

Reaching the Lost

Are you ready to meet the Lord?

Intro: Let's turn to Luke 12.

There was a man who was barber and a member of the church. After a highly motivating lesson on personal work, he became very zealous to do his part. He had determined that he would not miss the next opportunity to try to save a soul and that the first customer to his barbershop the next day would be his first prospect. The next day a customer came in and asked for a shave. He lathered him up; and then paused for a moment. Standing over him, he raised his gleaming razor and with the most serious voice, "Are you ready to meet the Lord?" Not very good timing.

A while back someone sent me an email message with some funny church marquees. One of them said, "Honk if you love Jesus. Text while driving if you want to meet Him!"

We used to sing an old song about being ready to meet the Lord:

"When Jesus comes to reward his servants, whether it be noon or night, faithful to him will he find us watching, with our lamps all trimmed and bright. Oh, can we say we are ready, Brother, ready for the souls bright home. Say, will he find you and me still watching, waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come."

The idea of the song appears to have come from our text today. Jesus had spent the day in teaching and had been discussing the dangers of distraction to our spiritual goals by materialism and worldliness. It prompted him to issue a special lesson on spiritual readiness.

The need for spiritual readiness

Jesus reveals this idea with a figurative expression:

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight. (Luke 12:35)

The first phrase of this verse in Greek is "Let your loins be girded."

The loin is the area around the waist. Since Oriental people wore ankle length robes, they could not work very well in them without raising the bottom of the garment up and tying it around the waste with a belt. (This is what is meant by "girding the loins." When people did that, it meant they were ready for service or action.

Keep you lamps alight

People in the ancient world didn't enjoy the benefits of electricity like we do. A lamp was a flax wick in shallow bowl of olive oil. It had be filled often and the wick trimmed to keep the lamp burning.

Everyone in Jesus' audience had no trouble understanding His words. And we will not either if we think about what most people do each

evening before they go to sleep. They take off their work clothes and get into their bed clothes; and they turn off the lights. And essentially what Jesus is saying is, "keep your work clothes on and don't turn off the lights!"

The illustration that follows makes that clear:

And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; (Lk. 12:36-37)

Imagine a man who is a servant in his master's house; and the master has gone off to a wedding feast. The exact time of his return is unknown. So the servant had to be ready even if he came home in the middle of the night, at the second watch (9-12 midnight), or the third (midnight to 3 a.m.). And when the master arrived he wanted to be dressed and have the light ready so that he could meet him at the door, prepared to serve.

So should we be with the Lord. Always ready to welcome his return.

But now the illustration takes an interesting turn.

Truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. (Luke 12:36-38)

I can imagine that the slaves in Jesus' audience would not have been able to suppress a smile as Jesus related how the master, so impressed with the faithfulness of his servants, would say to them, "Thanks for staying up for me. Now, let me now tie up my garment and you fellows sit down here and let me fix you dinner and wait on you!"

Not!

However, unreal as that might have seemed to those slaves; it is an accurate portrayal of what our master will do when he returns. He will be prepared to bestow His blessings on those who are ready to meet Him when He returns. They will be blessed by the wonderful grace of our Lord who will provide for them a heavenly feast of blessings around God's throne.

And so we need to be ready for His coming. But, why?

The reason for spiritual readiness

And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect." (Luke 12:39-40)

We need to be ready because the Lord's coming will be unexpected.

This much has already been made clear in the story of the returning master. But now Jesus likens His coming to the unexpected appearance of a thief in the night. And observes that no man would allow his house to be broken into if he knew the exact time of the thief's

arrival. Instead he would take steps to make sure that no thief would steal from him.

So Jesus says He will come at a time when we do not think, like a thief; and that we should be ready at all times. The apostles Paul seems to build his exhortations of 1 Thes. 5:1-6 on these very verses from the gospels.

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (1 Thes. 5:2-3)

As Peter heard these words, he was impressed with them; but he wondered why the Lord should say such things in the presence of the multitudes. Was the message intended for the disciples alone? Perhaps He could have reasoned, "I can see how the multitudes would need exhortations to be ready, but why give such an exhortation to us?"

And Peter said, "Lord," are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" (Luke 12:41)

This gave Jesus opportunity to talk about:

The obligations of spiritual readiness

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave 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 assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Luke 12:42-48)

There is an element of mystery in this story. Perhaps we should first point out that, more often than not, parables have a main message that they communicate and the details of the story simply supplement that main message. Usually the point illustrated by the story is given at the end of the parable. And so it is here:

And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Luke 12:42-48)

And so the primary message is clear enough:

There is an immutable principle of justice recognized among men as well as in the heavenly courtroom. The level of one's accountability/responsibility is contingent upon his knowledge and actions.

And so in the earthly story, the servants were treated differently by the master because some knew their responsibility but were rebellious, while others were ignorant but still disobedient. Punishment was met out to each in keeping with his level of responsibility and his actions relative to it.

But Jesus seems to want to say more, especially to his disciples:

Jesus' parable illustrates two tiers of accountability

First there are those servants of privilege (who seem in this story to represent the apostles and those who are privileged to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom). In this class there are two responses:

One slave is pictured as knowing the master's will and faithfully and sensibly executing his responsibility in caring for the other slaves, providing their rations in keeping with the master's will. This slave is pictured as being rewarded with the trust of all the master's possessions. He is made full steward over all.

In contrast Jesus describes an unfaithful slave who, not only knew the master's will, but also deliberately neglected his trust and abused his fellow slaves. The master returns at an unexpected time and finding him unfaithful, executes him on the spot. He has abused his privilege as a steward of the master. His judgment is decisive and harsh.

Second Jesus describes another group of servants who seem to represent the multitudes who have not yet experienced the blessings of God's kingdom.

Those who knew the master's will and did not properly serve him are given many lashes.

Those who did not know his will are likewise punished but with few lashes.

Notice, there is no reward here at all! So there is no comfort in disobedience, whether by neglect or ignorance!

In sum: There is a greater accountability for those who have been entrusted with the blessings of God's grace.

The message to Peter and all of us is to make the best use of what God has given us. We are more obligated by our calling to be faithful and busily doing the Lord's will.

Sermons about readiness have a special application to those who think they are already prepared! The privileges of salvation should not encourage us to become lax in our service, but rather instead to be more faithful in serving the Lord and our fellow-servants.

However when it comes to those outside the kingdom, there is no premium placed on ignorance.

There is no ultimate blessing in not knowing the master's will.

Instead every person needs to be on a quest for the truth so that he can know how to please and be ready to meet the Master when He returns.

Conclusion: Are we ready for the coming of the Lord? How would He find us today?