**YOU ALSO MUST BE READY**

Luke 12:35–48

Key Verse: 12:40

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Have you ever been caught unprepared? If you have, you know the feeling, and it’s not good, is it? Sometimes we’re unprepared because something happens we totally didn’t expect. Or, it may be because we’ve just been negligent. In contrast, it’s such a great feeling to be ready for something, like being ready to bring our new baby home. In today’s passage Jesus tells us that the Son of Man is coming. It’s an essential element of our Christian faith. The only thing is, we have no idea when he’s coming. Wait—Christians have to live in a state of constant readiness? What does that even look like? How can we possibly live like that? And why should we? May God speak to us through his living words today.

In this travel section of Luke’s Gospel (9:52–19:27), in the span of just ten chapters, Jesus tells a total of 20 parables.[[1]](#footnote-1) That’s a lot of parables! Parables are illustrations taken from ordinary life. And Jesus is such a master at it. In them he mentions all sorts of personal effects, places and household objects,[[2]](#footnote-2) living things,[[3]](#footnote-3) and people from all walks of life,[[4]](#footnote-4) engaged in various activities.[[5]](#footnote-5) His parables describe our common human experience in such touching and familiar ways. It shows how deeply he understands our lives at home and at work, our family and civic responsibilities—and our religious hypocrisies. In these parables he captures the whole range of human emotions, and our foolishness. For many Christians, these chapters have been the most loved parts of the whole Bible. Through these parables Jesus challenges us to have real faith, not abstract or compartmentalized faith. He wants us to integrate our faith in him into every area of our lives, every relationship, all that we’re doing, every day. He’s not calling us out of the world; he’s sending his disciples to live in the real world each day with our eyes wide open and set on him and his kingdom, with kingdom priorities and values.

In today’s passage Jesus tells two parables. The first is a parable of servants awake and waiting throughout the night for their master to come home from a wedding feast. The second is a parable of a manager appointed to care for a household. Through both waiting servants and this manager, Jesus is showing us how to be ready. Ready for what? Ready for when he comes.

He mentions his coming here ten times (36,37,38,39,40,43,45,46). It’s a future event like no other. Earlier he told his disciples that “the Son of Man” is going to come “in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (9:26). On earth he was a suffering servant of all, who, in the greatest injustice, was rejected and killed. But God the Father is going to send him back with power and great glory (21:27). We call it “the Second Coming of Jesus.” It’s also called “the Great Reversal,” when the most humble One is going to be the most exalted One (1:52; 14:11; 18:14b; Php2:8–11). When he ascended into heaven, two angels told his disciples, “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Ac1:11b).

His coming is the real hope of all believers. Living in this fallen world, we long for that day (17:22). On that day, unlikely people are going to come from all over the world and join his kingdom (13:29). It’s going to be like a great banquet (14:17), and, like lightning that flashes and lights up the sky (17:24). Later Jesus predicts that when he comes, people will be so engrossed in this world, they won’t be ready (17:26–30). When he comes, he says he’ll be looking for “faith on earth” (18:8). At the end of his journey to Jerusalem, he tells one more parable to show us how to live until he comes (19:11–27). And just before his death, he says more about how to be ready for that final day (21:25–28,34–36). But in today’s passage Jesus just says, “...you also must be ready” (40). He means, “You too.” Then he illustrates what he means, in two ways.

First, awake and waiting (35–40). Read verses 35–36. “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, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.” These servants are waiting for their master to come back from a wedding feast. They could go to bed, but out of loyalty, they want to stay awake and be ready for their master as soon as he comes home and knocks at the door. “Stay dressed for action” in Greek literally means, in today’s language, “Keep your pants on!” Practically it means to always stay spiritually alert. To stress this, Jesus adds, “...and keep your lamps burning.” Lamps are burned at night, because night is a time of darkness. It’s a metaphor for the spiritual darkness we all live in. And in this verse the Greek emphasizes the word “your.” In the dark night, a servant can’t borrow somebody else’s lamp. He needs his own, in case everybody else has fallen asleep, to see how to get to the door and open it for his master. A lamp burning symbolizes personal faith, eager to serve our Lord Jesus at any time. It means having a personal prayer life, focused on Christ, depending on him, and actually “waiting” for him. It means we *want* him to come.

Read verse 37a. “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.” The word “awake” stands out. It means more than not sleeping; otherwise, we could never go to sleep again. The Greek word means to “watch,” which is how it’s often translated.[[6]](#footnote-6) Some Bible versions translate this word as “be alert.”[[7]](#footnote-7) To be “awake,” to “watch” or “be alert” is a spiritual state. In this parable it means to have the hope to see our Lord Jesus himself. It’s what we’re waiting for. But *are* we? The Bible encourages us to long to see him “face to face” someday (1Co13:12), to watch ourselves (Lk17:3) and to struggle to grow in purity like him (1Jn3:2–3) through the Holy Spirit’s help (Lk3:16; Ro15:16; 1Co6:11).

How will such waiting servants be “blessed”? Read verse 37b. “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 a promise! If he finds us awake and waiting when he comes, he’s going to dress as a servant, invite us to sit at his heavenly banquet table, and come and wait on us (13:29; 22:30; cf. Isa25:6; Rev19:9). His grace, humility and love for us is mind-boggling! He’s inviting us to hold onto this promise.

And he says more. Read verse 38. “If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!” The second or third watch of the night were in the deep-night when everyone else was fast asleep. He knows it’s going to be hard for us. He may be a long time in coming again. But however long it takes, however spiritually dark the times are or how lonely it gets, he’s encouraging us to stay awake and waiting, believing he’s coming again.

He concludes with a warning. Read verses 39–40. “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. So you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” The Bible repeatedly warns us that Jesus will come again like a thief (1Th5:2–3; 2Pe3:10; Rev3:3; 16:15), meaning unexpectedly. Here, Jesus himself is telling us to be prepared for him at any hour, any day. We’d like to know precisely when he’s coming, so that we can take it easy until then, and repent at the last minute. That’s our smartness, desire for control and sinful nature working against us. Jesus is warning us not to do that. He wants us to always be ready, and not to depend on ourselves, but totally depend on him.

Second, a faithful and wise manager (41–48). Look at verse 41. “Peter said, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?’” It’s a rare moment when Peter speaks up. He was confident of his relationship with Jesus. But as Jesus warns he’ll be coming like a thief, Peter wonders if he’s talking only to the uncommitted crowds.

How does Jesus respond? Read verse 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?’” With the words “Who then,” Jesus is speaking both to Peter and the disciples, and to anyone who seeks this noble task to care for God’s household (1Ti3:1a; Eph2:19). Jesus asks, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager?” He’s asking an incisive, sobering question. In Greek, “manager” literally means one who gives things out to those in a household, and in Jesus’ parable here, it’s “their portion of food.” He’s not talking about a cook making meals, or about business management. He’s talking about making sure people are getting spiritually fed on a regular basis, and at crucial times in their lives. None of us can survive spiritually on bread alone (4:4); to grow as a healthy person in Christ, we all need to feed on the word of God. God, in his sovereign will and purpose, sets his servants among his people to carry out this holy task.

Currently Peter has only a dim idea of what Jesus has called him to do. But later he would learn that Jesus had called him to feed his sheep (Jn21:15–17). Still today, our Lord Jesus himself is calling and holding his servants accountable for feeding his people with God’s word. We can’t do it if it’s only before people, for our own honor and glory; we’ve got to be feeding people the word of God before God himself, as our most solemn responsibility.

Paul wrote to his spiritual son Timothy: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2Ti4:1–2). We need to do it in the holy presence of God himself and of our King Jesus; he’s the judge of the living and the dead. We need to always keep the reality of his appearing and his kingdom in our hearts. He tells us to always be ready. He also tells us not to give people our own ideas, but to “preach the word.” He says, “reprove, rebuke and exhort.” “Reprove” means to convict; “rebuke” means to censure severely; “exhort” means to come alongside to comfort, and even beg. Again, we do these things not based on our own ideas, but based on God’s word. Paul writes just before this: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…” (2Ti3:16). To help people with God’s word the way Apostle Paul is describing requires “complete patience.” If we’re feeding people with God’s word faithfully and wisely, we can be ready for Jesus’ coming at any time, and we’ll be greatly rewarded in heaven (43–44).

Look at verses 45–46. “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.” It’s a warning that if we ignore Jesus’ coming, our sinful nature can take over and turn us into abusive and self-indulgent persons; if we live that way, in the end we’ll come under God’s judgment. Jesus concludes by telling us that there are many kinds of servants, but God’s judgment is very fair. Read verses 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.” The point is: God judges based on what we know. The more we know, the more he holds us accountable.

Read verse 40 again. May God help us to be spiritually awake and waiting for our Lord Jesus to come again at any time. May God help us to grow as faithful and wise managers before him, who give his people the word of God at the proper time, with the hope of his heavenly reward.

1. 12 of them are unique to Luke’s Gospel [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Personal effects* like moneybags, knapsacks and sandals, robes, rings and shoes, purple and fine linen clothing; *places* like houses and inns and palaces, private rooms, cellars and housetops, barns and towers, fields, synagogues, marketplaces, banks, roads, highways and hedges, graves and tombs; *household items* like beds and doors, tables and seats, lamps, baskets and stands, cups and dishes and herbs, leaven and flour, eggs, mustard seeds, salt and a manure pile, debts, bills, interest and wages put in savings, millstones and needles, burdens to carry, pennies and silver coins, grain, an inheritance, possessions, goods and treasures [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Living things* such as serpents, scorpions and fish; sparrows and ravens; lilies, grass and moths; pack animals, oxen and donkeys, a mother hen and her brood, sheep, fattened calves, young goats, dogs and camels; and a fig tree, mulberry tree and sycamore tree [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *People such as* Jewish or not, religious or not, men and women, old and young, including infants, rich neighbors and poor beggars, masters and servants, kings, noblemen and citizens, the prominent and those living out on the streets, friends and strangers, healthy and sick, robbers and victims, prostitutes, judges and widows [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Activities* such as sleeping and staying awake, eating and drinking, reclining at table, gardening and farming, baking and building, sweeping the house, searching and grinding, buying and selling, digging and begging, plowing and keeping sheep, working for someone or managing workers, going to the bank or to court or to war, getting married and hosting guests, finding something or someone who’s been lost, music and dancing, and adultery and divorce. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Mt25:13; 26:38,40–41; Mk14:34,37–38; 1Pe5:8; 1Co16:13; Col4:2) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (NET, NRSV,HCSB,NASB) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)