

The Unconverted “Believer” (25); Finishing in Faith

Today we conclude our series, “The Unconverted ‘Believer’”, in which we have addressed the problem and prevalence of nominal Christianity in evangelicalism. We have examined this matter from many vantage points in our effort to expose and correct this significant spiritual problem. It has been our desire and intention that no one within the influence of this church’s ministry be uninformed or unmoved so that they will be among so many others when they hear the words of the Lord Jesus pronounced to them on Judgement Day, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matt. 7:23).

What we have declared regarding these matters is controversial. Most churches would not tolerate what we have shown to be scriptural teaching regarding salvation. But we have cited numerous voices, mostly those of the past, who had declared what we have taught these many weeks. Recently I completed reading the book by **Arthur Pink** (1886-1952), *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, in which he asserted the same things that we have taught.¹ It was reinforcing to read his words.

In this series we have identified and corrected a number of commonly held and propagated errors respecting the way of salvation that is thought to be taught in the Bible. Let me rehearse a few conclusions we have drawn from assessing these errors by the Holy Scriptures:

1. Salvation is much more than just the forgiveness of sins.

Salvation is commonly and popularly, but wrongly, reduced to God forgiving people of their sins. Although God’s justification of the sinner is granted through faith alone, which includes God’s forgiveness of his sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer, salvation is much more than just justification. The biblical gospel must, therefore, entail more than the mere promise that God will forgive a sinner of his sins if he but believes on Jesus. Biblical salvation includes the believer’s justification, reconciliation/adoption, sanctification, and his future glorification. God saves His people from sin—from guilt of sin, from the alienating effects of sin, and from the power of sin, and finally from the very presence of sin. The gospel message we proclaim must address these aspects of God’s salvation from sin.

2. Coming to salvation is not a one-time decision to accept Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior.

The commonly heard message, “If you but accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you will be saved”, is not the biblical gospel, for it does not speak fully to the sinner’s need of salvation. There are several unbiblical ideas revealed in this line of thinking. First, although God declares upon the initial faith of the believing sinner that He has justified him, it is wrong to conclude that God calls only for a one-time decision that He will regard as saving faith. Saving faith is continual believing on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; it is not a one-time decision to believe. Arthur Pink wrote: “Saving faith is not an isolated act which suffices for the remainder of a person’s life, rather it is a living principle which continues in activity, ever seeking the only Object which can satisfy it. Nor is it a thing apart, but a *productive* principle which issues in good works and spiritual fruits.”²

3. Initial saving faith is the entrance into a way of life that leads to full and final salvation.

Paul wrote, “now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). Although Paul regarded himself and his readers as having been justified (Rom. 5:1), he did not yet regard himself or his

¹ I have elevated this book in my own assessment to be included in my top ten recommended books for Christians.

² Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Baker Book House, 1982), p. 360.

readers as having experienced full salvation. Salvation is the future hope of the believer of his resurrection from the dead and his exoneration before the judgment seat of Christ. Justification is the initial coming to experience God's forgiveness of sins and the resultant peace that Christ secured for His people. But salvation is largely a certain, future, prospect and hope for the Christian.

4. Saving faith involves embracing and submitting unto Jesus Christ as Lord, as well as one's personal Savior.

Biblical salvation brings about the reversal and recovery of the fallen of man. It removes his rebellious heart and gives him the heart to love righteousness, to love God's people, to love God Himself. Repentance from sin in turning to Jesus the Lord is foundational, without which there is no salvation. "Saving faith not only trusts in Christ but follows Him."³ Coming to saving faith is the full and total surrender of one's life to follow Jesus Christ in faith, love, and obedience.

5. To become a true Christian is to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Saving faith is shown in the believer following a course of obedience doing the will of God through life unto final salvation. As the Lord Jesus declared,

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13f)

Charles Spurgeon once declared:

"Conversion is a turning into the right road; the next thing is to walk in it. The daily going on in that road is as essential as the first starting if you would reach the desired end. To strike the first blow is not all the battle: to him that overcometh the crown is promised. To start in the race is nothing, many have done that who have failed; but to hold out till you reach the winning post is the great point of the matter. Perseverance is as *necessary to a man's salvation* as conversion.

6. It is wrongly thought that good works are unnecessary in order to obtain salvation.

Saving faith shows forth itself in a life characterized by good works (Eph. 2:10). The Christian's good works are not the basis of God's acceptance of him, but they are evidence that he is a true Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ. This is one of the major errors of the day. Many believe that one's works have no bearing at all on their salvation. It is commonly, but wrongly thought, "As long as I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior who died upon the cross to pay for my sins, it does not matter how I live, for I am saved apart from works."

Arthur Pink addressed this as the greatest problem that the preacher must confront and overcome in today's world:

Now it is the duty of God's servants to provide help to exercised souls on this supremely important matter, to expose the lies of these "false prophets," to make plain the way of salvation. This may best be done by defining and showing the relation of *good works* unto salvation, for it is at this point more than any other that the emissaries of Satan have fatally deceived souls. The principal errors which have been advanced thereon may be summed up under these two heads: salvation *by* works, and salvation *without* works. Romanists (i.e. Roman Catholicism) have been the chief promulgators of the former, insisting that the good works of the Christian have a meritorious value which entitles him to heaven. Thereby they rob Christ of much of His glory, bringing in something of ours in addition to His blood and righteousness to

³ Ibid, p. 336.

obtain acceptance with God. Romanists do not repudiate *in toto* either the grace of God or the redemption of Christ, but they nullify both by attributing saving efficacy unto the rites of their church, and the performances of the creature. Such an error is expressly repudiated by such scriptures as Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8 and 9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

Some of the propagators of the *salvation-without-works* error during the last century have assumed the garb of the orthodox and thereby obtained a hearing from many who had never listened to them had their real characters been suspected. They have gone to the opposite extreme and preached a “gospel” as far removed from the Truth as the Romish lie of salvation *by* works. They teach that while good works from Christians are certainly desirable yet they are not imperative, the absence of them involving merely the loss of certain “millennial” honors and not the missing of heaven itself. They have interpreted those words of Christ’s “It is finished” in such a way as to lull multitudes of souls into a false peace, as though He wrought something at the Cross which renders it needless for sinners to repent, forsake their idols, renounce the world before they can be saved; that “nothing is required from them but their simple acceptance of Christ by faith;” that once they have “rested on His finished work”—no matter what their subsequent lives—they are “eternally secure.” So widely has this fatal doctrine been received, so thoroughly have these “ravenous wolves” deceived the religious world by their “sheep’s clothing,” that with rare exceptions anyone who now denounces this deadly evil is to call down upon himself the charge of being a “Legalist” or “Judaizer.”

Pink wrote that “with rare exceptions” anyone who proclaims the nature of salvation and the biblical gospel of this salvation is charged of being a “Legalist” or “Judaizer.” I have personally found this to be true. Listen to the words of a radio listener from Maine who had been singing my praises last fall, but after I began to address this series, he wrote these words to me this past April:

You're on real dangerous ground bucko. I would put your Bible down and not touch it again if you are going to refuse to believe it. You profess to be a Christian, yet you do not believe the Bible. It makes God sick... Don't bother message me back. You are an apostate and you are messing with salvation and I will be shocked if you dont burn for it. Dont send me your sermons anymore. They aren't worth time it took to press the send button.

Got thinking about you for some reason. The thief on the cross didnt have works to keep his salvation. You're going to hell, Lars. You are not saved. You think you can keep your own salvation by your works. Salvation is not yours to keep.

The foundation is Jesus Christ. To even get here, you must be saved. Salvation is not evidenced by work in this dispensation. Salvation is through faith alone. Salvation is permanent. Works after salvation get the Christian rewards but works dont keep you and they dont evidence a thing. Careful taking doctrine out of James. It's to the twelve tribes of the dispersion. That's not the church. Makes you think it might be talking to saints in the great tribulation aka the time of Jacob's trouble where the salvation setup involves works... just a thought though. Not saying there's nothing for the Christian there by any means, there is good stuff in James. Just careful taking doctrine out of it.

This is what I wrote to him last:

Greetings Jed,

I would encourage you to consider carefully the fact that you are falsely accusing me of teaching heresy. I have never believed or taught that we are saved by our works or that we keep our salvation by our works. For you to accuse me of this is wrong and you are bearing false witness regarding me. I attached sermon notes to this email in which I emphasized very strongly our justification by grace through faith alone apart from works. I gave this sermon at the end of this January. What I have been teaching is that true saving faith must be evidenced by works, or it is not saving faith. This is what God’s Word declares in Paul’s letters (Gal. 6:7-10; Rom. 8:12, 13), in James (2:17-20; 26), by John (1

John 2:3, 4), and most certainly by our Lord Himself (Matt. 7:21-29). There are two great threats to the biblical teaching regarding grace. The first is legalism, of which you are falsely accusing me. The second is licentiousness, or antinomianism, for which I hope that you are not advocating. To say that you can be saved without the presence of works is the heresy of antinomianism.

Thankfully in Christ,
Pastor Lars

This man's words illustrate the importance and the need to address the matters that have arisen in this series. There is much ignorance and many errant beliefs that are proclaimed and perpetrated by wolves in sheep's clothing.

We will conclude this brief summary with a few words of **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758). In his sermon, *The Manner in which the Salvation of the Soul is to be Sought*, Edwards showed how Noah building his ark in order to save himself from the wrath of God in the flood is illustrative of how we are to undertake a great work through this life with view to our own salvation.

Inquiry 2. Why is it needful that men should undertake to go through such a work in order to their salvation?

Answer 1. Not to merit salvation, or to recommend them to the saving mercy of God. Men are not saved on the account of any work of theirs, and yet they are not saved without works. If we merely consider what it is for which, or on the account of which, men are saved, no work at all in men is necessary to their salvation. In this respect they are saved wholly without any work of theirs: Titus iii. 5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." We must indeed be saved on the account of works; but not our own. It is on account of the works which Christ hath done for us. Works are the fixed price of eternal life; it is fixed by an eternal, unalterable rule of righteousness. But since the fall there is no hope of our doing these works, without salvation offered freely without money and without price. But,

2. Though it be not needful that we do anything to merit salvation, which Christ hath fully merited for all who believe in him; yet God, for wise and holy ends, hath appointed, that we should come to final salvation in no other way, but that of good works done by us. God did not save Noah on account of the labor and expense he was at in building the ark. Noah's salvation from the flood was an instance of the free and distinguishing mercy of God. Nor did God stand in need of Noah's care, or cost, or labor, to build an ark. The same power which created the world, and which brought the flood of waters upon the earth, could have made the ark in an instant, without any care or cost to Noah, or any of the labor of those workmen who were employed for so long a time. Yet God was pleased to appoint, that Noah should be saved in this way. So God hath appointed that man should not be saved without his undertaking and doing this work of which I have been speaking; and therefore we are commanded "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," Philip. 2:12.⁴

We might add that Noah built the ark through his faith in what God told him and promised him. Hebrews 11:7 reads, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." By faith we, too, are moving with godly fear, ordering our lives in view to the flood of God's judgment that is coming upon the world.

⁴ I attached this full sermon of Jonathan Edwards in a Word file to the weekly sermon notes sent out via email and text.

Today we will close out our series, “The Unconverted ‘Believer.’” Two Sundays ago we addressed the sinner initially *coming to faith in Jesus Christ* as his Lord and Savior. Last Lord’s Day we spoke of the importance of *continuing in faith in Jesus Christ through life*. And today we will emphasize the importance of *completing this life of faith in Jesus Christ*. Let us turn to consider our Lord’s words recorded in **Luke 12:35-48**.

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. ³⁸And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

⁴¹Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”

⁴²And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. 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. (Luke 12:35-48)

In the portion of Luke’s Gospel in which these words are recorded, we read that the Lord Jesus was on His final journey to Jerusalem. Luke recorded this journey having begun with Luke 9:51, which reads, “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus taught the crowds along the way. With the arrival to His destination, Jesus would meet His destiny, to die upon His cross and then be raised from the dead. He declared in Luke 13:33, “Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.” The time was short. His hearers must not put off responding to Him. For the day of salvation would end soon and then the judgment of God would befall that entire generation of Jews. Jesus used this occasion to press upon His disciples their responsibility and privilege to live in anticipation of His second coming, when He would judge the world in righteousness. This journey to Jerusalem, the impending death of Jesus and the subsequent judgment on Jerusalem, provide a sense of importance to Jesus’ teaching and a sense of urgency to His hearers as well as to the readers of this Gospel.

As we glance over these verses we can see an obvious division. Peter interjects a question (v. 41), which divides that which goes before and that which comes after. The first portion of this teaching session of Jesus speaks of the important need to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ. We may summarize the teaching verses 35 through 40 as “Be Prepared for the Coming of the Son of Man.” The second portion of our Lord’s speech to His disciples speaks of the blessing that His faithful servants will experience if the Lord finds them in faith at His coming. This second section may be entitled, “The Blessing of those Prepared for His Coming.” Let us consider each of these.

I. Be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man. (Luke 12:35-41)

Upon careful reading these first seven verses, they provide both a *positive encouragement for readiness* (vs. 35-38) as well as a *word of caution for Jesus’ disciples* (vs. 39-40).

A. The positive promise for the one who is ready (12:35-38)

The Lord Jesus exhorted His disciples to be ready to receive Him at His second coming to judge the world.

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. ³⁸And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Our Lord had just challenged His disciples to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven. He had assured them that it was God the Father’s desire and purpose to give them the promised kingdom, therefore they should give themselves over fully to prepare for a glorious and abundant entrance into that kingdom. Here are verses 32-34:

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

He now tells them that they are to get ready for the time when He will come and when their desires will be realized. They were to ready themselves for the day when they will begin to enjoy the treasures that they had formerly laid up for themselves in heaven. We read in verse 35 Jesus saying: “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning.” He then began to relate a parable, or a metaphor, to illustrate the kind of concerns they should have and the efforts they should put forth in being ready for His coming. He describes a Jewish household, the owner or master of the house being of some means, for he had servants. The master was away at a wedding feast of unknown duration. He would most certainly return, but the precise time of his arrival was unknown to his servants. They were to be ready for whenever he might appear. They were to be dressed and waiting, with their lamps burning, prepared to receive him and serve him upon his entrance into his home.

The Lord Jesus set forth the master in this parable as quite magnanimous. For Jesus said that if this master returned home and found his servants to have been faithful in having been prepared to serve him on his return, the master would reverse the roles and he would seat his servants down at the table and he would become their servants. One can hardly imagine the Jewish master of a household doing such a thing, but this surprising detail does serve to show us the great delight and appreciation of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He returns to find us ready and waiting for Him.

We should understand the illustration of the servants’ readiness and preparedness for their master’s return to be analogous to the disciples of Jesus Christ living and serving their Master in His absence as they await His return. **John Gill** (1697-1771) wrote of the application of the expression, “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning” to be Christians “with the girdle of truth (Eph. 6:14) keeping close to the doctrines of the Gospel, abiding faithfully by them, even unto death.” **John Calvin** (1509-1564) was more detailed in his application of the metaphor to our Christian experience:

Now though the Son of God has departed to the blessed rest of heaven, and is absent from us, yet as He has assigned to every one His duty, it would be improper for us to give way to indolent repose. Besides, as He has promised that He will return to us, we ought to hold ourselves prepared, at every moment, to receive Him, that He may not find *us sleeping*. For if a mortal man looks upon it as a duty which *his servants* owe him, that, *at whatever hour he returns home*, they shall be prepared to receive him, how

much more has He a right to demand from His followers that they shall be sober and vigilant, and always wait for His coming? To excite them to greater alacrity (cheerful response), He mentions that earthly masters are so delighted with such promptitude on the part of their servants, that they even *serve them*; not that all *masters* are accustomed to act in this manner, but because it does sometimes happen that a *master*, who is kind and gentle, admits his *servants* to his own table, as if they were his companions.

When the Lord will return is unknown to us. It was even unknown to our Lord (in his human nature) while here on earth. But when He comes is really immaterial if we are always ready and always prepared to meet Him. The master in this parable might arrive home at any hour of that night, perhaps even during the second or perhaps even the third watch. It should not matter when He returns for us, for if we are His faithful servants, we will be ready regardless of when He returns. **Mathew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote:

The time of our Master's return is uncertain; it will be *in the night*, it will be *far* in the night, when He has long *deferred* His coming, and when many have done looking for Him; in the *second watch*, just before midnight, or in the *third watch*, next after midnight (v. 38). His coming to us, at our death, is uncertain, and to many it will be a great surprise; for *the Son of Man cometh at an hour that ye think not* (v. 40), without giving notice beforehand. This bespeaks not only the uncertainty of the time of His coming, but the prevailing security of the greatest part of men, who are *unthinking*, and altogether regardless of the notices given them, so that, whenever He comes, it is *in an hour that they think not*.

That which He expects and requires from His servants is that they be *ready to open to Him immediately*, whenever He comes (v. 36), that is, that they be in a frame fit to receive Him, or rather to be received by Him; that they be found *as* His servants, in the posture that becomes them, with their *loins girded about*, alluding to the servants that are ready to go whither their Master sends them, and do what their Master bids them, having their long garments tucked up (which otherwise would hang about them, and hinder them), and *their lights burning*, with which to light their Master into the house, and up to His chamber.

The Lord has purposely left us uninformed of the time of His coming. Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (Mark 13:32f). This was God's purpose so that we would always be watching, always be ready for His return.

B. A word of caution for Jesus' disciples (vs. 39-40).

The Lord told His disciples on this occasion:

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (12:39f)

This is actually a different metaphor than what we just considered. Whereas Jesus had referred to a master returning home from a wedding to be met by his servants, here He speaks of the owner of a house who had been unprepared for a burglary that occurred. This master suffers loss of his things through burglary because he was not alert in guarding his house. We might say that our Lord was warning against nominal Christianity, those who lived in a manner that they were not prepared for His future coming. Here is one who lived with no thought of Christ's Second Coming and the accounting that will come with it. The Lord will come at an hour that no one will expect, but some will be ready and others will not be ready. And again, being ready is living in faith and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus as one's Savior and Lord.

Jesus is here speaking of the hypocrite. The hypocrite will be found out in the day of the Lord. You and I do not be as hypocrites, who will have no salvation from His judgment when He comes; we must *always* be ready, for we do not know when He will come.

By the way, here is a word to all date setters and date-setter followers: you do not know nor can you know when He will come. In fact, if you say He will come on such-and-such a day, we can be assured that He will *not* come at that time, for “He will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.” And do not be so foolish to say, “I might not know the hour, but I think I know the day” for the whole point of our Lord’s words here are this: “You will not know when He comes, so always be ready.”

Now we would have to admit that for most of us life has been pretty easy for us in this world. Our generation has lived a rather insulated life in this land in comparison to most people throughout the world. The danger of us letting down our guard and living in disregard of the coming of the Lord may be greater than those who are living through great hardship. For when daily existence becomes difficult and uncertainty of the future encroaches, the Lord’s people will tend to look more expectantly and in a more desirable manner for the coming of the Lord. The Lord will sometimes let loose the forces of evil and allow much trouble to come to us in order to wean us of the love of this world and to enhance our love for Him and for our longing for His coming. The Scriptures speak of those who will love the Lord and long for His coming. Paul wrote, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22). May the Lord help each of us be rightly fixed on these matters. **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) sought to challenge his own people regarding how they should long for the coming of the Lord:

“I feel rebuked myself, sometimes, for not watching for my Master, when I know that, at this very time, my dogs are sitting at my door, waiting for me; and long before I reach home, there they will be, and at the first sound of the carriage-wheels, they will lift up their voices with delight because their master is coming home. Oh, if we loved our Lord as dogs love their masters, how we should catch the first sound of his Coming, and be waiting, always waiting, and never happy until at last we should see him! Pardon me for using a dog as a picture of what you ought to be; but when you have attained to a state above that, I will find another illustration to explain my meaning.”⁵

The Lord Jesus promised that the blessing will be so great for His faithful servants that watchfulness should be maintained regardless of *how long* one must wait--as the servants waiting for their returning master even into the early hours of the morning. ***The great outcome for perseverance in godly living and faithful witness is what is being stressed.***

But we do not know at what hour the alarm will be given us, and therefore are concerned to watch at all times, and never to be off our guard. Or this may intimate the miserable case of those who are careless and unbelieving in this great matter. If the *good man of the house* had had notice of his danger of being robbed such a night, he would have sat up, and saved his house; but we have notice of the day of the Lord's coming, *as a thief in the night*, to the confusion and ruin of all secure sinners, and yet do not thus *watch*. If men will take such care of their houses, O let us be thus wise for our souls: *Be ye therefore ready also*, as ready as the good man of the house would be *if he knew what hour the thief would come*. (Matthew Henry)

Now these words of Jesus must have troubled Peter. We read in **verse 41** Peter asking Jesus, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?” It is as though Peter was asking, “Lord, You must be talking about non-disciples, aren’t You? For we are Your people. And these things seem to portend destruction even for us if we are not ready. Are You telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

II. The Blessing of those Prepared for His Coming (12:42-48)

After Peter asked this question, Jesus said the following:

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 38, p. 163.

⁴²And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?” ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. 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. (Luke 12:35-48)

The Lord did not answer Peter’s question directly, but what Jesus did say suggests that He was giving this warning to all would-be disciples, perhaps especially to the leaders among His followers. Here are the words of an excellent commentator of Luke’s Gospel:

The answer of Jesus then becomes an indirect reply to Peter’s question: He answers Peter with a parabolic saying that is concerned with the situation of the servant who is placed in charge of other servants; thereby the general application of the earlier parables is not lost, but rather they are seen to apply especially, but not exclusively, to the Twelve and other leaders among the disciples.⁶

A. The great privilege and responsibility of a disciple (especially leaders) (12:42)

In answering Peter’s question, the Lord Jesus asked a question. Verse 42 reads, “And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?’” When Jesus spoke of “the faithful and wise steward”, he was referring to a chief steward of a household, one who was in charge of all of the other servants of the household. This steward would have been a slave over other slaves, but a slave who had been entrusted great responsibility in the household.

In what way would the Lord bless this faithful steward? We read that great blessing would be conferred upon him. We can therefore conclude and consider...

B. The great blessing of being found faithful by Christ at His coming (12:43-44)

Jesus said of the faithful one at His coming: “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.⁷ Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has” (vs. 43f). The Lord Jesus promised that this steward would be greatly rewarded if he is found to have been faithful to his responsibilities. He would be granted greater privilege and responsibility.

The Word of God teaches us that there will be varying degrees of reward that the Lord will confer upon His servants at His coming. Paul wrote of this with respect to himself and Apollos.

For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. ¹⁰According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴If

⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 540.

⁷ I suspect some might accuse me of reading too much out of this, but for me our Lord’s words serve to set aside the possibility for me of retirement from the ministry, that is, unless the time arrives when I am no longer able to be faithful in pastoral service. When the Lord comes for me, I want to be busy serving faithfully in His church, His household.

anyone's work which he has built on it endures, **he will receive a reward**. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:9-15)

On the one hand Paul was diminishing his importance along with Apollos so that the people in this church not elevate them to an undue and unhealthy status. But on the other hand, Paul was acknowledging that the Lord will reward the faithfulness of His servants. Paul described the examination of the works done in this life for Christ. There can be much attempted and much done which is not spiritual or fruitful, and the product of that service will not endure. The fire of God's judgment of those works (not of the men themselves) will discredit and dissolve any benefit that was thought to be accrued by those works—the "wood, hay, and straw". Only that which is truly spiritual and of the Lord, that which may be likened to "gold, silver, and precious stones", will survive the trial and only that will result in the Lord giving reward to His servants. Moreover it would seem the nature of the reward for faithful service in this life is greater opportunity and responsibility for service in the world to come. The Lord elsewhere indicated that one day He will declare to His own, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mat. 25:23). It should be noted it is not how much you do now, but how faithful you are in what might be little you are doing now, that will one day give way to rich and wonderful blessing and honor. We cannot fathom the future blessing that we will receive freely from our Lord who is grateful and appreciative of your service and for your continuance in that service, while ready and waiting for His return.

But on the other hand, we read of...

C. The terrible loss of being found unfaithful by Christ (12:45-46)

Jesus then said,

But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. 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.

It is all important that we finish well, that we finish in faith. Yes, there was a beginning when faith was first exercised. But that was only saving faith if it continues through life unto the end. John wrote at the end of the Revelation,

And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. 21:6-8)

These words of the need to overcome trouble many professing Christians, and perhaps they should trouble many. They are troubling words for they do not seem consistent with their understanding of salvation as a gift and that through faith apart from works. But we may be assured that these words are perfectly consistent with the Scriptures true teaching of salvation as a gift, the present justification and forgiveness of the believer, as well as eternal security of the true believer. But as we have asserted throughout this series, we should not think that present day ways of evangelism are consistent with these things, for they are not. Do not think that a walk down an isle or a sinner's prayer ends all things with respect to your fate. It may be the main occupation of some to gain professions of faith, or "decisions for

Christ” as they are called. But frankly, we should regard them as nearly meaningless. We have cited these words of **Charles Spurgeon** in the past:

All hurry to get members into the church is most mischievous, both-to the church and to the supposed converts. I remember very well several young men, who were of good moral character, and religiously hopeful; but instead of searching their hearts, and aiming at their real conversion, the pastor never gave them any rest till he had persuaded them to make a profession. He thought that they would be under more bonds to holy things if they professed religion, and he felt quite safe in pressing them, for "they were so hopeful." He imagined that to discourage them by vigilant examination might drive them away, and so, to secure them, he made them hypocrites. These young men are, at the time, much farther off from the Church of God than they would have been if they had been affronted by being kept in their proper places, and warned that they were not converted to God. It is a serious injury to a person to receive him into the number of the faithful unless there is good reason to believe that he is really regenerate. I am sure it is so, for I speak with careful observation. Some of the most glaring sinners known to me were once members of a church; and were, as I believe, led to make a profession by undo pressure, well-meant but ill-judged. Do not, therefore, consider that soul-winning is or can be secured by the multiplication of baptisms and the swelling of the size (membership) of your church. What mean these dispatches from the battle-field? "Last night, fourteen souls were under conviction, fifteen were justified, and eight received full sanctification." I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretense of certifying in a half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime. Hope for the best, but in your highest excitements be reasonable. Inquiry-rooms are all very well ; but if they lead to idle boastings, they will grieve the Holy Spirit, and work abounding evil.⁸

The point is this: a decision for Christ but sets the “believer” on a course that must be finished. Of course it will be finished, if you are truly the Lord’s. But the Christian life and salvation cannot be reduced to a sinner’s prayer or a profession of the lips. Becoming a Christian has set you forth on a race that must be won, has engaged you in a fight that you must win, has caused you to enter a battle in which you must come forth the victor, has embarked you on a pilgrimage which you must complete, and has set before you the certain prospect for the Judgment Day went the fruit of your life will prove or discredit your claim to faith.

The Lord tells His disciples: *be ready*. Do not go to a place you would not want to be found if your Lord were to return for you. Do not be participating in an activity which you would not want to be discovered (for you will be discovered in it!). May the Lord grant us grace to be true and stand true with Him and for Him.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul Winner**, (Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 18, 19