

Ready, or Not?

Luke Series #35

Luke 12:35-59

David Sunday

September 22, 2013

God, we thank You that Your Word is living and searches us. Even as we look into it, it is reading our hearts. We pray for Your Holy Spirit to empower the preaching and hearing of Your Word. Use this message to tune our hearts to Your purposes, alert us to what You are doing in the world and ready us for Your coming. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

If I were to summarize the message of this passage, I would say, "Ready or not, Jesus is coming again!" He is coming whether we are ready for Him or not. You are not likely to hear this on CNN or Fox News. What if we were to poll the leading scientists, scholars or future predictors of our age and ask them, "What are some of the breakthroughs that might happen to humanity in the next 50 years?" I think it is unlikely any of them would tell you: "Perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth in the next 50 years." It is not on the minds of most people. Most are not thinking about what Christians call: "...our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Yet though the world is not thinking about the return of Christ, we Christians should ever keep this glorious event and reality on our minds. The return of Christ is so important that in the 260 chapters of the New Testament, it is mentioned 318 times.

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, the angels said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). The apostles spoke uniformly of their hope in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself repeatedly spoke of His return. The second-to-last verse of the New Testament says, "*He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon'*" (Revelation 22:20). John the Apostle responds to those words of Jesus with these words that are the cry of the Christian's heart: "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" That is how we should feel as God's people. "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!"

As we look at Luke 12, remember this was something Jesus spoke to thousands of people. Look at Luke 12:1 to picture the context: "*In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first...*" In the presence of

these thousands, Jesus takes up this theme of readiness for His return. It could hardly be a more important or urgent message for us today than to hear we should be ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us walk through this passage section by section:

1. Since we do not know when Jesus will come, we must stay awake (35-40).
2. Since His absence is only temporary, we must maintain faithfulness in our stewardship (41-48).
3. Since His coming creates a crisis, we must be decisive in our commitment and allegiance to Him (49-59).

We Must Stay Awake

³⁵ “Stay dressed for action 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! 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.”

The key here is the discipline of watchfulness. Since we do not know when Jesus will come, we must stay awake. We see it in Luke 12:35, “*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...*” Jesus is telling the story of a wealthy master of a household with many servants. This master has gone to a wedding feast, which in Hebrew culture could last seven days. When the master would come home from the feast was anyone’s guess. However, the master has servants who honor and care for him. They are staying awake and ready, like a good dog who hears the garage door opening and stands waiting for his master’s return.

These servants keep their loins girded—their garments tied up in their belts. Even at night they stay dressed for action, keep trimming the wicks and filling the lamps with oil so the house will be well-lit when their master gets home from the journey. They don’t want him to come home and find them all sleeping, or cause him to have to carry his own luggage into the house. They want to be ready to serve him when he comes.

I hope this is the way my family will be when I return home from Morocco in a week. It would be nice for them to have everything ready for my return and maybe even have some chocolate chip cookies on the table. Even if we get delayed in customs, arrive home a lot later than anticipated or return in the

middle of the night, when someone in the family is waiting for the return, they are saying, "I love you. I missed you and am so glad you're home. I couldn't sleep until I saw your face."

Jesus says that should be our attitude about His return. There should be a holy excitement and anticipation, a readiness to greet Him upon His return. We should miss Him. Yes, Christ is with us right now through His Holy Spirit and we praise God for that. But He is still absent. There is a separation that we long to see resolved. We are waiting for our Master's return and as His people should not get too accustomed to His absence or comfortable with the separation. "This is how Jesus' followers are to wait for Him. It is not to be a passive, lethargic wait but one filled with active service, continual preparation and joyous anticipation" (Hughes).

Jesus says in Luke 12:37 that those servants who wait for Him in that way will be blessed. "*Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.*" Then Jesus says something stunning. The Master is so delighted at the love, loyalty and longing of His servants for His return that instead of them serving Him when He comes back, "*Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service [Who will dress Himself? The Master] and have them [His servants] recline at table, and he will come and serve them.*" Have you ever known a Master Who wears a servant's clothing and invites His servants to sit down at a feast He has prepared? What master would ever stoop so low as to empty himself of his own rights and take the form of a servant?

As we read the book of Revelation, we are led to anticipate that very thing. There will be a marriage supper of the Lamb where Christ will gird Himself in the robes of a servant and serve His people. As the hymn says,

Then He'll call us home to Heaven, at His table we'll sit down;
Christ will gird Himself and serve us with sweet manna all around.

(from Brethren, We Have Met to Worship by George Atkins, 1819).

That is an amazing reversal. Only Jesus serves like this. Only Jesus is the kind of Master Who says, "I did not come first to be served but to serve and to give Myself as a ransom for many."

This serving didn't end at the cross but continues to the point of His return. Jesus says, "*If he comes in the second watch [midnight], or in the third [three in the morning], and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!*" The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has provided for us everything needed for us to be ready at His coming. He has provided the dress we are supposed to wear in the robes of His own righteousness. He clothes those who trust in Him in these robes. He has provided the oil that keeps the lamps burning through the indwelling and ministry of the Spirit. He has illuminated us with the light of His gospel. In light of all He has done to prepare us for His return, our attitude toward that return should be one of eager longing. Let us cultivate that kind of longing.

In Luke 12:39-40, Jesus switches to a different metaphor. Now He calls us the masters and compares Himself to a thief. “*But know this, that if the master of the house [this time it is us] had known at what hour the thief was coming, 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.*” This is kind of ‘Security 101.’ If you get an email saying, “I am a burglar and plan to be at your house tonight at 1:59 am and 30 seconds,” you will be ready for that burglar when he comes. You will be ready with a whole legion of police officers in the backyard who are ready to pounce on him. You wouldn’t let your house get broken into if you knew at what time the thief was coming.

But Jesus and the Apostles tell us that will be what His coming is like for many. He will come like a Thief in the night. They won’t be expecting Him. His coming will be troubling to them because they haven’t gotten ready for Him.

Jesus’ point in telling us both of these parables is in Luke 12:40: “*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*” He is saying we should expect the unexpected and be prepared. We don’t know when He will come but know He will come.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne was a Scottish minister who died at the age of 29 but had an incredible impact for the gospel. He would travel around Scotland and preach to different ministers. The story is told that he would sometimes ask them, “Do you believe Jesus will return tonight?” Usually, they would all sheepishly respond, “Well, no. I don’t really think He will come back tonight.” M’Cheyne would say, “*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (Luke 12:40).

The fact that we do not expect Him to come back does not in any way lessen the possibility He may come this very evening. There should be a readiness, eagerness and anticipation. As I read the New Testament, I see that kind of anticipation in the apostles. I don’t see any sense that the coming of the Lord may be thousands of years away. Yes, it may be but it also may be now. It seems there is an expectation that our Lord could come at any time and there is a longing for that coming. We don’t know when but know He will. The truth is we are 750,000 days closer to the return of Christ than Paul, Peter and John were when they wrote the New Testament.

So we should be eagerly longing for His return. As one old Christian has said, “Live as if Jesus died on the Cross last night, rose from the dead this morning, ascended to the right hand of the Father this afternoon and is coming again tomorrow.”

Watchfulness and wakefulness are the watchwords for this section. Are you too accustomed to Jesus’ absence? Is there in your heart a longing for His return?

We Must Maintain Faithfulness in Our Stewardship

⁴¹ Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" 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. ⁴⁸ 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 key word here is faithfulness. Since His absence is only temporary and we know He is coming back, we must maintain faithfulness. Peter asks a question in verse 41: *"'Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?'"* Jesus doesn't directly answer Peter's question but starts talking to him about the reality of stewardship. He anticipates the fact that He will be away for a while but will entrust to His servants tasks and responsibilities. He is going to one day come back and call for an accounting of these. He says, *"'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? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes'"* (Luke 12:42-43).

Jesus says that for those who are faithful in service to Him, there will be the prospect of greater, higher, nobler service in the life to come—in the new creation. Look at Luke 12:44. *"'Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.'"* The service we render to Jesus in this age is preparation for the new creation and life to come when we will continue serving in a nobler, higher, more rewarding way in the presence of Jesus Himself.

The way to watch and wait for His coming is to stay active in serving in the sphere to which He has called you. It is not to passively wait or to be checking the calendar and trying to figure out when the time will be. Rather, it is being active in His service.

On May 19, I read an article in CNN by Bob Green. He spoke about a day in American history that was known as 'The Day of Darkness.' The date was May 19, 1780 when darkness covered New England in the middle of the day. Around noon, everything went black. The sun seemed to be erased. It wasn't an eclipse or even a thunderstorm. Suddenly and inexplicably, light disappeared from the world. The citizens were terrified as minutes started to feel like months. One person wrote, "The birds having

sung their evening song disappeared and became silent... The fowls retired to roost... Objects could not be distinguished but at a very little distance; and everything bore the appearance and gloom of night.”

This went on for many hours and people started thinking it was Judgment Day—a precursor to the return of Christ. Many businesses shut down. In fact, in the Connecticut legislature there was a motion to adjourn for the day because they thought judgment was coming. A godly, older Puritan in the legislature by the name of Abraham Davenport rose to vigorously protest his colleagues’ wishes to adjourn. He said, “I am against adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty.”

I also want to be active in what God has called me to do until He comes. Jesus says we should be cultivating this attitude of faithfulness to Him.

He then makes it clear that God’s judgment will come for those who have not been faithful to Christ in this time of His absence. Luke 12:45 is a very sobering, serious statement. Jesus anticipates that there will be those who take advantage of His absence to be abusive in the treatment of His flock, negligent in their ministry of God’s Word and indulgent in their pursuit of earthly pleasures. I believe Jesus is speaking in verses 45-47 of those who are false teachers in His church, false shepherds among His flock. The judgment upon them when He returns will be severe.

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 (verses 45-46).

That is very harsh, severe language. The mouth of our Savior speaks of the severity of divine judgment, which is something people today don’t want to hear or believe. Sixty years ago, A.W. Tozer said, “The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly, has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions.” There are many who want to believe that God would never punish the ungodly. However, our Lord Himself makes it very clear that He will do so.

Jesus makes it clear that it is not only the ungodly but all of humanity who will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ. The standard of judgment at the Judgment seat of Christ is not a simple ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty.’ Those verdicts are declared. Those who trust in Jesus Christ are not guilty and will stand before His presence faultless and with great joy. But there is more going on at the judgment than simply determining who is in Christ and who is not. Even those in Christ will be judged according to their works and rewarded according to our faithfulness.

Jesus speaks of this in Luke 12:47-48:

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.

There will be a judgment according to what we have known. Ignorance will not be an excuse. Those who knew their Master's will but did not do it will be judged more severely; those who did not know but still disobeyed God will experience discipline. Much will be required of those who were given many talents and high responsibilities. *“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required”* (Luke 12:48).

This should encourage us to remain faithful to our Master until He comes and to labor diligently in the vocation He has given us. It should also drive us to the arms of our Savior. Praise God that the message of Christianity is not that of a religion for the faithful. It is a gospel for those who are unfaithful. Praise God that though we have often not been as faithful as we should even as redeemed servants, we have a Savior Who came to serve us and Who gave His life as a ransom for us. The more the truth of that ransom, the goodness of His sacrifice and the fullness of the redemption He has provided for us sinks into our lives; the more we want to live wholly for Him in His service and actively serve Him with the strength He supplies until He comes. Faithfulness is the way to wait and watch for His coming.

We Must Be Decisive In Our Commitment & Allegiance To Him

⁴⁹ *“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”*

⁵⁴ *He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?*

⁵⁷ *“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”*

When Jesus says, “*I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!*” He is not talking about a warm, cozy fire! He is speaking of the gospel being that which ignites the world ablaze with light. As His gospel spreads throughout the world, it spreads like a fire and everyone will eventually be caught up in that blaze. For those who repent and run to Jesus and trust in His salvation, the fire of His gospel will refine and purify. For those who reject Him, that fire will be a consuming fire.

Jesus says of the gospel, “Before that fire is set ablaze and spreads throughout the world, He first has a baptism to undergo.” Luke 12:50 is speaking of His death by crucifixion. He will be submerged under a flood of pain and suffering. He says His soul is in distress and anguish as He anticipates what He must suffer for our salvation.

Jesus’ first coming into the world did not result in everyone loving and receiving Him but in many despising and rejecting Him. Jesus says that same effect will continue in history until He comes. Look at Luke 12:51 and tell me how you would answer this question if Jesus were to ask it of you today: “*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?*” You would probably say, “Yes.” Isn’t that what the angels said when Jesus was born? “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*” (Luke 2:14). For those who receive Christ, the truth is that there is peace with God. There is peace within as the Holy Spirit dwells within us and peace that rules in the body of Christ for those who belong to Jesus.

However, the reality is that in this world Jesus’ coming forces a decision and choice. You cannot remain neutral. The choice creates a division. Jesus says we should not be surprised by that. Luke 12:51 continues: “*No, I tell you, [I did not come to bring peace] but rather division.*” In the world, there will be division based on people’s response to Jesus until He comes. That division will sometimes painfully come into the middle of families.

The world is not comfortable with the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ. It likes to take the attitude of Jim Carrey who said on 60 Minutes: “I’m a Buddhist; I’m a Muslim; I’m a Christian. I’m whatever you want me to be... It all comes down to the same thing.” Jesus says, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). There is a crisis and a decision that needs to be made about how you will respond to Jesus.

Jesus says in Luke 12:54-56 that it is tragic when people are so blinded by religious hypocrisy they do not realize the urgency and seriousness of this choice. They can tell the signs of the weather. If there is a cloud or wind coming from the south, they can interpret what kind of weather is coming. But they do not see Jesus’ coming into this world as a crisis that must result in a decision.

Jesus says it is urgent for us to decide. In Luke 12:57-59, He compares this decision and urgency to being carried off to a magistrate by an accuser. He says it would be far better to come to terms with your

accuser before you get before the Judge. If the Judge judges you by the letter of the law, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny (verse 59).

The reality is that all human beings are accused by God's Holy Law. We have many accusations against us and were we to face the Judge with those accusations unresolved, we would never pay the last penny. Our judgment would be eternal. Jesus is saying, "Come to terms with Me now, before it is too late."

We are going often sing "Jesus is Lord! A shout of joy, a cry of anguish..." (from Jesus is Lord by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend). That's what it will be like at His coming. There will be shouts of joy amongst those who are ready and cries of anguish amongst those who have not decisively come to terms with the accusations of God's Holy Law. It is urgent that we resolve this now.

In February of 1982, the *Reader's Digest* told the following story:

During a training session for soldiers who were about to make their first parachute jump, the Sergeant explained how to open the reserve chute if the main chute didn't open. A Private nervously raised his hand and asked, "Sergeant, if my main chute doesn't open, how long do I have to pull my reserve?" The Sergeant looked directly into the young Private's eyes and replied earnestly, "The rest of your life, soldier. The rest of your life."

You have from now until you hit the ground. Ed Pienkowski informed me that it is actually 400 feet above the ground. If you don't have your reserve pulled then, you are dead.

How long do you have to come to terms with God through simple faith in Jesus and repentance from your sins? You have from now until you meet Jesus face to face. You do not know when that will be. Whether you face Him in your death or at His return, you really do not know how long you have to get ready to meet Him. But we know He is coming again. Jesus says now is the time to make things right, to put your trust and hope in Him, to give your life wholly to Him. Ready or not, Jesus is coming again.

For believers, this is the best news imaginable and it fills them with joy. I remember when I first read the words of an English reformer named Lord Shaftesbury. At the end of his life, he said, "I do not think that in the last forty years I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord's Return." I read that statement about 14 years ago and was very convicted. At that point, I could have easily lived a week without consciously thinking about Jesus' return.

Thankfully, a lot has happened in my life and our lives in the last 14 years. God has used much of what has happened to create in me a much more intense longing for the coming of Christ. I cannot say I am influenced by His return every hour but not a day goes by that my heart is not crying, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly." I'm ready by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ for Him to come again. Are you ready?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for speaking so clearly in Your Word of the reality of Your judgment and of Christ's return. This is a glorious hope for Your people. We long for that day. I pray You would use our songs of worship to cultivate in us an eager longing for Your return. Lord, free us from all the distractions that result in us looking to other things. Help us lift our eyes, know our redemption draws nigh and rejoice in that fact. May that motivate us to live wholeheartedly for You in all the days You give us.

I pray for the person who is not ready to meet You. I thank You that through the servanthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have made the way so clear, free and simple. Thank You that we can come to You as sinful people and say, "'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'" (Luke 18:13) and know You have fully paid for all our sins through the death of Your Son Jesus on the cross. He rose from the dead to give us everlasting life. I pray You would be working in the heart of anyone who does not know that he or she is ready. It's in Jesus' name we pray that You would work faith and repentance into each heart; move in each of our hearts, Father. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](http://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net