

THE FAITHFUL AND WISE MANAGER

Luke 12:35-53

Key Verse: 12:42

“The Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?’”

Jesus’ teachings in chapter 12 are focused on his disciples, yet in a public context, surrounded by crowds. Jesus wanted to raise them as God’s servants who could shepherd people. So he taught them not to fear those in positions of authority, but to fear God who is the ultimate authority. He taught them not to be greedy, or worry about their future security, but to seek God, who is pleased to give them his kingdom. In today’s passage Jesus teaches us to please God by being faithful and wise managers. A manager differs from a common laborer because he bears responsibility. Jesus’ disciples should take responsibility as managers in God’s mission, as well as for God-given roles as parents, spouses, and workers. I respect responsible people. One of our neighbors, an Italian man named Anthony, has lived in our neighborhood for over 60 years. He is very diligent in mowing the grass, shoveling snow, and picking up garbage. He constantly oversees what is going on and encourages all neighbors to be watchful and diligent. Some people are irritated by this. But I really like his sense of responsibility. It is not easy to take responsibility. This is why many delay marriage, avoid having children, ignore civic duties, and try to retire early. Many waste their precious lives in petty pleasures. No one can be truly happy living in this way. On the other hand, when we live as faithful and wise managers, with a sense of responsibility, our lives have deep meaning and we can receive God’s reward. Jesus does not force us to take responsibility. We must decide to take it. Let’s learn to be faithful and wise managers.

First, be ready (35-40). In verses 35-40, the key word is to **“be ready.”** Jesus uses two metaphors to help us understand this. The first metaphor is of a servant waiting for his master to return from a wedding banquet (35-38). Modern wedding receptions last a few hours. But in Jesus’ time they lasted from four to seven days. Not knowing when their master would return, his servants needed to stay alert to be ready to serve him immediately. When the master finds them watching in this way, what happens? To their surprise, there is no barking of commands, or extra burdens of work. Instead, there is a

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role reversal: the servants will recline at the table ready to eat, while the master will put on the servant's clothes, prepare the food, and serve them. The master will say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness”** (Mt 25:21). What a blessing! Though the servants were only ready and watching, the blessings they received were unimaginable. The second metaphor is of a thief breaking into a house (39). Thieves do not make appointments. They depend on the element of surprise. The only way to protect our property from thieves is to be ready all the time. Jesus' second coming will be sudden and unexpected. Jesus concluded, **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him”** (40).

Being ready is more than knowing the motto, **“Be ready.”** There are practical ways in which we need to be ready. What, then, marks our readiness? First of all, awareness that Jesus is coming again. Verse 35 says, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning....”** This does not mean that we should always wear a suit and tie like a secret service agent, or that we should not sleep during the night. It does mean to be spiritually awakened in the awareness that Jesus will come again. We don't know when he will come, or when we will go to him. Each day may be our last in this world. Being aware of this, we cannot waste time and energy on self-indulgence. Rather, we use every moment most fruitfully. In these days, we see many signs of the end of the age. Just this week there was a tragic terrorist attack in Nice, France on Bastille Day. It was unimaginable. When we hear about such events, we are furious and fearful. But Jesus prophesied that such things must happen, like birth pains which precede his glorious return. And according to his command, the gospel must be preached to all nations. This is happening. God is working to save people all over the world, including in Muslim countries. So we can know that the Day of Jesus' coming again in power and great glory is approaching. Wycliffe Bible Translators have a sense of urgency about Jesus' coming. So they moved their goal of translating the Bible into all languages from the year 2050 to the year 2025, just 8 ½ years from now. We don't know when Jesus will come again. But God promises that he will come. When we are aware of this, we can have hope no matter how dreadful the world is. We can overcome fear and preach the gospel with a sense of final victory.

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The second mark is being ready to serve Jesus. Being ready to serve Jesus is not easy. Sinful man is naturally self-centered and ready to serve himself. Our mindset should be changed from self-centered to Christ-centered in order to be ready to serve Jesus. This can only happen by the grace of God when a person is born again by the Spirit and grows in the mind of Christ. For example, before conversion, Augustine was under the influence of Manicheism. He was overwhelmed by pleasure-seeking desires and ready to do as his sinful nature directed. Powerless to change, he struggled to get free, weeping, "How long, O Lord?" Then he heard a child singing, "Take it and read it." He snatched a nearby Bible and read Romans 13:13-14. **"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."** When he was clothed with Christ, he was ready to serve Christ. Then God used him as a great shepherd in his time and a blessing to future generations. When anyone is clothed with Christ, the Holy Spirit fills their hearts and empowers them to serve Christ.

The third mark is to keep our lamps burning. The fire in our lamp represents the love of God within us. Though Christ has come to dwell in our hearts through faith, we need to keep our love for him burning. For example, when people marry, their hearts are burning with love for one another. But as time passes, this first love can grow cold. Then misunderstanding and conflict arises. That is why we must keep our love burning. Many marriage counselors strongly advise setting aside quality time together on a regular basis. Some call it "date night." It may require hiring a babysitter or missing other opportunities. But the very act of prioritizing this relationship is an act of love that kindles the fire. As their love grows, a couple matures and bears good fruit. The same is true in our relationship with Christ. We need to invest our time and energy to keep our love burning. We need to set aside time with Jesus in his word and prayer, and give it a priority. Then we can have heart to heart conversations with him. As he shares his heart with us, his love burns in our hearts. We can also share our heart cries that only he understands. This keeps passion burning, and makes us long for his coming again. As we grow in the love of God, we can be a source of light in this dark world. Let's remember that the marks of readiness are: awareness of Jesus' coming again, readiness to serve him, and keeping our lamps burning.

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Second, be faithful and wise managers (41-53). Throughout the gospels, whenever Jesus talks about his second coming, he addresses all believers. Jesus did the same here. This aroused something in Peter, and he asked, **“Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”** (41) It seems that Peter had an exclusive mindset. Perhaps he thought that Jesus’ glorious reward should only be given to the most loyal and sacrificial people like him. Jesus did not answer directly. Instead, he asked a counter-question, **“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?”** (42) In essence, Jesus invited anyone to receive his glorious reward by becoming a faithful and wise manager. We can say that Jesus made an open job offer. He stated the position, the qualifications, and the specific task. The position is **“manager.”** In Jesus’ time, this referred to the steward of a household. Stewards were entrusted to take care of the master’s property, his other servants, and even his children. They were given authority by the master commensurate with their responsibilities. Here we learn that Jesus wants to promote us from laborers to managers. But we must meet his qualifications.

Jesus’ qualifications do not regard education levels, or even work experience; they have to do with character. Jesus wants people who are faithful and wise. A faithful person is trustworthy and reliable; he commits himself to serve his master with single-hearted devotion. He is honest and sincere. Whether the master is watching or not, he does his best. The master can depend on him to carry out his duty consistently, without fail. In any segment of society, whether politics, business, the military, or any other, faithfulness is fundamentally important. Recently, many people have been discouraged by political leaders who seem unfaithful and dishonest. But in America’s history, there are some great examples of faithful people. As a young man, Abraham Lincoln earned the nickname, “Honest Abe,” due to his faithfulness. While working as a store clerk in New Salem, Illinois, if he ever realized that he had shortchanged a customer, he closed the shop and delivered the correct change right away—regardless of the amount or how far he had to walk. People recognized his integrity and asked him to mediate their disputes. According to Mr. Robert Rutledge, “Lincoln’s judgment was final in all that region of the country. People relied implicitly upon his honesty, integrity, and impartiality.”¹ As we know, he was later entrusted with the

¹ <http://www.greatamericanhistory.net/honesty.htm>

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presidency of the United States at a most crucial moment in our nations' history. To Jesus, managers in God's work are as important as any national leader. We should know that Jesus requires faithfulness first and foremost. 1 Corinthians 4:2 says, **"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."** There are many faithful people around us, including the legendary Dr. Elijah Park. We thank God for them. But we should realize that they were not born that way. By nature, we are all unfaithful due to the power of sin in us. Yet when we are born again and remain in Jesus, he makes us faithful, as he is faithful (Heb 13:8). God is faithful. David praised God: **"For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies"** (Ps 57:10). The prophet Jeremiah, in the midst of anguish, looked up to God and said, **"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"** (Lam 3:22-23). God's faithfulness is unfailing and it is the surety of our sanctification (1Th 5:23-24). When we trust in this God, we can all grow in the faithfulness of God.

Faithfulness is indeed a fundamental quality. But it is not enough for a good manager. Though we faithfully endeavor to carry out God-given mission, we reach limitations and need breakthroughs. This requires wisdom. Proverbs 3:15 says, **"Wisdom is more precious than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare to her."** How can we become wise? Proverbs 9:10 says, **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."** This wisdom comes from God and is different than worldly wisdom. According to James, worldly wisdom is associated with bitter envy, selfish ambition, disorder, and evil practices. It is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. Whatever benefit it gives is outweighed by bad consequences. **"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"** (Ja 3:13-18). This wisdom brings perfect, permanent solutions to the most difficult problems. We can have this wisdom when we fear God, learn from him, and pray. James 1:5 says, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you"** (Ja 1:5). God graciously answers this prayer for wisdom. Recently, through prayer, God gave me wisdom to encourage each fellowship leader to specialize in teaching one Bible book. I

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constantly need God's wisdom to serve Chicago UBF ministry. Please pray for me.

Jesus' job offer has a specific task: it is to give the servants their food allowance at the proper time. Spiritually speaking, Jesus wants his disciples to give the word of God to his people. The psalmist cried, **"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God"** (Ps 42:1). People are thirsty for God. Through his word, God satisfies our yearning for truth, love, purpose, holiness, and life. Through his word, God makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ and equips us to serve him. God is eager to entrust spiritually thirsty souls to those who will teach them the word of God without fail. In just about a month, our Chicago area campuses will be filled with students beginning a new fall semester. Among them are those whom God wants to raise as Jesus' disciples in our times. He will entrust them to faithful and wise managers who are ready to feed them with the living word of God. Let's submit our job application to Jesus. Let's prepare by updating our Bible study notes. Now I know that many of us have taught the Bible to young people faithfully, free of charge, sacrificing time, energy and money for many years. However, the result was rejection, complaints and being blamed. Feeling sorry, we want to retire from teaching the Bible. We prefer to care for pet dogs who are loyal, thankful and willing to follow us. Why should we continue to serve young people instead of pet dogs? This does not mean that we should not have pet dogs. But let's not give up teaching the Bible to young people. Let's update our resumes, include additional suffering we have endured, and apply again as Bible teachers for young people.

Our reward does not come from Bible students, but from God. Verses 43-44 say, **"It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."** When we have been faithful with the specific task Jesus has given us, he will entrust us with more. Finally, he shares with us his kingdom and makes us co-heirs with him. God's reward is beyond imagination. Even though we suffer much in this world, God's reward makes it worth it all. So Paul said, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"** (Ro 8:18).

We should also remember that we will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ. Sadly, some people abuse their privileges. They

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assume that the master's return will take a long time. They feel that a faithful life is boring. So they indulge in fleshly pleasures and abuse the other servants. They think they can repent just before the master comes. But he comes suddenly, and punishes them severely. They will be beaten with many blows for their intentional unfaithfulness (47). The unintentionally unfaithful will not avoid punishment, but they will be beaten with few blows (48). In verse 48b, Jesus explains his principle: **“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”** We should not waste time comparing ourselves with others. We are accountable to God for what he has entrusted to us. According to the measure of his trust, we should prove faithful.

Thus far, Jesus has been talking about his second coming. Before that Jesus had a mission on earth. In verse 49, Jesus says he came to bring fire on earth. This is the refining fire of division between believers and unbelievers. In verse 50, Jesus says he will go through baptism, which refers to his suffering, death and resurrection. Through this process, Jesus accomplished his salvation purpose. This gospel always brings two consequences: salvation to those who believe and judgment to those who do not believe. If some members of a family believe the gospel and others do not, conflict is inevitable (51-53). It should not surprise us even when it is among close family members. True peace will come as we stand firm in the gospel and our family members come to salvation through faith in Jesus.

Today the Lord invites each of us to be faithful and wise managers for his mission purpose. Let's accept his offer with a decision of faith.