

June 30, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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ALWAYS READY
Luke 12:35-48

On this weekend when we are thinking about our nation's birthday, we are bound to think about the high price others have paid so that we can be free. In the couple of short centuries of our history, many men and women have been dependable, ready to defend our liberties even at the cost of their lives. The various branches of our armed forces have adopted mottos that articulate the character that is supposed to describe the members of each branch.

For example, most of you are aware that the motto for the Marine Corps is *Semper Fedelis*, which means "Always faithful." The Navy motto is *Semper Fortis*, which is supposed to typify the members of the navy as "Always strong or courageous." The Army motto is *De Oppresso Liber*, which means "This we'll defend." No one seems to know why, but the Air Force does not have a Latin motto. Therefore, I made one up that seemed to be fitting for the Air Force guys I knew who were in Vietnam. *Semper Altum* means "Always high." That's what jets do also. Oh, there is also the Coast Guard motto, *Semper Paratus*, which means "Always ready."

"Always ready" is the motto Jesus recommends for us, His people. Our Master also desires for His servants to be always faithful, always strong, and always defending the gospel. But in light of our Lord's promised, imminent return, "Always Ready" is the acceptable, the required, characteristic of His people. But what does "ready" look like? No doubt if we took a survey from each person in this auditorium, the vast majority of us would attest quite vigorously that we are ready for the Lord's return. We just don't know when that will be. So are we always ready, or sometimes ready, or maybe somewhat ready, fairly ready, in our humble opinion?

Let's survey members of the Coast Guard. Are their boats ready? Yes. Are their helicopters ready? Yes. Is all their communication equipment maintained in top-notch order? Yes. But what about the individual members of the Coast Guard? Is each member staying in good physical condition? Rescuing victims at sea is physically demanding. Is each member properly trained in the best course of action? You don't want someone who only has strong opinions trying to rescue you if your boat is sinking. Is each member trained and willing to communicate the important instructions?

I remember seeing a comical video several years ago. If I remember correctly, there was a new, young, German, recruit who was quickly placed at a Coast Guard call station. While he was on watch, an English-speaking boater came across the radio with a distress call. "May Day, May Day. We are sinking, We are sinking." The bewildered young recruit just sat there for a moment. Again, the message came. "We are sinking, we are sinking." Finally, the young fellow timidly answered the call saying, "Vat are you sinking about?"

I fear that too many professing Christians are just about that ready to help people in distress, people sinking in the sea of sin all around us. Our Master desires for us to be faithful servants who are diligently engaged in the rescue work He has left for us to do. In our text, He taught how important it is for us to maintain readiness all the time because He will keep His promise and come back to receive an accounting from us. Based on how you are ordering your life, what will your account sound like? Will we timidly say, "Well, I was planning to do this or that or something." Or will we be able to say, "Lord, I tried to be faithful with all that you gave me"?

The Master's Lesson (vv.35-40).

Jesus taught that His followers are to stay dressed (vv.35-36). That means that we are always to be ready for action. Specifically Jesus taught, "*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning*" (v.35). The command, *stay dressed for action* literally means, "let your hips be encircled." It is a present tense command that describes not a rare condition, not an occasional condition, but our normal, ongoing character. It is the picture of an ancient, middle eastern man who has tucked the ends of his long flowing robe into his belt so he

can work unimpeded. Or someone would do that in time of conflict so he can run to the aid of a victim.

It is the picture of the “Minutemen” who played an important role in the birthing of this nation and winning our freedom. Minutemen were civilian colonists who independently organized to form well-prepared militia companies self-trained in weaponry, tactics, and military strategies from the American colonial partisan militia during the American Revolutionary War. The name of the militia called attention to their ability to be ready at a minute’s notice. They provided a highly mobile, rapidly deployed force that allowed the colonies to respond immediately to war threats. The Minutemen were among the first to fight in the American Revolution. Their teams constituted about a quarter of the entire colonial army.

This is also supposed to be the picture of Christians. We are to be trained, fit, ready to respond in service for our King Jesus. We are not to be characterized (as many seem to be) as thinking about the need so we can prepare to respond when needed. The command is “Stay dressed for action” not “Get dressed for action.”

A second part of the command, which expands the first command, is *keep your lamps burning*. The same present tense command applies to the second characteristic of Christ’s servants. The whole purpose the lamp serves is to provide light. The lamp and light are used frequently in Scripture in a figurative sense to represent the giving of knowledge. The lamp is a picture or illustration of how Christians exist to display, convey, communicate the truth about Christ.

In this parable, the emphasis is on the truth that Christ is coming again. Therefore, our attitudes, words, and actions all should point the world to the reality that Christ is coming back. To be dressed for action, to keep the lamp burning, means that we are to be ready for the master’s return. Jesus taught, *“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”* (v.36).

This idea flows from the ancient culture which was quite unlike our culture where the wedding ceremony begins according to time and date printed on the invitation. The ancient middle eastern wedding did not run on a precise schedule. The feast began when all the necessary preparations had finally been completed. That might be

“man~ana.” When preparations were complete, the guests were invited. Then the wedding feast might last a week, or until the food ran out.

When the feast was over, the master in this story returned to his house. In this picture, the master was not the bridegroom as in Matthew 25:1; nor was he the father who hosted the wedding feast in the story in Matthew 22:2. This was simply a story about the master of the estate being away as a guest at a feast, leaving his slaves to guard and care for his property. Here the issue is that he was coming home. Would he find the servants faithfully doing what he told them to do?

The story holds an important lesson for us because if we are “being ready” when the Master returns, we will be blessed (vv.37-38). Jesus presented two kinds of servants in the latter part of this text—the faithful servants and the careless servants.

The Lord promised that the faithful servants will be blessed. *“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes”* (v.37a). *“If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!”* (v.38). This part of the story radically departs from everyday life. The word for servant is more accurately “slave.” It is true that rarely the same word can refer to household servants. But most of the time there is a different Greek word to refer to that specific position. More often than not, this Greek word refers to someone who does menial, difficult labor. It always speaks of someone who is owned by another. These were not employees, but slaves who were required to order their lives according to their master’s plans and commands.

And yet in Jesus’ story, these who are owned by another will be blessed. The word blessed can mean the recipient of honor or reward. Ultimately it means “happy.” How can someone who is owned by another be happy? That is possible only when you are owned by someone very special. Our Master is not the typical “slave owner.” He is our servant first. Then He bought us with His blood, through His death. He bought us not for service but because He loves us. He cares for us on a level that exceeds human comprehension.

No wonder we are happy to be found ready when the Master returns. But even more than that, we are blessed because the Master himself promises to serve the faithful servants. *“Truly, I say to you,*

he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them” (v.37b). That is very radical. Such a picture would have been unconscionable to the first century Jewish hearers. No master would ever treat His servants like that. In Jesus’ story, the master is so pleased that his servants were faithfully serving while he was gone, were ready to open the door on his return, that he served them. The master tucked his robe into his belt, had them recline at his table, and he served them.

Jesus fulfilled this picture the night He laid aside His robe, took a towel and bowl of water, and washed His followers’ feet. It is a picture of how our Master even now intercedes for us. It is a picture of how He is preparing to bless us in eternity for eternity. It is a promise reserved only for His servants, the kind of people who are ready.

The crux of the two stories is the same. Christ’s servants need to be ready (vv.39-40). Most people are ready in practical matters of life, like protecting our possessions. *“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”* (v.39).

Do we not respond in a similar way when we are warned about severe weather? Beginning in March, we are warned repeatedly about the steps to take when a tornado approaches. We are subsequently warned over and over when a tornado is possible (tornado watch) and when one has been sighted (tornado warning). If you fail to respond, if you fail to prepare, that is your problem. Also, from late summer into November the residents on our coastline are warned about approaching hurricanes. And the news will show us pictures of people boarding up their homes. Likewise, usually beginning in December the local weatherman will predict that there is a slight chance of one inch of snow accumulating. That is the signal for everyone to raid the local supermarket and buy up all the milk and bread. That you already have a well-stocked pantry full of great food doesn’t matter. Tradition requires that you respond to warning with acceptable action.

So, too, you and I are expected to be ready for Christ’s return. *“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (v.40). The whole story, the purpose of the commands, is that we might be ready for Christ’s return. That our

Master who bought us is returning to earth where He previously came to purchase salvation is promised repeatedly in Scripture.

The coming of the “Son of Man” is not the same as the rapture of the saints, which will initiate the Great Tribulation. Most of the information in *The Revelation* describes that time period. At the end of the Great Tribulation, Christ will return to establish His kingdom. Everything about human existence on earth will change at that moment. Contrary to the attempts by many to predict when this grand event will take place, Jesus said that no one knows when to expect it. He warned that it is imminent because it will occur *“at an hour you do not expect”* (v.40). Jesus also taught, *“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”* (Mark 13:32). Why do people not believe what Jesus said?

The Application (vv.41-48).

In applying the previous warning, Jesus taught lesson for faithful managers (vv.41-44). For whom is the lesson intended? That is what Peter wondered. *Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?”* (v.41). Peter brought up an important distinction. “Who needs to be ready, Christ’s followers or everyone?” On one hand, everyone needs to be prepared for Christ’s return. Once the Lord shows up, it’s too late to prepare. Therefore, it behooves all sinners to confess their sins, be forgiven, and to be ready for Christ’s return. Jesus explained that His words apply to unfaithful servants, who represent unbelievers; and faithful servants, who represent His followers.

Concerning those faithful servants, Jesus promised they will be blessed. The Lord appoints managers to be faithful and wise. *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?”* (v.42). One important truth that stands out in this statement is that a faithful manager believes what his Master says – he or she is a believer. This servant is also characterized by wisdom or sensibility – he or she knows what is expected, what to do. This is the description of a born again person. The Savior sovereignly appoints His servants to positions in His household. The Savior

determines and provides all that we need at the proper time. We are His servants by His choice, we do His service according to His choice.

But, on the other side of the coin, the human responsibility side, the Lord expects faithfulness from all His servants. Jesus taught, *“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes”* (v.43). The Master desires to find us doing what He told us to do. And yet, we cannot do what He requires, we will not do what He requires, if we are not ready. One gets the idea that true servants of Christ are characterized by at least trying to do what the Master expects.

In response, He promised to reward faithfulness. *Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions* (v.44). This is simply a picture of rewards for faithful service. The statement does not teach that the reward for faithfulness is salvation. Jesus never taught that a person can be born again because he or she does the right number or right kind of works. The promise also reveals that Christ’s servants will have various responsibilities of leadership in the future kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12).

But then there are the other people, the careless managers (vv.45-48). Jesus warned them saying that some servants will face dire consequences. There might be servants who despise their responsibility. *“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”* (v.45).

A true follower of Christ will not have a conscience that allows this kind of rebellion. This is not a genuine servant of Christ but an apparent servant of Christ. In reality he is selfish, fleshly, given to pleasure, interested only in doing his own will. He will not get away with such insubordination. Jesus warned in this story that the careless servant’s master will severely punish irresponsibility. *“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”* (v.46).

Now we see the picture of the same Christ who is the Master who serves the faithful servant, turned to become the severe Judge who judges the careless servant. The punishment described will be eternal, not annihilation.

At the same time, Jesus spoke of some servants who will face pending beatings. Again He broke this group into two categories, both of them speaking of unfaithful servants who represent unsaved sinners. Some of the servants (those in the first group) will receive severe beatings. *“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”* (v.47). These people knew what Christ requires. That means they are probably church-going-kind-of-people. But being wrapped up in the stuff of this world, they never got around to getting ready. The actual warning is that these people will suffer in hell, but not as severely as the determined rebels.

There will also be servants who will receive light beatings. *“But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating”* (v.48). This group describes sinners who are ignorant of Bible truth. They are servants because God created them to glorify Him. But they don’t. They still ignore God’s common grace revealed in creation and in the conscience. They too will suffer in hell, but not as severely as the other two kinds of sinners (the distracted and the intently rebellious).

Jesus concluded by applying the principle of “What is required.” *“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”* (v.48). This principle applies primarily to the faithless servants. So what is given to them?

God is faithful to give many kinds of common grace to all sinners. He has revealed His character in creation. He has written His law on the conscience. He has given His Word, to which most people in the world have access. In Greenville, SC and the Southeastern US, no one has an excuse for not knowing God’s plan of salvation through faith in Christ. God has given much grace.

What is required or demanded? God requires that all sinners need to confess sin and receive Christ’s payment for their sins. God’s plan is for everyone to be faithful, obedient servants who serve Christ. Sin precludes us from doing that. We are all servants. But there are faithful servants who are born again, and there are faithless servants who are rebellious sinners.

Therefore, this principle of what is required also applies secondarily to faithful servants. What does “much” given look like

for Christians? Our Master has given us salvation. That is definitely much. Our Master has given us abilities to serve Him. Our Master continues to give us opportunities to serve Him. What are you doing with what you have? What does much required look like? The ultimate standard is death to self and selfish desires, to live for Christ's reputation. That works out in very practical ways as we are constantly working on being ready for His return.

In conclusion, let's consider an interesting illustration of practical readiness. In October, we (Community Baptist Church) will celebrate our 34th anniversary as a church. That means, in very round numbers, that we will have met together approximately 1,768 Sundays. Typically, we have engaged in three teaching opportunities each of those Sundays. Those times have been forty-five minutes each for Sunday school (ABF), morning preaching and evening preaching. That adds up to about 2 hours 15 minutes per week or 135 minutes of Bible instruction per week.

Now if we take those weekly minutes times the 1,768 weeks in which we have been doing it, we arrive at 238,680 minutes (or 3,978 hours) of spiritual feeding in CBC's history. Of course, this does not include Wednesdays when we do small groups, which has not always been the case.

One would think that people with that much Bible training would be spiritually healthy, strong, courageous, and ready people who are faithful serving the Lord and Master waiting for His return. But the sad reality is that about one-third of our people have not taken advantage of the opportunities afforded them to be prepared. About one-third of our folks only eat one forty-five minute spiritual meal per week on Sunday morning. Not only that, but when we subtract about six or more Sundays per year for vacation, sick days, and visiting Aunt Snoozy and Uncle Snodgrass, we have a good number spiritually malnourished people. They could be compared to people who choose to eat only one-third of the recommended meals that make for physically healthy people.

Malnourished people cannot be ready for action. For example, in a past generation, young men, our family members, and friends, trained arduously in order to go to another part of the world to fight tyranny so that we can be free at home. They were fit, prepared, ready to serve. But many of those very fit and ready servants were captured

by the enemy, placed in concentration camps, and became emaciated. Before long, those once fit and ready men were so starved they could no longer fight for even their own freedom from slavery.

Too many professing Christians look like this. They know the Master's orders to exercise diligence to stay ready. They know they are supposed to serve Him. But they are so spiritually emaciated that they are barely alive spiritually. They can barely respond to the Holy Spirit's moving, teaching, and directing. They are hanging on with their last bit of spiritual strength because they refuse to be nourished according to the Master's plan.

The Master's plan to prepare us, to make us ready for His return includes these four significant expectations:

1. **Resort to the Word of God which makes us fit for every good work:**

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. **Hear the Word of God read publicly and preached regularly:**

"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13).

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

3. **Stop neglecting to meet together with the Master's servants:**

"[Stop] 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" (Hebrews 10:25).

4. **Meet together with the Master's servants in order to encourage and build each other up into the pattern of the Master (Ephesians 4:12-13).**

The work of the pastor/teacher is, *"To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13).*

Practicing these steps will prepare us well for the Master's return.