

Ready for the Return

Luke 12:41–59 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: As we have been following the progress of Jesus' ministry, He has announced several times that He would be handed over to sinners and put to death, then subsequently raised from the dead. He said this must happen.

Luke 9:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Again in Luke 9:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

You can see that they were not fully grasping what He was telling them, no matter how emphatically He stated the facts.

Suppose they had, to some degree, comprehended the fact that their Lord would die and be raised. What after that? Was He to immediately usher in the Kingdom? Was He to then drive the soldier out of Fort Antonia and re-establish the Throne of David? No, you see. He has also ALLUDED several times to His **ASCENSION** — and the time that elapsed between the ascension and a glorious return.

Remember at the TRANSFIGURATION, he was speaking with Moses and Elijah, and Luke tells us they were discussing His “exodus” or “departure”. It was the time of departure that Jesus spoke to in **Luke 12**. The disciples were in the grip of fear and anxiety, terrified that what happened to their Lord might also happen to them.

Luke 12:4 (ESV)

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.”

Then as the final way to press on in the face of fear, Jesus began to indicate that He would ultimately return... and they were to be ready for His return.

Remember what he said - Luke 12:35–40 (ESV)

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.”

So, He compares His departure to a man going to a **wedding celebration**, which in that day were something like Shrimp Fest, lots of food, lots of celebration, and they could last several days.

Yet, before he departs, he places his servants in charge of the estate. They were to manage the estate exactly as the master would if he had remained. They were to keep the estate ready whether the master was gone a few hours or a few days.

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.”

This week, Jesus continues that line of thought. As you read through Luke, underscore the number of times that Jesus emphasizes that we ought to always be living in light of His return.

There are 260 chapters in the New Testament, and Christ’s return is mentioned no less than 318 times in those chapters. Statistically, one verse in twenty-five mentions the Lord’s return. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event.

In some ways, the Second Coming of Christ is the penultimate doctrine of the entire Bible. It is the resolution of all the tension created from the FALL onward.

IN MANY WAYS, the validity of your faith is verified by your consciousness of the imminent return of Christ. (REPEAT THAT)

In the text before us - Jesus teaches us what it means to be ready for the return of Christ. Three indicators are given -

1. Practical Stewardship

TEXT: Luke 12:41–56 (ESV) ⁴¹“Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?”

So Peter is asking: Is this teaching about being ready for your return something that only lost people need to be concerned with? Or is it something only ministry leaders need to be concerned with? Who is your audience here?

Most of us have grown up in an education system heavily influenced by the **Prussian model, which was** designed to prepare the population to fill the jobs available in a particular region. It is highly **CATECHISTIC**.

If you grew up in a Catholic or mainline denomination, you might have memorized a Catechism, a series of questions and answers. That's how we tend to learn.

The Rabbinical approach was different...it was designed not only to teach you the answers, but also to teach you how to think.

So, Jesus answers Peter's question down at the end of verse 47. But before he does, he gives a parable that helps to expand Peter's thinking as well as our own.

He continues the illustration of a master who has departed and left his servants in charge... but this time, he zeros in on a number of the servants.

a. The Faithful Servant -

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".

This first servant is to be our example. NOTICE, he is not climbing onto the roof of the house to watch for the master's return... but rather, he is living as if the master had already returned and is residing in the home.

That's very important—there is always a temptation for those who are gripped with the reality of the second coming to neglect everything else, including reading a bunch of Tim LaHaye books, and sitting around and talking about Revelation until Jesus comes back.

That's nothing new. In II Thessalonians 3, Paul has to very directly remove the church at Thessalonica against this tendency. They were so gripped by the possibility that Christ's return could happen at any moment that they neglected their work and lived fruitless lives.

2 Thessalonians 3:10–11 (ESV)

10 "For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies."

ILLUSTRATION: It was said that Martin Luther was planting a row of apple trees one day and a friend, concerned to see him involved in a temporal task reproved him and said, "Luther, what would you do if you knew Jesus were coming back this very day?" To which Luther replied, "I would plant this apple tree".

Now, at first, that seems like a sarcastic reply - but I think it was one of the most profound things Luther ever said. You see, living in light of the return of Christ doesn't

look all that different than how we might live if we were already in the Millennial Kingdom.

It means - you do as you ought as a father or mother, a young adult, a child, a Sunday school teacher, a pastor, a banker, or a realtor; if you work at the paper mill, you do your duty there as if you reported directly to Jesus Christ at the end of each day. Do you see?

Secondly, we see...

b. The Evil Servant -

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.”

ILLUSTRATION: This servant reminds me of times in grade school when the teacher would leave the class to run an errand. Within seconds, the class would descend into anarchy. It was like Lord of the Flies. Why? When the cat is away, the mice will play. Well, some people who are a part of the Master’s household live that way.

ILLUSTRATION: I will watch what some churches do and think to myself, “Do they not realize that they will answer to Jesus Christ one day? Silly sermons with little, if any, Scriptural truth...a complete neglect of the standards of Scripture.

Not to mention the ludicrous apostasy of the United Methodist movement... I hesitate to call it a church. By a vote of 692 to 51, and without a word of formal debate, the United Methodist General Conference voted to overturn the church’s historic discipline and doctrine on homosexuality.

This is NOT a grey issue in the scriptures. God did not whisper about this issue unless you consider Sodom and Gomorrah to be a whisper. Nothing could be more clear than the fact that homosexuality, transgenderism, and the like are clear violations of the mandate of God Almighty.

Yet, the **United Methodist Church** has not only endorsed this lifestyle, but it has also agreed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies... or as I call them same-sex MIRAGES.

They have also begun to ordain homosexuals into the clergy.

I would call my dear brothers and sisters in that movement - “come out from them and be separate.”

Jesus will return, and when he does - it will not go well.

The same goes for the Roman Catholic Pope, who recently affirmed the blessing of same-sex marriages.

Lutherans have long since affirmed such things.

We have the faithful servant, the evil servant...

c. The Lazy Servant -

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.”

This servant knew exactly what to do. He knew what his Master expected of him. He just didn’t bother to do it.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard the story this week of a man speaking at a Christian event to a group of college students who were soon to graduate. He instructed them to take a sheet of paper and write down all of the things they hope to accomplish in the next 5 to 10 years after graduating. Once they had written everything down, he said, now turn the paper over and write down what you would do if you knew Jesus was coming back in the next two months. Oh, they began to write down all the names of their friends they would witness to, the mission trips they would go on, things marked by the urgency of the mission. Then, he said, “If the back of the page radically differs from the front of the page, there is a problem.”

Now, when you hear that, you probably know that there are some things that ought to shift in light of the return of Christ.

But if you simply say, “hmmm that was a good thought... good sermon preacher...” and don’t take the time to actually execute on what God has shown you, Jesus says, “That servant will receive a severe beating”.

WELL, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN PASTOR? I assume it means what it says. Jesus is not to be patronized; he is to be obeyed. He disciplines those whom He loves.. and that discipline can sometimes be severe.

We have the faithful servant, the evil servant, the lazy servant...

d. The Ignorant Servant -

^{47b}. “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.”

So, the discipline and the reward will take into consideration the amount of knowledge you have access to.

If someone lives foolishly but never heard this sermon, they will still be punished, though not as severely. It will be a light beating... but a light beating still sounds an awful lot like a beating to me.

FRIEND, you are not in that category. You can't claim blissful ignorance. Not if you are attending this church. If you have no plan to live right... then it would be better for you to go to church anywhere but here.

- Find one of these cool churches that boast in their newest tattoos and celebrity members.
- Find one of these churches where it sounds like the pastor wrote the sermon 15 minutes before the service.
- Find one of these liturgical churches where you can't understand what they are saying.

But, for heaven's sake, don't join this church....unless you take the Word of God seriously.

*The person ready for the return of Christ will be marked by **Practical Stewardship...***

2. New Alliances

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."

When you live a life marked by readiness for the return of Christ - some of your diehard cultural alliances will be shifted.

Biblically speaking - the family is one of the highest values for a Christian.

Yet, there are times when our fidelity to Christ may be in conflict with our fidelity to our family. When that happens, there should be no question about which side we should take.

Later in Luke, Jesus will say - Luke 14:26 (ESV)

²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

In other words, your commitment to Christ should be so great that all other relationships look like hatred next to your commitment to Jesus Christ.

WOULD YOU FOLLOW JESUS IF IT MEANT YOU WOULD BE DISOWNED? I HOPE SO.

NOW, I hope that doesn't happen to any of you. Nothing could be more devastating than being ostracized from one's family. BUT, if we ought to be prepared for that happening with our family, HOW MUCH MORE ought we be willing to lose other alliances and allegiances for the sake of Christ????

Will you live for the MASTER even if it costs you membership in a club? Even if it costs you friendship? Even if it costs you clients?

A person living in light of the return of Christ will, at times, have to make significant shifts in his or her alliances.

*The person ready for the return of Christ will be marked by **Practical Stewardship... New Alliances...***

3. Precise Repentance

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."

As you consider the fact that Christ may return at any moment, AND the fact that severe discipline awaits those who have not lived in light of His coming... you ought to make every effort to settle out of court.

REPENT, change your mind.... If you haven't lived rightly up til now, change how you live going forward. Cry out to God for forgiveness.

Set systems in place to help you in the future.

WE ARE TO BE ALERT FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a teenager, my parents bought a new house. It was around the fall of the year when school was back in session, and kids began to toilet paper each other's yards. My parents had an opportunity to go on a trip for a week, and they thought that maybe I was old enough to stay at home all by myself that week. I wasn't old enough to throw a wild party, but I was old enough to stay home. Apparently, I boasted to some of my friends about this opportunity to stay at home. I got word that

about 20 of them were going to roll my yard that night. I stayed up all night. Around midnight, I heard them. I loaded my 22 pistol with 12 rounds. When they all got in my yard, I snuck in the middle of them and began to fire the gun into the air. That was the last time my yard was rolled for a while.

Now, the return of Christ will happen when you least expect it... but it will be no prank. You would do well to stay alert and keep ready.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

“Live as if Christ died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back tomorrow.”
Martin Luther