

Ready or Not... (Part 1)

May 12th, 2013

Luke 12:35-48

"³⁵Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶and 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. ³⁷Blessed 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. ³⁸If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

I was on Facebook earlier in the week and a friend (not in this congregation, but a Christian I believe) posted this status update: "All I want in life right now is....a massage, and a pedicure, and a facial, and a cheeseburger, oh, and maybe a brownie too." Now I know it's just Facebook, and that probably isn't a really true, sincere reflection of the deepest desires of this person's heart. But it does raise a provocative question: how would you fill in that blank? "All I want in life right now is _____". Maybe you want to be a mom, or have your kids move out of the house, or get \$X in the bank, whatever.

If this passage of Scripture has its intended effect on us, then I think we'd see that the only true, fitting answer to this question is, "Jesus to come back." That's what this passage is about: it's about Jesus coming back from heaven to earth, and about how we as disciples of Jesus need to be prepared for that coming. So let's look at these verses and note, first, the kind of attitude we're to have about Jesus' coming, and then we'll look at what Jesus says here to strengthen that attitude within us.

The Son of Man is Coming

Actually, before we talk about the attitude we're to have, let's take a minute to get in our minds this fact that Jesus *is* coming: "⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." So be clear that the imagery used here (master coming

home from a wedding feast, thief coming in the middle of the night) is intended to convey that Jesus -- the Son of Man -- will indeed come, not this time as a suffering servant (the way He did 2,000 years ago), but as Lord and King and Judge. That's what the title Son of Man (which Jesus used for Himself 25 times in this book) refers to:

"¹³I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man (so not a mere man, He's coming from heaven), and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (A divine King, no angel)

Be Ready

That's what Jesus is coming to do, which He speaks of in verse 40. It is a certain event, that is coming at an uncertain time ("...at an hour you do not expect"). And that's what necessitates the attitude that Jesus calls for here, one of eagerness and readiness and alertness and expectation. He says it a number of different ways in this text: stay dressed for action (v.35, lit, "Let your loins stay girded", ie. someone ready to spring into action in a moment), keep your lamps burning (v.35), stay awake (v.37), and most plainly in verse 40, "be ready".

We'll talk more about what this condition of readiness involves next week, so I won't dwell on this long today. But it's worth noting that in both of the images Jesus uses here to describe His coming (the master, and the thief), He pictures it coming at night (this happens in other texts as well, cf. Matthew 25). Now nighttime is when you get sleepy, right? Second, third watch of the night (9PM-3AM), your eyes are heavy, you want to go to sleep. And so it seems that maybe Jesus is pointing out that the danger that what characterizes this world (and your life, if you're not vigilant) between the time of His first and second comings, is that it's easy for people to fall asleep spiritually.

The apostle Paul puts it this way: "¹¹Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." To be asleep is to forget about the nearness of your salvation (cf. 1Thess5:1-11). It's to be shaped more by temporary reality than by eternal reality, to be more moved by the reality of a pedicure or a cheeseburger than being face to face with the Lord of the universe.

Now I said I don't want to be too hard on that person, but what's more real to you? Do you find more comfort in thinking about a summer vacation, or in meeting Jesus on that great day? More consolation in getting down to that ideal weight, or getting that promotion, or the kid potty-trained, than reclining at table with Jesus in the Kingdom of God? Do you invest more mental and emotional energy in the color of your carpet or your landscaping than you do in the appearing of our great God and Savior coming on the clouds? Are your lamps burning, or has the tyranny of circumstances left you sleeping?

Not How-to's, but a Taste of Heaven

So when Jesus says to be dressed for action, to keep your lamps burning, to stay awake, to be ready, He's using a number of images to press home the urgency of exercising constant, continual effort and vigilance to keep a fresh grasp on the magnificence of Jesus. Now for the rest of the time I want to help you have the motivation to do that. Yes, I could work through the different images Jesus gives here in more detail, and talk about practical strategies for keeping awake (read the Bible, pray, fellowship, corporate worship, etc.).

But that's not what you really need this morning. The best way to produce the appropriate response to Jesus' coming is not through a list of how-to's, but to give you a taste of heaven. You are alert, and watchful, and expectant for the things you really look forward to. Kids, does anyone need to give you pointers on how to be eagerly

anticipating the end of the school year? If the coming of Jesus is the longing of your soul, you won't be asleep! To be sure, Jesus calls us to vigilance, but He does so by giving His disciples a picture of the glory that is come when He comes:

"³⁷Blessed 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. ³⁸If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!"

This is an astonishing thing! Jesus says that if you keep your lamps burning, and if you're dressed and ready for service, He Himself will focus all of the immensities and infinities of His power to serve you...to satisfy, to heal, to cleanse, to gladden you, as though He were the slave and we were the masters. Maybe that's the first coming, but not when He comes as King (remember Revelation 19), white war horse, sword coming out of His mouth, King of kings, Lord of lords, treading His enemies under the winepress of the fury of His wrath, seated on His throne. Yes, He will come down from that throne, bind Himself with a towel, and tell us to kick back and relax, and *He* will serve *us*.

This is breathtakingly beautiful to imagine. If the omnipotent God who can scatter stars like we scatter sand through our fingers, if He takes all of His power and wisdom and creativity and brings it to bear on making you happy, what kind of job do you think He can do? And He *really* wants you to know this; the repetition of "blessed", the "Truly, I say to you..." are meant to give you deep confidence that Jesus really means what He says here. When He comes, He will put you in the place of honor and serve you!

Ten Ways Jesus Will Serve you When He Comes

How will Jesus serve you? From the New Testament, I can think of at least ten ways:

1. Jesus will serve you by raising your body from death

"¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." (1Thess4)

"²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." (1Cor15)

"⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1Cor15)

2. Jesus will serve you by transforming your lowly body to be like His glorious body

"²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Phil3)

"²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1John3)

"⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." (1Cor15)

"⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt13)

3. Jesus will serve you by restoring the natural world from the effects of the curse to be your eternal playground

"²⁸Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world (lit, the regeneration), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne..." (Matt19)

"²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago." (Acts3)

*"¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8)*

"¹¹Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; ¹²let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy ¹³before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness." (Psalm 96)

"³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him." (Rev 21)

4. Jesus will serve you by reuniting you with loved ones who have died in Christ

"¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thess 4)

"¹⁴knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Cor 4)

5. Jesus will serve you by judging all unrepentant wickedness and evil

"⁷...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed." (2 Thess 1)

"⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey

unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." (Romans2)

"¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed...¹³But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2Pet3)

6. Jesus will serve you by transforming your sufferings into eternal glory

"¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2Cor4)

"¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom8)

"¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1Pet5)

7. Jesus will serve you by allowing you to appear with Him in glory

"⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Col3)

"⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2Tim4)

8. Jesus will serve you by commending you as having pleased Him

"²¹Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." (Matt25)

"⁴²And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.'" (Matt10)

*"⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."
(Eph6)*

9. Jesus will serve you by allowing you to rule and reign with Him on the New Earth

"⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." (Rev22)

"²¹The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev3)

*"¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;"
(2Tim2)*

10. Jesus will serve you by dwelling with you forever in perfect, face-to-face fellowship

"³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." (Rev21)

"⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." (Rev22)

*"²⁸When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all."
(1Cor15)*

Now, do you see, "All I really want in life is...." Jesus to come back! Every longing you have is, at bottom, a longing for this. Everything you've **ever** longed for will be will be multiplied by a trillion in your heart in that first second before Him. And this is no fantasy; it is *history*. In the words of an old liturgical refrain: "Christ has died, Christ

has risen, Christ will come again!" The hope of a Christian isn't a wishful grasping at an uncertain tomorrow, but a confident expectation rooted in the reality of what transpired two thousand years ago (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4).

Future Service, Guaranteed by Past Service

The greatest assurance Jesus ever gave that He would come on the last day and dress Himself to serve and have us recline at table for Him to come and serve us, is that He already has:

"⁶Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

He has taken the form of a servant once, to pay the penalty for your sin, your persistent serving of yourself in serving your rightful and true Master. And He rose from death on the third day to guarantee that the payment has been made in full. Have you any reason to doubt that He will come again, to serve you in the Kingdom of His Father (How do you know this salvation is yours? You're heeding the command):

"²⁸Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

So wait, and wait eagerly. What blessing awaits!

"¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action (lit, girding up the loins of your mind), and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ..."

Truly I say to you, Your King will soon come, at an hour you don't expect, and you will rule with Him in an experience that will make the deepest thrills of this life seem like eating cardboard. So be ready!