have cell phones, there was no way for the master to tell the servants he was on his way home, so they just had to keep the house ready all the time because the Master didn't want to return home to a dark, cold house with all the servants asleep in their pajamas.
- You also should live like that, Jesus says. **(2)...and keep your lamps burning (vs. 35).** Ready for me to return at any hour.

Which leads to the **third image**, vs. 39, ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

(3) ...like you're watching out for a thief (vs. 39) Thieves, as a **general rule**, don't schedule break-ins. You don't get a notification on your phone, "*Your thief is on the way!*" Their goal is to **surprise** you. So, if you know a thief is coming sometime in the night, you'd better stay up all night to be ready for him.

Same thing with me, Jesus says. (The point here of course is not that Jesus is some sinister, ruinous villain; just that he may come when you're not expecting and if you're not ready you will be ruined.)

Now, vs. 41, Peter asks a great question: ⁴¹ "Lord," Peter asked, "are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?" IOW, Peter wants to know if Jesus is directing this warning only to outsiders, or also to the disciples.

This is a very important question, because it's one of Jesus' big themes in Luke. Is the **dividing line** of judgment between those who are Christians and those who aren't--or are some Christians also going to be caught unprepared and swept away in judgment? IOW, does just becoming a Christian make you prepared, or is Jesus talking about something more, a **warning he would direct toward people active** in the church?

And you'll notice in the next few verses that **Jesus doesn't really answer Peter; he** instead tells another story to help Peter self-diagnose whether he's living ready. **Which IS Jesus' answer.** He's saying, "Peter, this most definitely applies to you, also. A lot of my **so-called followers** are going to be caught unprepared, and they are going to face judgment because of that. **Again, this is a consistent theme in Luke:** not everyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus actually is. Followers of Jesus are only those who live ready, and a lot of church-going people are going to find themselves coming up short on judgment day.

Watch this: 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? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ 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, ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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. (ESV)

Here's your **4th image**: (4)... **as stewards who do not want to be caught idle** (vs. 42–43) Because these servants forget their boss is coming back, they **start to commandeer** the Master's stuff for personal use. They throw parties for their friends on his dime, drink his wine, wear his clothes; they even force the other servants to tend to their needs. **When the Master comes back**, he's going to say, "These things aren't yours! I didn't entrust these things to you for your personal use." In fact, the word Jesus uses for the servant in **vs. 42**, *oikonomos*, translated "manager," communicates just that. It literally means "steward." A steward is not someone who owns the assets but manages them for someone else.

4 images that all communicate the same thing. *Live ready*--in anticipation of your Master's return, busy about your task. And **if you don't live that way**, Jesus says, you're not really my disciple. Look at the wording of vs. 46–47. If when the Master returns and he does not find you ready, he will **"cut (you) in pieces and put (you) with the unfaithful."** **You're going to get the same judgment an unsaved person gets! This is serious stuff.** Again, **Luke seems concerned that you realize** that a lot of people think they are followers of Jesus but actually aren't, and that's demonstrated by the fact that they don't live ready.

So what does living ready look like, practically speaking? I'll give you 3 things; 3 characteristics of the "ready":

1. Awake to your task (vv. 35–37)

V. 37, "Blessed are those whom the master finds awake (and you could read, 'active at the task') when he comes."

And what is that task? Well, what's the specific *task* Jesus gave to us before he left? **"Go into all the world, and make disciples of all the nations.** (Matthew 28:19–20)." We call that "the Great Commission"--Jesus' marching orders for his church.

That is his task for the church right now. Our mission is to make disciples from every nation. BTW, the Greek word for "nations" in that verse is not referring to the 206 nation-states in our world today; 'panta ta ethne' / all the nations a reference to the different ethnic and language groups. The different cultures and ethnicities.

Sociologists say there is total of 17,442 of them in the world today.¹

The task is not finished until there is a thriving church planting movement among every one of them. It's what God is doing on earth right now and what he wants us to be doing. Luke records it this way, Luke 24:47: **"For as it is written, this gospel of repentance and sins will be preached in all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem."**

You wonder **why we talk so much about global missions** here? It's not because we like to travel, but because it's what we know the Master has given us as our great task. Are you doing anything with it? Giving, praying,

¹ Joshua Project, 2020

going? We've had 1000 of you go on STT's in the last couple of years. Have you gone yet? When it comes to the Great Commission, John Piper says, you only have 3 options: GO, SEND, OR DISOBEY.

Here's another thing this passage points to: meeting the physical needs of others around us. Did you notice that in **vs 42** Jesus describes the "faithful and wise manager" as the one who gives others their portion of food at the proper time?

I think you can **deduce from that that the faithful servant** is the one making sure the physical needs of people around them are met. He's using his resources to make sure others get fed. **The unfaithful servants** are those who **Vs. 45**, "begin to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk,"

- They use **what God gave them to bless others to bless only themselves.**
- A lot of people today look at their money as their own. **"I earned all this! It's mine! I can do whatever I want with it.** If I want a bigger house, better clothes, nicer stuff, that's my prerogative. It's mine!"
- **But friend, that's not how God sees it.** Sure, you worked for it, and God wants you to enjoy it. But the Master says, **"Who is the one you think gave you those talents? Who gave you the opportunities? There's a big difference in walking through a door of opportunity and creating that door. The air you breathe, the talents you employ, the health you enjoy, the earth you walk on, where did all that come from? God says, "I gave you that ability to multiply money, with the responsibility to use it for my purposes. But you commandeered all of that and turned it inward on yourself. You thought only about your needs and got drunk on the world's pleasures. You were asleep to your task."**

Don't miss this: *God considers us not using our resources to bless others around us an act of grave injustice.*

I've **shown you this before**, but Paul talks about our failure to preach the gospel to those around us in terms of injustice. Romans 1:14, **"I am a debtor..."**

Do you want to live justly? Use what you have to help meet the physical needs of others and make sure they've had a chance to hear the gospel!

Wake up to this task!

- Listen, there are still **7,413** unreached people groups in the world today--a group of at least **10,000 people** united by a common language and no viable Christian witness to speak of. They represent **3.23 billion** people. **1.7 billion** of those have never even heard the name of Jesus.
- If you lined them all up in rows, 5 across, 5 feet apart, they would circle the globe 5x. Imagine that throng marching headfirst into eternity with no chance to hear.
 - **Each one of those is a person just like you,** made in the image of God just like you, who knows what it's like to feel afraid, lonely, lost.
- I think of a place like **Northern Yemen**, which has a population of 8 million--almost the size of NC. Guess how many believers in that whole nation? 20 or 30. **Are those people any worse sinners than we?** Is it fair for us to know so much about salvation and do nothing to get it to them? **We owe it** to them.

Blessed are those who are awake to their task and active in it when the master comes!

- **What about you?** Do YOUR friends know about Jesus? What if he comes back, or you or they die? Are they going to look at you one day and say, "Why did you never tell me?" Will Jesus look at you and say, "What were you waiting on?"
 - **I remember hearing the story of 2 junior devils talking to Satan about how to destroy the church:** One said, "I'm going to tell them there's no God." Satan replied: "That won't be that effective."

Instinctively men know there's a God. Not many will believe you." The second said, "Well I'm going to tell them there's no hell." Satan replied, "You won't get that many that way, either. Most know there's a punishment for sin." Satan said, "No, if you want to ruin the church, don't tell them there's no God or no hell, tell them there's *no hurry*."²

How are you spending your money? Don't be caught hoarding money he gave you for his task. Don't let him find you with all kinds of money stuffed in your bank account that he gave to you to help relieve people from suffering and hear the gospel *now*.

- **I knew a man here at TSC** who was very wealthy and very generous. I asked him one time what motivated him in generosity. He said, "My goal is to bounce my last check." (I told him: "Make sure you write your 2nd to last check to us.")

2. Confident of his return (vs. 40)

The servants who got in trouble in this parable were those who were either unsure of his return or just forgot about it. When you are sure Jesus is coming back, you look at everything differently.

- You look at sacrifice differently. You can endure sacrifices on earth because life is temporary. Eternity is forever.
- **Illus. Today it's become popular to talk about "bucket lists."** A "bucket list" means a bunch of stuff you want to do before you kick the bucket, things you won't ever have an opportunity to do after. So, go to a Bon Jovi concert, climb **Mt Everest**, shake Nicolas Cage's hand. Or at least those are mine.
- One of the questions I ask in WYD is "Does a bucket list make sense for a Christian?"
- You see, the Bible teaches that **when Jesus comes back, he will restore the earth**. He brings a "new heaven and new earth", which scholars say means "renewed." In fact, when Matthew records this same teaching of Jesus we're looking at here in Luke, Jesus calls his return the "**renewal**" of all things (**Matt 19:28**). Literally, the **re-gensis**. When Jesus returns, he will **renew the earth and take the curse** out of it.
- And that means where we're going will have a better version of everything we loved down here--all the pleasures of the world with none of the curses. And that means anything I missed out on down here I'll get to experience in abundance up there. If you never make it to the earthly Hawaii, you'll have your own oceanfront mansion in the Heavenly one. You think the earthly Hawaii is beautiful; I can't wait to see the Heavenly one. **I bite into a ribeye here and I think**, "This ribeye is still part of the cursed creation. I can't wait for the heavenly one." If I never get to fly on a spaceship to the moon, in heaven I'll get to fly myself there.
- **So, I don't think bucket lists make sense for the Christian**; that is if we really believe Jesus is coming back. If he is, **YOLO isn't true for the Christian**. **YALF is**, and anything we miss out on down here we can experience in abundance up there.
- That is, **except for one thing**. There is one thing we can't do up there that we can only do down here, and that's tell people about Jesus. So why wouldn't we prioritize that with our time, resources, and opportunities?

One of my missionary heroes has always been Adoniram Judson. He wanted to marry a girl named Ann and wrote this letter to her dad. I share this story in WYD:

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world? Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the hardships and

² Heard in John MacArthur's sermon, "Reward and Punishment at Christ's Return" (Luke 12:41–48), sourced from William Barclay

sufferings of a missionary life; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death?

Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Saviour from the lost who were saved through her means from eternal woe and despair?

First, Dads, what would you say if you got a letter like this? John Hasseltine said yes, and Ann and Adoniram got married and went as America's first missionaries to Asia--they moved to Burma and, get this, every one of those terrible things Adoniram predicted and many more came true.

Why could Adoniram and Ann and their father-in-law John endure these things? Because they **believed time was short**, earth was nothing; eternity was real and the Master was coming back soon.

My challenge to you: live in a way that only makes sense if Jesus is coming back soon. That's what it means to live ready.

3. Faithful to your charge (vv. 45–47)

Most sobering in **this parable** to me is how Jesus describes the fate of those who neglect their Master's return. They are (vs. 46) given severe punishment and assigned a place with the unfaithful.

Note: these aren't overtly evil people, just people who failed to actively pursue their task.

This is not the only place Jesus taught this. Later in Luke Jesus tells a story about a Master who went away and left 3 servants with different amounts of money: "Wicked servant."

Summit, we live in a land of abundance. And that is God's gift to us. But it is so easy **to become so besotted with the benefits and pleasures** that come from success that we forget WHY God gave them to us. **C.S. Lewis famously said**, "Wealth has a way of knitting a man's heart to this world." We forget that God gave us what he gave us for eternal investment, not temporary pleasure.

Question: Have you asked yourself why Jesus gave you what he gave you, and are you faithfully investing it?

- College students, have you offered your career to him? If he came back, would he say, "Why are you doing THAT?"
- Have you offered your talents to him and asked, "What did you give me this for and what do you want me to do with it?"
- **What resources do you have that**, if Jesus came back, he'd say, "Why are you holding onto that? Did you ever even ask why I gave that to you?"

What are you doing with your life? Most of you know I have a new book out by that title and it's the question I think every Christian should consider. Especially if you're in college or high school or starting your career or nearing retirement, it's something you need to ask. Are you wasting your life, or are you fulfilling your purpose?

Blessed are those who are awake to their task and active in it when the master comes!

Conclusion

Maybe you're sitting there saying, "Well this sounds great. I'd love to live this way, but it's **easier said than done.**" In this parable, Jesus tucks in some amazing things that give you the motivation to do this. **For example, vs. 37** is a surprising verse. **³⁷ 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.**

What is the master doing serving the servants? This is crazy. Masters don't come home and serve the servants. But this Master does. Our salvation is not about our service to him but his extravagant gift to us. This is a Master who has served you at the cost of his own life. Though he was in the form of God...

Friend, this is the gospel!

Plus, what he offers us is extravagant. **44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.** "Truly I say to you" means, "I know this is hard to believe, but this is actually true." He will put us in charge of all his possessions. I'm not even sure what this means, but God destined you to rule. He's not talking about a higher class of slave; he's talking about making you co-heirs with Jesus. Part of his family. "Behold what manner of love... that we should be called the children of God." Not slaver, but children.

You may read this parable as threatening. But consider this. Undoubtedly, we deserve the punishment of the wicked servants. And what punishment were they supposed to receive? **Vs. 46.** They were supposed to be cut in pieces. That's exactly what happened to Jesus. ³

- **I don't fear the coming of my Master** because just as he served me in the past by dying for my sins so he will serve me in the future by establishing me as a co-ruler and a son.
- *How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song, will ever be! How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me!*

Doesn't that make you want to be generous? We can 'gird our loins' and serve others just as he served us!

I want you to hear from a Summit family that is striving to apply these principles to live as faithful stewards. Ken and JoAnn are retirees from our Brier Creek Campus, where Ken serves as an Elder, and they are leveraging this season of life to seek first God's kingdom. I pray their story inspires you to jump in...

[Video]

[Recap and Celebration of FIRST](#)

³ Tim Keller's sermon, "Forward-Back Living" (Luke 12:32–46), was helpful here.

