

Nearly four-in-ten Americans say we're "living in the end times"... according to a poll conducted in April of 2022. ... It was taken against a stark backdrop of claims about climate change... the pandemic... nuclear uncertainty... and doomsday cults.

This Pew Research Center survey of more than 10,000 adults... found that 39 percent (of Americans – whether Christian or not) called these the "end times" – 39%. (That surprised me. It didn't think it would be that high.) ...But 58% were assured that humanity was **not** careening towards catastrophe.

Researchers added: "Periods of catastrophe and anxiety... such as the coronavirus pandemic... have historically led some people to anticipate that the destruction of the world as we know it — the 'end times' — is near." Those types of fears (certainly) are present today... and they seem to relate to the expectation among Christians that "Jesus will return to Earth after or amid a time of great turmoil."

But here is something that is VERY tragic... in light of the Scripture we will be studying today. (Are you ready?) ... Only half of those who identify themselves as Christians... say Judgement Day is closing in. ... Boy is it EVER important to sound the same warning - **today** - that Jesus gave to His followers!

The warning in our passage is for us to be ready. Don't be like the house steward... who gets lazy while his master is gone. When the owner finally comes home he's not ready. Jesus condemns this person - not for evil done... but for good undone. This is a warning for **all** of us. You might

believe with all sincerity that the Lord will return... and that His time is near. But Jesus warns us that condemnation will be NOT ONLY for evil that has been done – but for good that has been **UNDONE**. ... Be ready! ... Don't be lazy. ... There are things we know we should be doing... and we are not to be lulled into inactivity by the fact that the Lord has delayed His coming. ... We are to do the things we would do if this were our last day — but not frantically or desperately.

Last week we studied (in the passage just before this one) the parable of the rich fool. Jesus warned His followers against material greed. Right after that warning... He challenged us not to worry about finances and material things. (He knows what we need.) Now... in today's passage... He calls for us to be ready for His return. ... Do you know what...? I think Luke presents this teaching of Jesus next – because if we busy ourselves... in light of Jesus' imminent return... we will not be worrying. Readiness (looking for His coming Kingdom) is the antidote for worry. Look at these verses that were part of our passage last week...

Luke 12:29-31 (ESV)

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Readiness (looking for His coming Kingdom) is the antidote for worry in your life. ... Look (now with me at our first verse for today...

Luke 12:35

This verse says so much! I was thinking that I would like to print it on a t-shirt... or a polo shirt. Most certainly I think that I will start writing it on

every card that I sign. “*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning.*” ... This is such a powerful message! (If anyone want to print up some shirts with this verse on it... and maybe our church logo... I’ll buy one.) Maybe I’ll start dismissing every worship service with this benediction - “*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning... You are dismissed. ... No... No... Come back. Don’t leave yet. I am thinking about saying that – WHEN WE ARE FINISHED with our worship service.*”

Luke 12:35 says “*be ready for the arrival of the Lord.*” (He is coming back.) ... This readiness means to remove from your life anything that is spiritually hindering you... and let your light shine for Christ.

Earlier translations of this verse read “*Let your loins be girded.*” But I like “*Stay dressed for action*” much better because it communicates more clearly to our generation... doesn’t it? The two phrases mean the same thing. Girding your loins was an expression for removing hindrances so that you could freely work. It carried the idea of being diligent... prepared... or ready.

No one wore pants in the first century. ... Both men and women wore tunics... (these were outer garments that extended well below the knees.) When a man needed to run... climb... work... or fight... (in short... any activity that required nimble movement)... he gathered the material in the back of his tunic... pulled it forward between his legs... and tucked it into his belt. ... Consequently... “*gird your loins*”... became an image and a phrase of readiness for action.

This same truth is taught in other verses of the Bible. ... We are to remove sinful habits that hurt our effectiveness for Christ.

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 Corinthians 7:1 (ESV)

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

2 Timothy 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

The phrase “**keep your lights burning**” also deals with being ready or prepared. This second image of burning lamps shows someone’s readiness to move about during darkness. ... We can certainly say that the world is a dark place right now... and seems to be getting darker. However... there is another application here that I would like to point out. ... We are to let our light shine for Christ because we are the light of the world. (LISTEN!) A great way to be ready for the Rapture... is to be on fire for God! ... Lift up the name of Jesus in your actions... attitudes... and in your words. Be distinct in your behavior. Share the gospel with those who need the Lord.

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Philippians 2:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

The Lord's people are to be ready for the coming of the Lord. The word of the writer of Hebrews is helpful here:

Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

²⁵ *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Look how the writer of Hebrews declares that being ready means attending church regularly (not forsaking your assembling together... and even more so... when Christ's return is close.) ... Since Covid-19 church attendance everywhere has significantly dropped. We have never returned to pre-covid 19 numbers. (AND yet we definitely see "the day drawing near." ... Isn't it **sad** that so many people who claim to be believers are ignoring Christ's warning in our passage? ... [P A U S E] ...

As we continue (now) in our passage... we will eventually see what will happen to those who willfully ignore it. (But... it will be a few minutes... before we get to it.)

Luke 12:36-38

FIRST... I need to point out that this is not the same passage about the bridegroom who goes to get his bride. That one speaks of readiness too... but this addresses it a little different. The example that Jesus gives us here is about a man who attends someone else's wedding... and finally comes home. You see... a Hebrew wedding celebration could last several days... so that the time of a guest attender's return could be anyone's guess.

This man was a home-owner who had servants. But the uncertainty of his return did not put off these excellent servants. Though it was late at night...

they were “dressed ready for service.” (That is... they not only remained fully clothed in their daytime clothes... but they had their long robes tucked under their belts... making it possible for them to move quickly to the door. They were prepared.)

The night was also kept bright because they vigilantly replenished the oil in their lamps and trimmed the wicks for maximum light. They were awake and alert. These servants were remarkable. They did not give in to fatigue. ... They displayed no irritable grouchiness. ... They did not have an “attitude.”

(As I have been saying...) these verses are about Jesus’ return. But I need to say something about that... in order to avoid a common confusion... that many believers have. Jesus’ coming is in **two** phases.

The first phase is called the “rapture.” This will happen at any moment. It could happen today. Every true believer will be suddenly removed from this planet. We will instantly (in the twinkling of an eye) disappear... and be caught-up in the clouds... where we will meet Jesus and all of our loved ones (who had placed their faith in Christ) and had died before us. We are going to have a very joyful reunion. Here is a descriptive passage about that occurrence. (Take a look...)

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

(Now) the second phase of Jesus' coming will be at the end of the seven-year period known as the Tribulation. While we are with the Lord... God will be pouring out His wrath here on earth. ... We will be in Heaven with Jesus... and we will experience what verse 37 tells us Jesus is going to do for His faithful... watching... prepared servants. He will rapture us... and bring us to a table (a feast) where **He** will serve **us**... (Right here in verse 37 Jesus tells us that.) WHAT a reversal of roles! Verse 37 says blessed are those servants. Then because that wasn't exuberant enough...He said it again in verse 38 – "blessed are those servants!"

In contrast... here is a descriptive passage about the **second** phase of Christ's return...

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

He will crush the Antichrist who had been wreaking such havoc on earth... and slaughter all of his evil forces. That will be **AFTER** we have been raptured... and been served by the Master. ... Both phases (phase one and phase two) – fall under the heading: "The Day of the Lord."

The rapture (phase one) is what we are waiting for - right now. It is what our passage today is about. We are being told to make sure that we are ready for it... by being about the Lord's business.

I have to quote Chuck Swindoll's comment about verse 36. He writes:

"It's difficult to see in the English of 12:36, but the Greek grammar places great emphasis on the pronoun "you." I would paraphrase the command like this: "You there! Yes, you! Be like men who are waiting for their master." The emphasis grabs one by the shoulders and shakes the reader with each syllable. "This is for you. Wake up. Be ready."

How sad to know about all of this... and NOT bother to be ready! ...

Because the Rapture could take place at any moment... we are to be ready... watching... waiting for His return... and faithfully serving Him. ...

(So let me ask)... Are you Rapture ready?

Verse 38 mentions being ready if He comes in the second watch... or in the third. The Jews had divided the amount of time between sundown to sun-up into four sections. The second watch was from 9:00p.m. to midnight. The third watch went from midnight to 3:00a.m. Either one of these watches for a 1st Century Jew was a long time to stay awake and alert.

We have been waiting for Jesus' return for a long time and there is every indication that we are near the end of the third watch. His return is imminent. ... Don't get groggy – as many have! (What a great warning for us!)

When will He return...? Jesus used a second example for us to understand the surprise nature of it.

Luke 12:39-40

When the figure changes from the “master” to the “thief,” it is to emphasize the element of an unexpected appearance. Paul used the same figure of speech for Christ’s second coming in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 which says:

1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV)

² *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*

His coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected. We must be ready! Burglars don’t send postcards announcing the time and place of their next target... so the homeowner must remain alert at all times. ... Furthermore... first-century thieves usually gained entrance by digging a hole in an exterior wall... which was usually constructed from mud. ... Consequently... the head of a household had to keep watch over every inch of the home... not just the doors and windows.

Presbyterian pastor Robert Murray McCheyne sometimes asked people: “*Do you believe that Jesus is coming today?*” If they replied in the negative... he would say: “*Then you had better be ready, for He is coming at an hour when you think not!*” ... [P A U S E] ...

Jesus has been addressing the issue of a faithful servant that is prepared and ready for the arrival of his departed master. ... As we continue through our passage... we will be reminded again that there is going to be a day of reckoning. ... Some folks will have a reckoning of rejoicing and reward ... because they have been faithful in serving Jesus Christ and are faithfully working when He returns. (The thing God wants is **faithfulness**.) ... Others... however... will experience the rigors of a rude awakening because of their unfaithfulness... and apathy... (being so “ho-hum” about His return.)

Luke 12:41

Peter says:

“Ummm... Lord... You imply that some will not be ready. But those of us who are part of your 12 special disciples are not those who you are talking about... right...?!”

Now... in order to understand what Jesus is teaching... we simply MUST understand His answer to Peter’s question here. *“Who are You talking about, Lord?”*

Jesus will answer this question (in essence) by saying He is addressing any and every steward in the House of God - (the Master’s House... as He puts it - which is the church.) This applies to “anyone who associates themselves with Jesus – and undertakes official responsibility with His people...” That includes every pastor... elder... deacon... denominational leader... and anyone involved in ministry of one form or another. Jesus will use the term “manager.” ... Every Christian is a steward (a manager.) We are made into servants of our Lord and Master (Jesus Christ). ... All believers have been entrusted with responsibilities and gifting for building-up fellow believers.

But this isn’t only about Godly men and women. It embraces those who are placed in positions of leadership over others in the church - who are not believers at all. There have been plenty of ruthless... ungodly... worldly... and even blood-thirsty leaders of the church over the centuries. (And these are about to be spoken of.) ... He is addressing any and every manager in the House of God. ... But FIRST Jesus speaks of the Godly stewards.

Luke 12:42-44

What is at stake is how much responsibility you will have in Christ's Kingdom... during His Kingdom reign. ... We are going to rule with Him. ... Great honor will be given – according to how much a person will be given charge over. ... If you are found as being very faithful when He returns... He might let you be like the mayor of London... New York... Chicago... or Portland. (Of course in that day... they will be purged from all their evil.) ... By showing less faithfulness... you might be given charge over a run-down neighborhood of La Pine... Gilcrest... or Christmas Valley... as you reign with Christ. ... The greater your faithfulness – the greater your honor will be in reigning with Christ.

This is what awaits God's faithful servants who have been diligent with their tasks. Now let's see about the ungodly servants... in the ensuing verses. (The unfaithful servant reminds me of the student who goofs off in the classroom when the teacher steps out into the hall.)

Jesus (in the next verse) describes the *conclusions* of the unfaithful servant... who believed since his master had delayed his arrival... he could do as he pleased. ... And please notice the *repulsive behavior* of the unfaithful overseer. His arrogance causes him to be greedy... ruthless... and harsh with others... as he abuses them.

Jesus is about to predict a significant (and unfortunate) part of Church history. It has an ugly blemish on Western civilization... which - to this day - turns many off ...concerning Jesus and His church. (Jesus saw that this would happen.)

Luke 12:45

As we look at the description of the unfaithful servant... we shouldn't only think that it is about the ugly part of our Christian history. (You see) there are many who are part of the church today... who live in a fantasy world that says – “because I prayed a prayer... or walked down an isle at church... or I agree with all the right doctrines... I have fire insurance to protect me from Hell... and now I can live any way that I want. I can engage in sexual immorality... and be just as wild as I want. If that is you... you're in for a rude awakening. ... [P A U S E] ...

(And) there is something else we need to see here. ... Once a believer starts to think his Master is *not* coming back... his life begins to deteriorate. Our relationship with others depends on our relationship to the Lord. So if we stop looking for Him... we will stop loving His people. ... The motive for Christian life and service must be a desire to please the Lord and be found faithful at His return.

Maybe He will not come today or tomorrow... but He is going to come. Our tendency is to let things slip because He has not yet appeared. We feel like we get by with things... but in reality we get by with **nothing**. In that day when He comes... we **will** be judged.

Believers are not going to be judged to see if we make it into Heaven or not. That is affirmed the moment we place our faith in what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. (It happens when we accept His punishment for all of our sin by dying on the cross. We place our faith in that.) ... No. **This** judgment determines **the degree of reward** (our heavenly honor) that we will receive.

The unwise steward commits two errors. First - he says to himself: "*I will do as I please while my master is away.*" (And) second... he says: "*I have plenty of time to put things right before my master returns...*" Their heavenly reward will be little. If the servant isn't a believer it will be harsh.

Luke 12:46

"*Cut into pieces and put with the unfaithful.*" He will definitely be rejected and subjected to great pain. ... This does not mean the servant once had - but **lost** their salvation. (Remember) the parable is about anyone who has been a manager/overseer/leader in the church that is associated with Christ. This servant (probably) never was a true believer. (I believe that there have been MANY unsaved managers of Jesus' church through the centuries.)

Here is another description of an unfaithful servant...

Luke 12:47

Here is a man who is well schooled in the things of God. He knows what is expected of him. Nevertheless... he wastes his time and talents and ignores God's will for his life. Instead of laying up treasure in heaven... he fritters away his life. (I think that this is still dealing with non-believers who have been given responsibility inside the church. They won't be in Glory. - I don't think there will be any beating in Heaven.)

Luke 12:48

There is not only going to be different degrees of reward for the faithful servants in Christ's Kingdom... but there will also be varying degrees of

punishment/suffering in Hell. (Yeah. Those who were a part of Christianity's ugly blight on history will not get-off scott-free at all!)

Some may disagree with me... but this much is very clear. The second part of verse 48 (which not only speaks about unbelieving servants) expresses that the talents with which God has given to you must be used... the best use must be made of your time... It must be "redeemed"... YOUR opportunities used properly. No one has the right to be lazy.

We are responsible for the truth that comes to us. For example... as soon as I know the bridge is down... I am responsible to stop every car behind me and tell them. That's responsible living.

Jesus' followers understand that Christ is real... the Bible is true... hell is a factual place... and eternity is long. ... Therefore... we are held responsible to give this information out.

Luke 12:48 b

We have so much. We have the word of the Old Testament... the word of the prophets... the word of the covenants. We have the word of the New Testament... the revelation of Jesus' coming to earth... the gospel of grace... the life and teachings of Jesus... the apostolic witness and teaching. We have over 2,000 years of the church's comprehension (excellent minds putting it all together.) ... We have abundant preaching. We have Christian education. We have thousands of books. We have a wealth of opportunities. Consequently - much is required of us! But WHO CARES (?) – if you are not looking for Jesus' return!

The thrust of Jesus' message can be summed up in two words: *Get ready!*
He **IS** COMING!

What are you doing with your life? ... Is Jesus first? ... Are you living every day for Him? That is what really matters. Listen to these famous words of missionary C.T. Studd...

*Two little lines I heard one day, Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart, And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, yes only one, Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet, And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, the still small voice, Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave, And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, a few brief years, Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill, living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*When this bright world would tempt me sore, When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way, Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Give me Father, a purpose deep, In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Oh let my love with fervor burn, And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone, Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, yes only one, Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.*