

Are You Ready?

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 12:35-48

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What's on your mind this morning? There's a lot to worry about these days. Just read the newspaper headlines—North Korea's nuclear threats, Charlottesville and the resurgence of white supremacy! Good grief! But there are other things too. Perhaps you're thinking about a problem you can't shake, an argument on the car ride here this morning, or a pressing decision that needs to be made. What's on your mind? Isn't it good news that we can give this stuff to God? But while these are real concerns, there's one we too often forget about. What am I talking about? *Judgment is coming, so we must be ready.* And the question is: Are you ready?

Please open your Bibles to Luke 12:35-48. Jesus is warning the Jewish religious leaders and teaching his disciples the meaning of being ready. Judgment is coming and he wants them prepared. The consequences are eternal! Therefore, nothing should be more pressing on our minds than the question of our readiness to meet Jesus. So let's learn what it means to be ready.

Luke 12:35-48¹

³⁵“*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶and 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. ³⁷Blessed 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. ³⁸If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!”³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

⁴¹Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?”⁴²And 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?”

⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵But 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, ⁴⁶the 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. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸But 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.

Judgment is coming so we must be ready.

This is the Word of the Lord.

YOU MUST BE READY FOR THE COMING JUDGMENT

To unpack this text we're going to deal with Jesus' command to be ready. Then we're going to dig into what it means to be ready. So let's start with the command to be ready.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

What holds this text together? Jesus gives us three pictures of what it means to be ready for judgment when he returns. In vv. 35-38, Jesus compares readiness to servants who stay up the whole night working until their master returns from a wedding banquet. In vv. 39-40, Jesus compares readiness to the master of a house who, knowing a burglar is coming, takes necessary measures to prevent the break-in. And in vv. 41-48, Jesus compares the consequence of not being ready to servants who are beaten for neglecting their duties. All of this holds together to make the point that we must be ready for Jesus to return.

Now what's at stake? There's great news for faithful servants, there's really bad news for unfaithful servants, but faithful servants will be blessed. How so? Jesus says faithful servants will actually be served by him! He says in v. 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." Jesus is not like earthly masters! Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus took up the basin and the towel to wash his disciples' feet. Jesus invites us to the marriage supper of the Lamb in the new creation. Blessed are those servants who Jesus finds ready!

And there's more good news! Look at v. 44, faithful servants will be set over Jesus' possessions. We see this promise throughout the New Testament—2 Timothy 2:12, "If we endure, we will also reign with him"; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"; Revelation 2:26, "To the one who conquers...I will give authority over the nations...." Blessed are the servants whom Jesus finds ready!

But what about the bad news? Unfaithful servants will be judged severely. In vv. 45-48, Jesus says that unfaithful servants will be punished by the degree of their neglect. The servant who rejects Jesus' will, shall be cut to pieces and put with the unbelievers. The lazy and neglectful servant will receive a severe beating. And the ignorant servant shall receive a light beating.

Jesus doesn't elaborate much on these judgments. We see that the first group is considered unbelievers. But the other two groups appear to still be considered believers. I get that from the fact that Jesus only consigns the first group to go with the unfaithful in v. 46.

What can we understand, then, about the judgment of Christians?

Christians will go before the judgment seat of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, "...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10; see also Rom. 14:10). Both Christians and non-Christians will undergo judgment.

The Christian's judgment is an assessment of their works, not whether they go to heaven or hell. It is possible to enter heaven with nothing to show for your work on earth! For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:15, Paul pictures a church leader who makes it to heaven but his work is burned up because he didn't build with gospel materials.

Christians will be judged according to their level of knowledge, resources and responsibility.

Now, back to our text. We find Jesus' main point at the end of v. 48, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required...." Those of us who have been privileged with an abundance of resources and education will undergo a more stringent judgment. For example, James writes that

teachers will be judged more strictly. And so, judgment will be proportional to what we've been given.

By virtue of our place in this world as American evangelical Christians, we have been given an abundance of unprecedented wealth, education and resources. At no point in history has the church had more ability to sanctify the name of Jesus in this world. We can access virtually any book ever written about God through digital media. With rare exception, we can reach virtually every person on the planet through social media.

How are you doing with the resources God's given you? My guess is that there's not many of us here in group one—those who reject Jesus' will and use his resources for selfish pursuits. There shouldn't be any of us in group three either—the ignorant group. The gospel is preached every week in this church so there should be no ignorance about what Jesus' will for us is. But, I'm guessing there could be a number of us in that second group who know Jesus' will, and while you don't reject it, you're really not doing it either. Judgment is a reality even for Christians. It's coming and we must be ready. So let's look at what readiness means.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY?

In this section, I'd like to unpack what readiness means for Christians generally, and then what it means for Christian leaders—particularly for pastor-elders

What does it mean to be ready? First off, being ready means you are always about your master's business. In vv. 35-36, Jesus says faithful servants are always dressed for action. They keep their lamps burning. They diligently work while they wait for their master's return. Notice how focused they are. They're not distracted. They're not sidetracked by personal agendas. Why? Because servants are servants. Servants don't set the rules. Their master sets the rules. They work for him. They know their master's business and they're hard at work.

Second, being ready means your business is caring for God's house. Master's don't give servants resources so that servants can go and build their own kingdoms! No! Servants are given resources to care for the master's house! They manage his house to make sure it's needs are met. Jesus gives us a description of this kind of care in v. 42, "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?" So readiness here looks like a manager who is diligently caring for God's house. The faithful manager feeds God's house food at the proper time. There's a feeding work to be done. But what kind of food does the manager feed God's house?

And last, readiness means serving God's Word to God's people. The food Jesus is talking about is the Word of God. Jesus told Satan that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). He told Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:15, 17). And in Luke through Acts, Luke highlights how the responsibility of the Word has been taken away from the Jewish leaders and given to the Apostles and the churches they plant (particularly to pastor-elders).

Now, most commentators agree that this text is particularly aimed at church leaders; while still having a wider application to all Christians.² This text is certainly an indictment of the Jewish leaders

² Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996.

Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. The New American Commentary. vol. 24, Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.

who took the Word away from God's people. It's certainly a discipleship-call to the new managers of God's people (the Apostles, and then pastor-elders). But it also has bearing on the responsibility all Christians have in relationship to the Word-ministry in the church and in their lives in general.

What I'd like to do now is illustrate the point in Luke through Acts and a few other places in the New Testament.

The Jewish leaders failed to feed God's Word to God's people. They did not feed God's house. Rather, they starved it out! Back in Luke 11:52, Jesus said, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." In fact, these leaders stole what belonged to them. For example, in Luke 11:39 Jesus blasted the Pharisees for being full of greed and wickedness. And in Luke 20:47 he describes them as those "who devour widow's houses." They were like a nanny who locked the kids in the house, took the food money, and spent the week on the town. It's unthinkable! These leaders utterly failed to feed God's house!

Paul's example is much better. He knew that, as an apostle, the blood of God's people was on his head. That is, he knew that God had given the apostles the utmost responsibility to proclaim God's Word in an unadulterated manner. And further, they were to make sure it was observed in the church. And Paul passed this responsibility on to pastor-elders. The blood of God's people are on their heads! Talk about a solemn responsibility! Let that sober those of us in this position! Listen to Paul's words to the pastor-elders of the church in Ephesus, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." (Acts 20:26-28).

Just like Paul, the pastor-elder's responsibility is to declare the whole counsel of God. That means they don't get to choose the message. They don't get to teach just the parts they like. Their job is to ensure that God's whole counsel is declared and observed in the church. The blood of God's people is on God's leaders. This is why in 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul told Timothy to preach the word with completeness. This is why in Titus 1:9 he instructs Titus to appoint pastor-elders who can give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. Their whole business is to feed God's Word to God's people!

But what about Christians in general? Consider the Bereans in Acts 17:11. They were called noble because "they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Notice their commendation for checking the Scriptures to verify what was being taught. Also consider what pastor-elders equip you to do. They equip you to speak the truth in love so that the whole body is built up (Eph. 4:15, 16). The church's Word-ministry is to equip you to participate in that Word-ministry to others. So in Luke 12, and by way of all of these illustrations, we can come to an expanded definition of what it means to be a ready disciple: Disciples diligently obey Jesus' will by ensuring that God's Word is being sufficiently served to God's people, doing so with a single-minded focus in light of the coming judgment.

We have seen that we all have a role in the ministry of God's Word to God's people. Here are three points of application.

Consider what readiness to serve the Word means for your personal priorities. Does the discipleship-call to participate in serving God's Word to God's people fit your lifestyle? Would that be what others say about you? Would they say at your funeral, the dominant goal of your life was the flourishing of the gospel in every area of your life? Would your friends and family say, "He loved God's Word?" or "She always spoke the Word of God to me"? Does Jesus' priority for your life, fit with your priority for your life? Where is it out of alignment? What does this singularly focused call mean for your personal priorities? Jesus wants you to take a good, hard look in the mirror. Where does Jesus' discipleship-call to prioritize the Word challenge your priorities? Where do you need correction?

Consider what readiness to serve the Word means for your various life roles. We have a lot of roles. Where does the ministry of the Word enter those roles? Martin Luther once commented that we have "three sweats" in our life: family sweat, work sweat and church sweat! They're all important. What does a readiness to serve the Word mean for your home responsibilities? How are you leading or supporting the ministry of the Word in your family? This, by the way, is your primary discipleship-calling. If God has blessed you with children, or family of some kind, this is the first circle of discipleship. Is the main question you ask for your family, "Is the Word dwelling richly in my home?" What does serving the Word mean for how you serve in the church? When you sing, are you singing to build up those around you? When someone is hurting, are you there to minister the healing balm of Scripture? Do you learn so you can share what you've learned with others? Or are you here simply here to get something, keep it to yourself and go home? The same applies for your role in your workplace and neighborhood. What does serving the Word of God look like in your various life roles?

Consider what readiness to serve the Word means based on your spiritual gifts. We all have spiritual gifts, and we all have been given those gifts in different degrees. Romans 12:6 tells us we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. And these gifts are given in varying proportions. Teaching is a great example. We're all called to teach to one degree or another. But not everyone is called to preach. Even among elders—who are all are required to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2)—only some are particularly called to give themselves to preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17). Romans 12:7 says that the one who teaches should teach according to the measure of grace given to him. This same principle applies to hospitality, generosity, acts of mercy, etc.

God gives Christians varying degrees of gifts and abilities in these areas. They're all related to serving and applying God's Word for the care of his people. So in terms of serving the Word based on your spiritual gifts, how are you doing?

ARE YOU READY?

So now we come to the point.

Pastor-elders, are you ready to give account for your ministry to God's flock? Will you stand unashamed before the judgment seat of Christ of how you've upheld the purity of God's Word in the leadership of this church? Does a zeal for fidelity to God's Word drive your ministry? Is it your joy to see the Word fed to God's house? And are you eagerly participating in the distribution of this food to the church? Are you allowing the whole counsel of God to be taught and applied in this place?

Congregation, are you ready to give an account for your partnership in the ministry of the Word in this church and in your life-roles? Will you stand unashamed of how you supported and encouraged and followed the ministry of the Word in this place? Are you letting the Word flourish in your family, workplace, and community? Where do you need to make steps to grow here?

Non-Christian, are you ready now that you've heard your responsibility to obey Jesus' will? Whether you like it or not, Jesus is your Lord and Master. Are you ready to meet him? Above all things, being ready for the coming judgment simply means repentance and faith. What must you do to be saved? Acknowledge your sins to God, say you're sorry, turn from them, and place your trust in Jesus' blood for forgiveness. The truth is, we're all unworthy, unprofitable servants (cf. Luke 17:10). We're only acceptable to God because Jesus shed his blood for us. So turn to him now. There's no hope if you go before his throne unprepared.

CONCLUSION

Judgment is coming so we must be ready. That's the message. Today's passage is a really tough passage. So how are you feeling right now? Jesus has many tough and tender sayings in the gospels. This text is certainly one of those tough passages. And the danger of preaching a tough passage 'toughly,' is that sometimes the wrong people can feel crushed by the weight of it. There may be some here who are resting on a sort of pharisaical pride, and you need to feel the full weight of this tough passage—to whom much has been given, much will be expected. But I also know that there are many more of you here who need to hear tenderness. You have no problem feeling guilty. How about some hope?

I want to close with this exhortation: Rest your faith, your failures and your strength for the work on Jesus. Do this, and you'll have no need to fear his return. Why? Because we live on the other side of the cross from this passage. Every failure—past, present, and future—has already been forgiven. Jesus is the only perfectly faithful servant, and he died in our place. And when we are faithless, he remains faithful. But more than this, because we live on this side of the cross, we've been given a Helper (John 14:16, 26). Jesus gives us his Spirit (Acts 1:5). He's with us always (Matt 28:20). We're not alone in our work!

Even our strength for the work comes from him. In this way, faithful, ready service is all by God's grace. What God requires, he also gives! Although he worked harder than any of the other apostles, Paul says that "it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). In Colossians, he said that he toiled with all of Christ's strength that he powerfully worked in him (Col. 1:29). And Peter says whoever serves, serve "as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4:11). Even our strength for faithful, ready service comes from God! It's all of grace.

In a moment we're going to sing the hymn, "We Rest on Thee." Make verse three your song this week:

*We go in faith our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day Thy grace to know.
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,
We rest on Thee and in Thy name we go.³*

³ Edith G. Cherry, 1895.

Friends, judgment is coming so we must be ready. Of all the things that could worry you this morning, this should be on the top of your list. Don't let it leave your mind. But as you strive to be ready, rest your faith, your failures and your strength for the work on Jesus. Do that and he will be your hope and peace as you wait for his coming. And when he does come, you'll have no need to fear. He will say to you, "Well done good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master." (Matt. 25:21).

Brothers and sisters, rest on Jesus and enter the work of your master with all the grace that he supplies! Do this and you'll always be ready. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.