

### The Master is Coming to Serve You

The last Sunday we looked at Luke's Gospel, we finished by asking some very pointed and serious questions: What if your entire life, here on earth, is merely a test? When it is over, you will be able to go back and watch the whole of your life and see how you well you did. What if God gave you just what you needed of the basic necessities of life and then every once in awhile He gave you a little more – a few more possessions, a handful more of giftedness, a little extra time - to see what you would do with it? He wanted to see what you were made of, or better yet, He wanted you to see what was in your heart? Would you spend it all on yourself or use it to serve and love others? Where is your heart? That is where your treasure is (**Luke 12:32-34**)! Are you investing in merely earthly treasures that will very soon burn up and blow away (**v. 21**)? Or, are you investing in eternal, permanent treasures of the Kingdom of God?

Now, I want to add a new set of questions, just as pointed but perhaps not as serious: What if life begins not simply when we are born into this world, but real life begins once you die? What if life after death is far more active than we previously thought? We sometimes think of eternal life as going to heaven and living a “Sunday-gathered-worshipping” kind of life of sitting on clouds, playing on harps, and eternally lounging on a heavenly couch? But what if life after “life on earth” was a much more active life, the beginning of life and all we were doing here on earth was in preparation for service in that eternal life? We know that heaven itself will not be our permanent dwelling and our pre-resurrection bodies will not be our permanent bodies we dwell in. Paul says very clearly:

<sup>1</sup> For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup> inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge (**2 Cor. 5:1-5**).

And both John and Isaiah speak of a new heavens and a new earth with the new Jerusalem coming down and settling-in upon the new earth (**cf. Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21:1-4**). John describes it:

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, <sup>4</sup> and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no

longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:1-4).

In our passage this morning, Jesus describes this life we now live on earth as preparation for how we will serve on the new earth – to the degree that we serve others here will determine our position of service in our future, permanent life. Let me explain. The whole passage is about what will Jesus find you, His disciples, doing when He returns (v. 40). Why? Because those who are faithful with the gifts He has provided you with today, while the Master is currently away, will be given even greater responsibilities when He returns (vv. 42-44). Jesus told another parable which coincides with what He says here in Luke. Look at **Matthew 25:14-30** [see **vv. 21 & 23**].

Whenever we are teaching someone how to do a task, there will usually be three stages to the learning process. **First**, I show them how to do it and they watch. **Second**, I hand them the tools and let them attempt and fumble through it while I watch and occasionally advise them on their technique. And then **finally**, when I am satisfied that they are able to do it correctly, I go off and let them do it. What if Jesus first advent was His showing us how to do it while we watched (by reading our Bibles)? While He is currently on His throne in heaven, He is watching our service here on earth seeing us attempt and fumble through our service to others, while the Holy Spirit produces fruits of righteousness through us (cf. **Phil. 2:12-13**). But then when He returns, He evaluates our service during the training process here on earth, to **now** let us **truly** get to work in the new heavens and new earth? That future life in the new heavens and new earth is when we really get to get started on our eternal service for the LORD. That is the picture Jesus is providing us with this morning and His main purpose in this passage is to focus our attention, as His disciples, in taking seriously – actively, sincerely – the work He has called us to do now. It is in no way that our service to others now is unimportant or nonessential. It is only that there will be much more fruitful labor after this life, which we are preparing for now in this life.

Now with that future orientation of a busy, active eternal life in the new heavens and new earth before us, let us turn to the beginning of our passage and see more carefully what Jesus is saying to us.

You will notice right off the bat that the passage includes two beatitudes: a blessing upon those who are expectantly waiting on their LORD (vv. 37-38) and a blessing upon those who have faithfully labored and are faithfully laboring when Jesus returns (vv. 43-44). The rest of the passage is built around these two blessings with three parables, the first two illustrating how Jesus' disciples are to be ready for His return (vv. 35-36; vv. 39-40), and the last one encouraging faithfulness in our service while He is away (vv. 42, 45-46, 47-48). Let's look at each parable first.

### **Parable 1 (vv. 35-36) – Being Prepared for the Master's Return**

The first parable includes three graphic images of preparedness. First, is the girding of our loins (v. 35a). Those living in the ancient near east customarily wore long flowing robes which impeded quick, easy movements when necessary. So when someone needed to get on with his work, he would bundle up his robes around his loins and tuck them into a large belt around his waist. The Scriptures use this language as a picture of being constantly at the ready when called to action.

The second image is of a lit lamp (v. 35b). A modern idea here would be a turned-on flashlight or

even having the lights in the house left on. The idea is that though it is dark, you are not asleep in bed but up and ready for action.

These two images come together in the third image of the servants awaiting their master's return from a wedding feast (v. 36). Such feasts in the ancient world could last anywhere from a few days to as long as a week. There would be no way for the servants of the master's house to know when their master would return. Not only might he return on anyone of those days during the week, but at any hour of the day or night. He might come as late as the second night watch (or between 9 p.m. and midnight) or even the the third watch (or between midnight and 3 a.m.) (v. 38). The point being that the master could come at any time and therefore the servants must be awake and ready to unbolt the door when the master knocks so that he may come in (v. 36).

But what if the master has gone and after a couple of days the servants begin to think that “the master won't come tonight either, so we might as well turn out the lights and tuck in for the night.” You will remember in the Song of Solomon how the bridegroom came in the night to the chamber doors of his bride and knocked (SoS 5:1-8) but she had already washed up and tucked in for the night. She refused him and he went away. When she suddenly realized what she had done, she arose and went after her beloved only to find that he was gone and the watchmen found her and beat her and raped her. She cried out in her desperation:

<sup>8</sup> “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, As to what you will tell him: For I am lovesick” (SoS 5:8).

Or, Jesus parable of the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. The five foolish had no extra oil to light their lamps and when their lamps went out they had to go buy more oil. But the wise virgins were prepared with extra oil so to be ready for the bridegroom when he suddenly appeared. The ending of the parable is most tragic:

<sup>10</sup> “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> “Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ <sup>12</sup> “But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour (Matt. 25:10-13).

When Jesus comes to get you, will you be ready to receive Him OR will you have retired into your chambers and fallen asleep in the arms of this world? Where are your eyes looking with expectation? Are you focused here on earth, building your kingdom, great and glorious? Or, are your eyes fixed on Jesus, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Col. 3:1-4), awaiting Him to stand up and come back to earth to bring you where He is, so that you may be with Him to behold Him in all His glory (John 14:3; 17:24)? Let us fix our eyes on our Master:

<sup>1</sup> To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens! <sup>2</sup> Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the LORD our God, Until He is gracious to us (Ps. 123:1-2).

## Parable 2 (v. 39-40) – Being Ready for His Return

The second parable is like the first, but with a shocking twist. The suddenness of Jesus' return is likened to a thief which comes in the night. If we had to be robbed, wouldn't it be much easier on us if our burglar were to text us to let us know when he would arrive? We could then be ready to protect our home and possessions from being pillaged. Jesus shocks his audience, as well as us, by comparing his return to a thief coming in the middle of the night (v. 40). The purpose of the analogy may only be to use a surprising, jolting image to make the memorable point that His disciples must be ready for His return on any day of the week, day or night.

## Parable 3 (42, 45-46, 47-48) – Four Stewards (like the Four Soils – 8:4-8, 11-15)

The third parable brings with it a new beatitude (vv. 43-44). To understand this parable, it is helpful to have the earlier parable of the four soils in mind (cf. 8:4-8 11-15). In that parable, there was only one good soil that had been prepared beforehand by the sower to receive the seed and grow into a fruitful harvest. The reasons the other soils did not produce fruit was because they were never intended to receive the seed for it to grow as part of the harvest. In the same way, there are four stewards in the parable, but only one of them is a faithful and wise steward for his master and will thus enjoy the blessings the master has for him.

Let's look at each one. In v. 41, Peter asks if Jesus is telling the parables exclusively for "us" (meaning Jesus' disciples) or for "all"/"everyone" (meaning both believer and unbeliever alike). Jesus answers Peter's question with another parable and it is clear that the answer is "yes" - both, especially when we remember the purpose of Jesus' use of parables. Jesus clearly includes the unbeliever as part of the parable (see v. 46 – the "unfaithful"). But you will remember why Jesus speaks in parables in the first place:

<sup>10</sup> And He said, "To you [Jesus' disciples] it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND (LUKE 8:10 → ISA. 6:9-10).

Parables allow Jesus to speak to a large group of people, which includes both the elect and the reprobate, while granting the hidden truth or mystery of the kingdom of God only to His elect few He has chosen to see. "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Jesus says elsewhere

<sup>21</sup> At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. <sup>22</sup> "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*" (LUKE 10:21-22).

So to answer Peter's question, Jesus is speaking to both – the believer and the unbeliever – but by using a parable it is only the believer who will benefit from hearing and obeying what Jesus is saying. And what is that?

The first steward is both faithful and wise while his master is away (v. 42). The image here is of a

master who once again has gone away for a time and his servants do not know when he will return. While he is away, he leaves the running of his house in the hands of his stewards. Stewards were managers of the house – the chief of staff – Mr. Carson for those in the know. Their responsibilities included the welfare of all the other servants – making sure that all their needs, including their daily portion of food, were taken care of so that they could do their duties (v. 42). Note Jesus' emphasis on the loving care the faithful and wise steward provides for the other servants. The picture Jesus gives, is that had the master been home, each of the servants would have been loved and cared for by him. But since he is away, the wise and faithful servant will treat the master's servants the way the master would have treated them while he was at home.

We can see more fully how the wise and faithful steward was required to treat the master's servants by seeing why the master punishes the unfaithful stewards (vv. 45-48). The first of the unfaithful servants says to himself, “my master is delayed in coming” and so because of that he becomes careless by changing his behavior and demeanor towards the master's servants. While the master is around, the steward cares for the rest of the servants. But once the cat is away, the mouse begins to play and he begins beating both the male and female servants and throws wild parties – wasting his master's provision on himself – the idea of self-indulgence may mean that he is abusing the rations that were left for all the servants on himself. In other words, he abuses his position – which was entrusted to him by the master – and becomes the king in his own castle. Or more clearly, he takes what God has given him, to become “god” over his subjects in his own little, miniature kingdom. He was clearly laying up his treasure here on earth for himself and was bankrupt towards God (cf. Lk. 12:21). He has become the fool by becoming the opposite of what Jesus commands us:

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Like in the parable of the talents we read earlier, he has taken what God provided and wasted his whole life on himself (cf. Matt. 25:24-30). And so what will the master do when he returns and finds how unfaithful his steward has been with what was entrusted to his care?

Jesus actually uses some pretty graphic and troubling language here of the most horrific punishment – the master will appear suddenly when he is not expected and cut or slice him in two or in pieces and then the master will put him with the rest of the unfaithful – the unbelievers (v. 46) – because the unfaithful, worthless slave who only thought about himself and ignored the privileges that the master entrusted to him proved to be no better than the unfaithful – the unbeliever. He was placed among the unbelievers because he was one. John describes:

<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19).

Jesus describes why the servant received such a terrible punishment from the hand of his master in v. 47. He knew what his master required of him. The problem was not a lack of knowledge but an

unwillingness to seek the master's kingdom and the master's righteousness instead of his own (v. 47; cf. Matt. 6:33). The unfaithful steward did not trust his master. He did not believe in his master's good nature. So he thought that if his master won't care for him, then he will use what belongs to the master to care for himself and to be a king in his own kingdom while the master is away. But because he knew what the master required of him and chose not to do it, he received the far more severe punishment. One thinks of the Pharisees who knew what God required of them but refused to follow His word because they sought to serve themselves rather than God.

<sup>37</sup> “And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. <sup>38</sup> “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. <sup>39</sup> “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; <sup>40</sup> and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life (John 5:37-43).

Beloved, this image Jesus gives hear of the unfaithful steward is not simply a “pharisee” problem; no, it is a you and me problem. We are the unfaithful steward who constantly takes what is entrusted to us by God and uses it for ourselves – for our own pleasure in this world. Oh, how we feel the eyes of God's disgrace upon us as we read that last principle of v. 48b “to whom much was given, much will be required and to him whom much was entrusted much will be demanded.”

We can never match the grace God has shown to us through the gift of His Son's life for our worthless offerings, but there is a way that we can now live our life for Him in gratitude and thanksgiving for all He has done for us. I would like you to think a little more deeply about the two blessings before us and let what Jesus promises you fill your soul with deep joy satiating your heart with His eternal love to move you to live out the rest of your life, day by day, ready for Jesus to come and get you and take you home.

Throughout Scripture God often describes His people as “servants” (Paul's greetings; Isa. 65:8, 13-15; Ezek. 20:40; Mal. 3:18; etc.). And when we often think of the life of a servant or slave, we often pity them because they are left out of the master's feasting with his friends. They must wait on others, while others are enjoying themselves. But not the servants of this Master (Lk. 12:37). Jesus is describing the marriage feast of the Lamb, where He is the divine host serving you at His table. John describes this blessing:

<sup>6</sup> Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “**Hallelujah!** For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup> “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” <sup>8</sup> It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ ” And he said to me, “These are true words of God” (Rev. 19:6-9).

When Jesus suddenly appears He brings the feast with Him. But not only does He provide a whole smorgasbord of delectables for his servants, but He girds Himself with the posture of a servant and serves you at His table. Once again, He comes not to be served but to serve and give His life for you. You will remember the first time He took this posture:

<sup>1</sup> Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end . . . <sup>3</sup> *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup> \*got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself (**John 13:1, 3-4; cf. Phil. 2:6-8**).

But there is much more to come – a whole other life where Jesus will continue in the posture of your servant. Does this surprise you? Jesus' character will always be the same. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (**cf. Heb. 13:8**). Jesus loves you and it is the nature of divine love to give to you, to provide for you, to serve you who are the objects of God's loving devotion. That will never change. Jesus' character will never change even when we arrive before Him in heaven. It is just that in heaven you will lose all those distractions that prevent you from truly drinking deeply in the well of His everlasting love for you.

But the same is true of you – as you follow Jesus is serving others in love as He served you, you will find a very smooth and natural transition in the life to come where He will entrust you to even greater service in the Kingdom of God (**Lk. 12:43-44**).

What if this life is just the test, the trial for where we will serve when life truly begins? What you do in this life will determine how and where you will serve in the new heavens and on the new earth. Your master is calling you today to be ready when He comes and may He find you faithful and wisely serving others in love even as He has loved you. For Jesus promises you His Bride:

<sup>20</sup> 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. <sup>21</sup> 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne (**Rev. 3:20-21**).

**Amen!**

**-SDG-**