

Spiritual Readiness Luke 12:35-48

Intro: We used to sing an old song about being prepared to meet the Lord. "When Jesus comes to reward his servants, whether it be noon or night, faithful to him will he find us watching, with our lamps all trimmed and bright. Oh, can we say we are ready, Brother, ready for the souls bright home. Say, will he find you and me still watching, waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come."

The idea of the song appears to have come from our text today. Let's turn in our Bibles to the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12. Jesus had spent the day in teaching and had been discussing the dangers of distraction to our spiritual goals by materialism and worldliness. It prompted him to issue a special lesson on spiritual readiness.

The need for spiritual readiness

Jesus reveals this idea with a figurative expression: Be dressed in readiness and keep you lamps alight, v. 35

Literally "Let your loins be girded"--The loin is the area around the waist. Since Oriental people wore ankle length robes, they could not work very well in them without raising the bottom hem up and tying them around the waste with a belt. (This is what is meant by "girding the loins" or tying the waste. When people did that, it meant they were ready for service.

Keep you lamps alight--Remember they didn't enjoy the benefits of electricity and wall switches like we. A lamp was a wick in shallow bowl of olive oil. It had be filled and the wick trimmed to keep the light going. And Jesus is saying, Don't let the light go out.

Everyone in that audience had no trouble understanding Jesus' words. And you will too if you think about what most people do each evening before they go to sleep. They take off their work clothes and get into their bed clothes; and they cut the light out. And essentially what Jesus is saying is, "keep your work clothes on and keep the lights on!"

The illustration that follows makes that clear: Be like slaves...v. 36-38

Imagine that you are a servant in a man's house and he has gone off to a wedding feast. The exact time of his return is unknown. So you have to be ready even if he comes in the middle of the night, at the second watch (9-12 midnight), or the third (midnight to 3 a.m.). And you want to be dressed and have light ready so that you can meet him at the door, prepared to serve him. So should we be with the Lord. Always ready to welcome his return.

But now the story takes an interesting turn. I can imagine that the slaves in the audience could not suppress a smile as Jesus relates how the master, so impressed with the faithfulness of his servants, says, "Thanks for staying up for me. Now, let me now tie up my garment and you fellows sit down here

and let me fix you dinner and wait on you!" However, unreal that might have seemed to those slaves; it is a representation of the blessings awaiting those who are ready to meet the Lord when He returns. They will be blessed by the wonderful grace of our Lord who will provide for them a heavenly feast of blessings around God's throne.

And so we need to be ready for His coming. But, why?

The reason for spiritual readiness (v. 39-40)

The Lord's coming will be unexpected. This much has already been made clear in the story of the returning master. But now Jesus likens His coming to a thief in the night. And observes that no man would allow his house to be broken into if he knew the exact time of the thief's arrival. v. 39

So Jesus says He will come at a time when we do not think, like a thief, He will come unexpectedly. The apostle Paul seems to build his exhortations of 1 Thes. 5:1-6 on these very verses from the gospels.

As Peter heard these words, he was impressed with them but he wondered why the Lord should say such things in the presence of the multitudes. Was the message intended for the disciples alone? Perhaps He could see how the multitudes could need exhortations to be ready, but them? This gave Jesus opportunity to talk about:

The obligations of spiritual readiness

v. 42-48 There is an element of mystery in this story. It raises an often asked question: are there going to be degrees of punishment in hell? Perhaps we should first point out that all that is said in v. 42-48 is designed to fill out an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. More often than not, parables have a main message that they communicate and the details of the story simply supplement that main message. Usually the point illustrated by the story is given by the Lord at the end. And so it is here: v. 48

Here is an immutable principle of justice recognized among men and as well as in the heavenly courtroom.

The level of one's accountability is contingent upon his responsibility.

The measure of one's responsibility is contingent upon his knowledge and actions.

And so in the earthly story, the servants were treated with differing levels of accountability because they occupied different levels of responsibility. Punishment was met out to each in keeping with his level of responsibility and his actions relative to it. Thus we might say, if the world were a house and all men were God's servants, then, we see two classes of servants:

Servants granted special privilege

Other servants without special privilege.

First Jesus describes the choices for the servants of privilege (who seem in this story to represent the apostles and those who are privileged to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom). In this class there are two responses:

One slave is pictured as knowing the masters will and faithfully and sensibly executing his responsibility in caring for the other slaves, providing their rations in keeping with the masters will. This slave is pictured as being rewarded with the trust of all the master's possessions. He is made full steward over all.

The alternative: In contrast Jesus describes a slave who, not only knew the master's will, but also deliberately neglected his trust and abused his fellow slaves. The master returns at an unexpected time and finding him unfaithful. He is executed on the spot. He has abused his privilege as a steward of the master.

Second Jesus describes the choices for the second class of servants who seem to represent the multitudes who have not yet experienced the blessings of God's kingdom.

Those who knew and did not get ready--many lashes.

Those who did not know--few lashes.

Notice, there is no reward here at all! And it may suggest that there are degrees of punishment in hell. But I must agree with the man who once remarked that if there are such degrees the coolest seat in hell would be too hot for him!

By this means then Jesus seeks to distinguish between those who are disciples and thus men of privilege and the multitudes who do not yet enjoy the blessings of God's grace. The message is clear: There is a greater accountability for those who have been entrusted with the blessings of grace. However, there is no premium placed on ignorance.

The message to Peter and all of us is to make the best use of what God has given us. We are more obligated by our calling to be faithful and busy doing the Lord's will. Sermons about readiness have a special application to those who think they are already prepared! The privileges of salvation do not encourage us to become slothful and lax in our service but instead to be more faithful in serving the Lord and our fellow-servants. Paul's own explanation is right to the point: 1 Thes. 5:8-11. This is the proof that we are ready.

Conclusion: Are we ready for the coming of the Lord? How would He find us today?