

On Your Mark, Get Set, ... Wait!

Luke 12:35-48

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for January 29, 2023

Stephen Davey

Many steps of obedience in the Christian life involve frequent moments of action. “Evangelize,” “pray,” “read the Word,” are just a few examples. But what about God’s command to wait? How do we fulfill that command with the same eagerness? Because, let’s face it, waiting is hard. But Jesus teaches in Luke 12 that as we wait for Him to return, how we wait will directly impact what it is exactly we are waiting for. So, let’s learn how to wait today!

Mention the end times, and just about everybody will start listening. In fact, just about everybody has an opinion.

Even unbelievers will have their opinion of what’s going to happen next. God has built eternity into our being, Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:11, which means people intuitively know there’s something more than this life.

Fortunately, the Lord has not left us in the dark.

When the Lord arose from the dead and appeared over the next few weeks to hundreds of eyewitnesses, He eventually gathered His disciples and gave them a final charge—to effectively go reach the world—and then He ascended before their very eyes, up into the clouds and then out of sight.

They stood there gaping at the sky, as if expecting Jesus to turn around. They weren’t quite sure. But then, two angels arrive to fill in the blanks, and they 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 1:11b

Simply put: He’s coming back.

Now the prophecy of His return is expanded and explained as the New Testament letters are completed.

I have read that of the 260 chapters we have in the New Testament, the return of Christ is mentioned no less than 318 times; that's one verse in every 25 that mentions something about the Lord's return.

R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume II (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 59

Frankly, we know a lot more about the subject than these early disciples did because of the completed Scriptures that we have today.

But listen, beloved, after all the debates about the timeline of prophetic events; after all the arguments, what we should never forget is this most basic fact: He's coming back. He's going to return just as literally and physically as He went up.

Now, because of completed Scripture, we know that His return will take place in two parts; first the rapture of the church, where the Lord comes again in the clouds and takes us up ***in the twinkling of an eye (I Corinthians 15).***

Then the second phase of His return, following the tribulation period on earth, will not be to the clouds for the church, but all the way to earth with the redeemed.

We will one day see Him, and in light of that future day, our lives should stand ready.

According to what Jesus is about to deliver, there's a certain way we should be living in the light of the fact that He is returning.

What I want to focus on today, as we return to Luke's Gospel account, is Luke's key verse in the next passage before us.

That key verse, and the theme of this passage, is in chapter **12 and verse 40; here it is where Jesus says:**

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

Luke 12:40

Now since this coming here is related to the context of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, this will be the second phase of His return, when the Lord returns all the way to earth to establish His kingdom, with His redeemed, regathering Israel, and setting up His capital city, which will be Jerusalem.

Still, Luke isn't interested at this point in laying out the prophetic timeline of Christ's coming; but he is interested in how we live our lives in light of it.

My purpose today is not to dive any deeper into the pool of end-time prophecy—that was all just an introduction.

If you'd like to read and study my four-year teaching series in Revelation, all those sermon manuscripts are available online—outlines, illustrations, footnotes—the entire transcript is available, free of charge.

Now I want to focus our attention today on Luke's primary theme. In light of Jesus' coming, here's how we should be living.

Let's back up for a moment or two and remember that so far, Luke has given us in real life, or in parable form, examples of what it looks like to live for ourselves, in the here and now, forgetting about the future.

How to be consumed by covetousness.

It began with a younger brother wanting his inheritance and wanting Jesus to settle the score.

Jesus told him he was greedy and then told a parable about a rich man who couldn't get enough—his barns were full, but he wished for more.

And then, the Lord challenged us for worrying about the basic needs we have in life.

So, we can summarize these three scenarios in Luke 12:

- Someone is whining about what he doesn't have—the younger brother.
- Someone is wishing for more of what he already has—the rich farmer.
- Someone is worrying about what he needs to have—the worried believer.

Jesus is effectively warning us:

- Don't whine about what you don't have.
- Don't wish for more of what you already have.
- Don't worry about what you need to have; instead, wait, and while you're waiting, watch, and while you're watching, work.

That's next here, as the Lord delivers two imperatives—two commands—to His disciples, starting in verse 35:

"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning."

Luke 12:35

Stay dressed for action. Literally, keep your loins girded.

Nobody wore pants in this culture, both men and women wore tunics; so, when someone needed to work, or run, or climb, they gathered the material in the back and pulled it forward between their legs and tucked it into their belt.

Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on Luke (Zondervan, 2012), p.336

The second imperative here in verse 35 is **to keep your lamps burning.**

The Lord is about to describe two nighttime scenes where readiness and alertness is described by keeping oil lamps burning and their clothing ready for working.

In today's culture, the Lord would say something like, "Roll up your sleeves and keep the porch light on."

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 229

These are present tense imperatives which means we're to stay in a perpetual state of alertness and awareness of how we might live for Christ, in light of His soon coming.

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 336

Now with that, the Lord goes on to give two illustrations of readiness. Verse 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. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes."

Luke 12:36-37a

This is a wedding scene here.

Jewish wedding feasts were held at night and the feasting could go on for hours, if not longer.

Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13 (Victor Books, 1988), p. 142

Jesus makes the point here that the household staff is staying awake.

Now in these days, the Jewish people divided the night into three shifts: 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.; 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.; and 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.

Clinton E. Arnold, Gen. Ed; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 431

The second and third shift are those shifts you never want to work. I remember in seminary, a few times to make some extra much needed cash, I'd work with a custodial

crew, cleaning office buildings at night. I learned that at 2 a.m., nobody's happy. Nobody really wants to be awake.

Notice what the Lords says here in verse 38:

"If he (the master) comes in the second watch, or in the third (that's 2:00 a.m.), and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!"

Luke 12:38

They're probably in for a promotion, or a bonus.

In fact, Jesus tells us that the master does something that would never have been done in those days; **go back to verse 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.

Luke 12:37

Many commentators see this played out as the Lord washes the disciple's feet before they eat their meal in the upper room.

Now the Lord gives the second scenario of watchfulness and alertness **here in verse 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."

Luke 12:39

This was unexpected.

To break into this house literally means to dig through the walls into this house.

Ibid

The walls were made of clay and if the house was unoccupied, a thief would simply dig a hole in the side of the house and slip inside.

This homeowner didn't know the burglar was coming, who does?

They don't book appointments or send out notices.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 431

We had our own home burglarized several years ago; it was a gang of professional thieves who were eventually caught; they had targeted pastors of large churches in this region;

they simply went online and looked up large churches and then burglarized the pastor's homes during church services.

They assumed the pastor and his wife would be at church; and we were—it was fortunate that we were.

The back door was unlocked and the alarm hadn't been turned on. They just came on in and then left before we got home.

Maybe you've been the victim of a burglary and it plays over in your mind, "What could I have done differently to prepare for it?"

Again, the point of these scenarios is that we must be prepared, His return is expected, but it'll still be unexpected—so we need to stay ready.

So, it's "On your mark, get set; now wait—wait for it—and while you're waiting, be watching!"

Now with that, Peter evidently raises his hand to ask a question here in verse 41:

Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"

Luke 12:41

In other words, "Do we need to know this for the final exam? Should we be taking notes?"

"Is this for us 12 disciples, or for the people around us, or for everybody in the whole world?"

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 339

And what the Lord does next, instead of directly answering Peter's question, He describes two kind of stewards, but we'll see in a moment that these stewards represent believers and unbelievers of all time. So, in a very real sense, this answer is for the entire world.

Now before we dive in, let's understand the role of a steward.

Stewards were household managers.

We know from history that a steward would be left in charge of all the supplies. His duties would be to organize and superintend the activities of the estate; he would oversee purchasing food and making sure everyone was taken care of; it would be his role to make sure everyone on the payroll did their jobs while the owner of the household was away. If he was a faithful steward, he would often be given an immediate promotion to more responsible work.

Adapted from J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Zondervan Publishing, 1981), p. 316

By the way, Joseph was this kind of steward over Potiphar's household back in Genesis chapter 39.

Now be wary in these parables and metaphors of trying to make everything analogous to Jesus. If that were the case, in the parable we just read, Jesus would have been the burglar breaking into someone's house against their will!

Keep in mind the main idea—the theme—that Jesus is delivering. The Lord basically wants them, and us, to answer this question: what kind of steward are we?

Are we faithful stewards of what He's assigned us, or unfaithful stewards who really don't care about Him at all?

Notice the description begins here with 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? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions."

Luke 12:42-44

In other words, the faithful servant will be rewarded with even more opportunity and responsibility in the household. Most evangelical scholars see a hint here at the larger responsibility given to the faithful steward in the coming kingdom.

But let me point out here that the steward's reward is not based on personal power, or unusual skill, or even wide influence.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 2* (Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1178

Did you notice that he is commended for simply doing what he was assigned to do: "he gave them their portion of food at the proper time."

In other words, this steward made sure the household staff were fed on time; in other words, he cared about their basic needs.

One of my favorite commentators, a seminary professor and well-known scholar by the name of Dale Davis, writes in his commentary on this passage, published just last year, how he read this text and immediately thought of faithful ministers of the word and their faithfulness as stewards.

He writes, [I think of a man] who has been pastor of a church of 100 members. It's in a small town where there are opportunities for personal evangelism and discipleship, but there will never be explosive church growth. His picture never appears on a brochure for some popular Bible conference; he'll never be an adjunct professor at the nearest

seminary; he'll not have the time or money to pursue an advanced seminary degree; he'll never be a speaker on one of those cruises sponsored by a fine evangelical organization. No, he's been serving there now for many years, diligently studying the word and giving his people their "portion of food" on the Lord's Day. And Jesus is delightfully satisfied with him.

Adapted from Davis, p. 231

What has the Lord assigned to you?

- A sink full of dishes that seems to stay full?
- A household to feed and clothe?
- A Bible study with a handful of people where you pray for and teach your students?
- Long hours in a job that allows you to live out your testimony of integrity?

Don't miss this:

- The measure of influence isn't the issue.
- The number of people isn't the issue.
- Noticeable talent or income or prestige isn't the issue.

You're just faithfully stewarding that which the Master has assigned to you, and it might just be cooking one meal at a time.

But you're ready to serve; you're waiting; you're watching; and you're working, you're just doing your job—as simple as it might be.

And Jesus is delightfully satisfied with you.

Now with that, the Lord describes unfaithful stewards through the rest of the passage.

The first one is described here in verse 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, 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."

Luke 12:45-46

This is the judgment of God. ***Cutting him in pieces*** is a figure of speech referring to the severity of the judgment of God.

Bock, p. 1182

And we know that it's figurative because this steward doesn't end up in little pieces, Luke says here at the end of **verse 46** that he ends up being ***put with the unfaithful***, that is, those who defy the master; those who are unfaithful; in this case, those who's defiance reveals they never believed or followed the master to begin with.

Keep in mind that Judas is listening here along with all the others.

Two more stewards are mentioned here, and all of them end up experiencing the judgment of God as unbelievers, starting in **verse 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. 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."

Luke 12:47-48

Most evangelical scholars take the judgement of God against these three stewards as an indication of the degrees of punishment in hell as they are judged. Those who knew more will be judged more severely than those who knew less.

And this principle applies to the rewarding of believers, as the Bible indicates degrees of reward.

And again, the reward will have nothing to do with how many people like you or follow you or get influenced by you; how popular or talented or beautiful or powerful or well-known or well-connected.

God just assigned you to serve a meal and you served it. You touched one life; you ministered to one sufferer; you gave the gospel to one child or classmate or co-worker.

And not much seemed to come out of it, but you're **waiting** and **watching** for another opportunity to come along where you can **serve**: one more portion of food; pull a few more weeds; and wash one more load of laundry; teach one more lesson; clock in one more time; encourage one more person along the way.

Beloved, I personally think we're going to be shocked one day to discover the generosity of the Lord in His rewarding of believers, The most surprising moment might be discovering exactly what we are rewarded for.

We tend to think in our minds that He will reward us for great things, great influence, great steps of faith. And He will.

But the devil will be happy with that misperception because it will discourage you if no great thing comes your way.

And while you were waiting to do some great thing for God, you missed doing some small thing for God.

What Jesus is describing here is a steward who is rewarded for small things, making sure that people had their basic needs met—even something to eat.

Small tasks, like whatever it is that He gives you to do today. As you wait, and watch, and work.

In one of his commentaries, Sam Gordon tells the true story of a tourist who was exploring some of the beautiful estates in northern Italy.

He arrived at a beautiful castle called Villa Arconati. And even though it wasn't open for tourists at the time, he pushed open the ornamental iron gate and ventured inside.

Everything was incredibly beautiful, flowers blooming in with extravagant color; the flower beds and shrubbery manicured to precision.

He noticed over at one side of the castle, a gardener on his hands and knees, clipping by hand the blades of grass near the wall.

He ventured over and said, "I hope you don't mind a visitor having a look at your gardens?" The gardener replied, "You're more than welcome; I'm glad to have a guest."

The visitor walked around the beautifully kept grounds and eventually returned and asked, "Is the owner here today?" "I'm afraid not," the gardener replied, "he's been away now for some time."

"Well, when was the last time you saw him?" The gardener laughed and said, "Almost twelve years ago." "Twelve years? You mean, he hasn't been back here for twelve years?" "That's right," the gardener replied.

The tourist was even more intrigued; he asked the gardener, "Who tells you what to do around here?" The gardener explained that the owner had an agent in a town nearby who communicated regularly with him.

"But do you ever see the owner personally?"

Still clipping away and focused on every detail, the gardener answered, "No; he just sends instructions through his agent."

The tourist was amazed by this, and he said, “But, you have everything so well kept; it’s all so perfectly manicured; it’s beautiful around here—it looks like you’re expecting him sometime tomorrow.”

The gardener paused and looked and said with a smile, “Oh, no, not tomorrow; I expect him sometime today.”

Sam Gordon, Hope and Glory: The Timeless Message of I & II Thessalonians (Ambassador International, 2005), p. 56

So, we should say, “I’m waiting *for Him*, I’m watching *for Him*, I’m working *for Him*, and just think: He could come sometime today.

© Copyright 2020 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

Access the complete archive of Stephen Davey’s teaching ministry at
wisdomonline.org or on the **Wisdom for the Heart** app.