

Master's Return (Luke 12:35-59)



The first half of Luke 12 focuses on removing negative influences from our lives as followers of Christ - hypocrisy, fear, greed, and worry, i.e. how to avoid living the wrong way. The second half of Luke 12 focuses on the positive aspects, i.e. how to live the right way. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”* (12:22) What then do we live for? Jesus answers, *“But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (12:31)

Then how do we live for this kingdom in our daily lives? In answering this question, Jesus defines what a truly successful life looks like.

A. Two Right Responses, Two Wrong Responses, Two Surprises (12:35-40)

1. In the ancient middle east, wedding celebrations lasted several days. Close friends would be invited to stay longer to celebrate with the family for many days and often into late nights. So, while the servants knew for certain their master would soon be returning, they didn't know the day or the hour of his return. Note, the 2nd watch was from 9pm-12am at night, and the 3rd watch was from 12-3am the next day. Jesus is now beginning to prepare His disciples for His eventual absence from among them after the cross and resurrection.
2. Jesus' instruction to His disciples was two-fold, *“Let your waist girded and your lamps burning...”* (12:35) (a) Girding the waist is a picture of 'readiness for action'. The long, flowing robes in those days were a hindrance to serious labour, so they tucked their robes into the belt about their waist. (b) Keeping the lamp burning is a picture of 'vigilance and alertness' at a time most people are fast asleep.
3. We can have two wrong responses to Jesus' return. (a) Lack of interest in His return, and therefore failing to prepare for the future. We can just live for today with no regard for the future. 'Been there done that. It's been 2000 years. I am not interested unless it benefits me today.' (C.f. 2 Peter 3:3-13 talking about the 'scoffing spirit.') (b) Preoccupation in the detail and timing of Jesus' return, predicting dates, etc. and 'living only in the future.' Sometimes it can be escapism from the disappointing present, and we can fail to 'fully live today'.
4. *‘Blessed are those servants whom the master when he comes, will find watching.’* (v37) *‘Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.’* (v43) Jesus gives us the picture of the servant who is blessed, i.e. effective and successful in heaven's eyes. He is one who has (a) 'his waist girded for action' and (b) 'his lamps burning in alertness'. This man lives faithfully today and is making the most of today because he has tangible anticipation of the Lord's soon return. Our faithfulness in living today is shaped by our expectation of the future, i.e. the Lord's return. When Jesus returns, we can't present Him our charts and knowledge of end-time theology. Jesus wants to know how we have used the resources He has entrusted to us – time, gifts, etc.
5. Two surprises are awaiting the servants at the master's return: (a) Positive surprise for the faithful servants who were watching and waiting so to serve their soon returning master. Their master will put on the apron and serve them! This was King David's testimony in Psalm 23. The Lord Himself serves David at His banqueting table, anointing his head with fragrant oil and pouring wine into his cup until it overflows! (b) Negative surprise for the unfaithful servants who did not watch for the master's return. They will find the master's return painful, like having their house being broken into by a thief in the middle of the night. That sick stomach-sinking feeling that your treasures are taken, that sense your safety and privacy being violated.

B. The Faithful and Wise Steward (12:41-48)

1. At this point, Peter interjects a question, *“Lord, do you speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”* (12:41) i.e. 'Is this teaching relevant only to us, the believers? Or to everyone, believers and unbelievers alike? Will your return affect only the believers or everyone in the world?'

Jesus doesn't give a direct answer to Peter because it is not the right question to ask. Instead, Jesus tells a more detailed story but with the right question everyone should be asking, *“Who then is that faithful and wise steward...?”* (12:42) Knowing the answer to Peter's question will not help us. (C.f. 'What is it to you?' Jn 21:21)

The answer Jesus gives is, *'Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.'* (v43) (C.f. 12:38, 'find them so.' v38).

Question 1 - *Suppose you know the details of Jesus' coming and suppose it is next week. Are you going to be full of joy, or in panic? Are you going to live a radically different life than the way you are living right now?*

Jesus says the blessed servant is the faithful servant. What made them faithful? Because they were wise. They have already made radical changes to their lives in view of their master's return. So, they simply had to go on 'doing the same'. They knew they were already walking in the master's will. They were wise and faithful, and they were living a truly successful life.

Question 2 - *Are you living today as if the Lord is returning today? That is wise and faithful living.*

2. Jesus revealed two secrets about His return. It is an event that will be both rewarding beyond belief, and dreadful beyond belief. Depending on which side you stand, Jesus' return will be the greatest event or the most dreadful event.

7A) The master had a secret plan. He was going to make the faithful servant ruler over all he has, and Jesus owns the lot. The day of the servant's promotion was 'sudden', 'drastic', and 'permanent'. We never need to envy billionaires, who are like 'the fleeting mirages here only so briefly.' (C.f. Psa 73:20) The riches of God's kingdom and the increase of His government, there shall be no end. (C.f. Isa 9:7)

Note the three-fold promotion for the faithful servant. 1. Past ID - Slave; 2. Present - Steward; 3. Future ID - Ruler. How we live today affects our eternal destiny. If we live wisely and faithfully today, then the day of the Lord should not come like a thief breaking into our house in the night, but it will be the glorious day, long-awaited day of promotion. The hope of the Lord's second coming motivates holy living. (c.f. Phil 3:10-11)

7B) The day of the Lord will also bring judgment on the unfaithful servant beyond belief. Why was he unfaithful? Did he deny the master's return? Not at all. He knew his master was returning. He says to himself, *'My master is delaying his coming.'* (12:45) His theology had no connection to his daily living. He gets into petty brawls, eating, drinking, and getting drunk. He lives in the pleasures of this life, just like the people who don't know or care about the master's return.

The shock of this unfaithful servant's judgment was also 'sudden', 'devastating', and 'permanent'. Jesus states, *'He will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.'* (12:46) This is the shocking news from the mouth of Jesus. Will there be so-called 'ministers' and 'believers' in hell? According to Jesus, the answer is yes. These are hypocrites - pretenders with just religious labels. Jesus said, at the end of the age the angels would separate the true believers from the false ones. True believers are not known by their theology, but by their inner life in Christ which only God can see, which leads to the life of obedience.

3. Two Principles of Judgment: (12:47-48)

A) Ignorance is NOT bliss. 'I didn't know,' will not be a good enough an excuse to get off the punishment.

B) God's judgment is proportional to the revelation that was available to each person. Those who sinned because they did not know the truth, will fare better on that day than those who sinned despite knowing the truth. *'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.'* (12:48)

Question 3 - *How much has been entrusted to you? We were born slaves to sin. The Lord rescued us and made us stewards of His time and gifts, and we are on our way to be co-rulers with Christ. (C.f. kings and priests - Rev 1:6) Are you faithful over what He has committed to you?*

C. Post-Cross Disciples (12:49-53)

1. Now Jesus looks ahead to the cross that is awaiting Him. He calls it a 'baptism of fire', referring to the suffering required of Him in doing the will of God. (c.f. Mk 10:38ff) *'How distressed I am till it is accomplished!' or 'until the ordeal is over! (NEB).'* (12:50) It gives us a glimpse into what the cross must have cost Jesus. We can see the shadow of the cross over Jesus, even from this early part of His journey towards Jerusalem.

2. Jesus warns that His followers will also undergo the baptism of fire to a degree because following Jesus will invite persecution. Jesus gives us deep peace with God that leads to real peace with people, but Jesus' stand will inevitably bring conflict and division, and the clash of ideologies and priorities in life, even among the closest family members, especially when we seek to live with the kingdom priority. Most often this division will run right through the family. A basic family unit consists of five members: father, mother, son, daughter, and daughter-in-law. The disciples of Jesus must be prepared to suffer the rejection and separation from the loved ones at times if we want to walk with Him all the way.

D. Discerning the Times (12:54-59)

1. The people of Jesus' days had perfected the ancient weather forecasting science. They knew the westerly wind from the wet Mediterranean Sea would bring humidity and rain, but the southerly wind from the scorching desert would bring dry heat. However, they refused to discern the times in which they lived. Jesus rebuked them, *'Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern the time?'* (12:56)

Would Jesus rebuke our generation? Countless financial institutions forecast economic models and investment movements, but they have no idea that the signs of our day point Christ's return. In fact, most do not want to know. Israel has come back to her own land – not interested. Inter-faith religion is rapidly growing – don't want to know. A great political and economic storm is brewing over the horizon – yet the great majority of people want to only know about blessing and prosperity. Human nature has not changed much last 2000 years.

2. Given the signs of their days, Jesus gives important advice to the hearers. Settle all your account while you still have the chance. In this picture, this man failed to repay his debt and was being dragged off to court by an official in charge of the debtors' prison. The most sensible thing for this man was to make every effort to 'settle out of court'. He had no chance if he stood a trial because his debt was too great and unpayable.

Likewise, we should spare no effort in getting right with God now. If we get to the judgment day without settling our debt of sin out of court, the penalty will be too great for us to ever repay. And that day Jesus tells us we will be required to pay back in full down to the last penny - the lepton - a copper coin of the smallest value.

The court day is already fixed on God's calendar. We just don't know the day or the hour. The day of the Lord's return will be the day of great promotion to some, and the day of dreadful judgment for others. The outcome of that lawsuit will stand forever. If we come to Jesus Christ today and ask for forgiveness for all our sins, we can settle our debt today before we get to the court on that day. Jesus' suffering paid in full our debt of sin. He was distressed that we may be comforted!

There is an event that may precede the day of the Lord. It is the day of our death. Whether He returns for us, or we die before His return, we must be ready. If we are ready, we will love and long for the day of His return.