

Much of the material in Luke stresses the presence of the kingdom with Christ; however, Luke 12:35-48 looks forward to the future of Christ's return when He will come again to judge the earth and establish His kingdom upon it.

John MacArthur says,

In some ways, the doctrine of the Second Coming is the most important doctrine in the Christian faith because it features the culmination of all redemptive history. It looks at the judgment of the wicked, the blessing of the righteous, and most of all, the final and permanent and everlasting exaltation and glory of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Savior Jesus Christ. All other doctrines lead up to that one. That's the finale; that's the culmination. That is the purpose for which all other elements of redemptive history were designed.

Jesus had just said that His disciples were to focus on gaining treasure in heaven (12:34). They were not to worry, but were to steward their resources for the good of others and the glory of God (12:22 ff.). The content of what follows (12:35-48) is concerned about how Christ's followers are to live in the interval between His death and His return. In these verses, Jesus teaches us "the way to wait" for His return.

12:35 "Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit."

Verse 35 introduces two images of preparedness. The first image is being dressed in readiness. Literally it reads, "let your waist be girded" (NKJ). People in Jesus' day wore long flowing robes. When they were at work or needed to move quickly or agilely they would draw their garment up above the knees and tie it up or tuck it into the sash worn around the waist. The English Bible often translates this as "girding up your loins." This eventually became a figure of speech for readiness. In Exodus 12:11, prior to the Exodus from Egypt, God told the Israelites when eating the Passover meal to ". . . eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste-- it is the LORD'S Passover." In other words, they were to be in a constant state of readiness.

The command, "be dressed in readiness," is a perfect tense verb in Greek which stresses being in a ready state of spiritual preparedness. "Be ready and stay ready." Similarly, 1 Peter 1:13 says, ". . . gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NKJ).

The second image is in keeping a lamp lit. Lighting a lamp was much more time consuming and cumbersome than turning on a light switch. If one wanted to move about in the dark in a moment's notice a lamp would already have to be lit. The present imperative, "keep your lamps lit," stresses that the lamps are to be kept continually burning (Talbert, 160). Although some see a correspondence to the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1ff., the context in Luke is somewhat different; the lit lamp here would allow the master to see if he returned at night.

12:36 "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.

The first two images in verse 35 spoke of perpetual preparedness; the parable starting in verse 36 speaks of perpetual wakefulness.

Jesus compares His disciples to servants who are awaiting their master's return from a wedding feast. Weddings in those days were events that lasted up to a week, so no one could predict the exact time of the master's return.

12:37 "Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.

Verse 37 is a beatitude - a pronouncement of the blessing and approval of God. The nature of that blessing is absolutely astounding. Those who are found waiting for the Lord when He returns are the objects of God's unrestrained pleasure and receive an unheard of reward; despite the late hour, the master will not only share a meal with them, He will serve them! The master makes the servants the honored guests.

Jesus said in Luke 22:27, "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

The picture is of the great and final eschatological banquet (Lk. 13:29; 22:30; Rev. 3:20; 19:9).

12:38 "Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

The timing of the master's return is unknown so the only way the servants could please him fully is by perpetual vigilance. In Roman time, the second and third watch would be between 9:00 P.M. and 3:00 A.M.; in the Jewish way of viewing time this would be between 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. Whichever way is intended, the point is that even if the master were to return in the deep hours of the night, the slaves that are blessed are those awaiting His arrival.

Paul says in Romans 13:11, ". . . knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." The word for "time" in Romans 13:11 is *kairos* (καίρος). It is used of a season (Matt. 13:30; 16:3; 21:34; 21:41; Ro. 8:18) or an appointed time (Matt. 8:29; 26:18; Mk. 1:15; Acts 1:7; 3:19; Ro. 5:6; I Cor. 4:5; Eph. 1:10). Seasons have observable characteristics. For example, harvest time has a maturing of the grain in conjunction with certain weather patterns. Times appointed by God have a predetermined meaning to them. Christians should be aware of both the characteristics of the age in which we live and the meaning of it from God's perspective. Paul refers to the time in which we live as "the end of the ages" (I Cor. 10:11). It is described as the age in which our salvation is drawing near. As the time draws closer, we should be all the more diligent to act properly.

12:39 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into.

12:40 "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

"The admonition for watchfulness is reinforced by a parable within a parable (v. 39)" (Edwards, 379). Jesus compares His coming to that of a thief breaking into a home. In those days homes were made of bricks made of dried clay, and a thief could literally break through the wall to enter the house and steal from it. The parable states that if a homeowner knew that a thief was coming they would not leave the home unprotected; they would be ready.

In the first parable, Jesus referred to the return of the master to the home; in the second it is the coming of a thief. However, the lesson in both is the same: the time of Jesus' coming is unknown so one should be ready.

Luke 12:40 tells us that the return of Christ is a certain event at an uncertain time; the Son of Man *is* coming, but He is coming when He is not expected. In Matthew 24:36 Jesus said, "Of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (also see Mark 13:32 -33).

If Jesus didn't know when His return would take place, the disciples surely wouldn't know either. This is a reminder that although there are prophetic events that precede Christ's return, His return cannot be predicted. In Acts 1:6-7, prior to Jesus' ascension, the disciples asked Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." In the Book of Revelation the souls of the martyrs in heaven ask, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10) "They were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also" (Rev. 6:11). In other words, when God's plan comes to completion, when all who are to be martyred are killed, then the Lord will return to judge the world. Only God knows that number or when that number will be complete. All we know is that the Lord's return could be at any moment and we are to wait expectantly.

Nevertheless, watchfulness has always been expected of God's people. Watchfulness for the Day of the Lord was a common theme in the OT (Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Amos 5:18; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:14-18) and this is carried over in the NT; Christ's return has always been viewed as an imminent event. Paul, in writing to Titus, said, "We are looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." James 5:7-9 says, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . . for *the coming of the Lord is near*. . . the Judge is standing right at the door." 1 Peter 4:7 says, "*The end of all things is near*; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." 1 John 2:18: "Children, *it is the last hour*; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that *it is the last hour*." 1 John 2:28: "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that *when He appears*, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Hebrews 10:24-25: ". . . let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but

encouraging one another; *and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*" The writers of Scripture were not mistaken by expecting Christ's return in their lifetime, rather, as Peter reminds us, "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. . . . But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. . ." (2 Peter 3:8-10). Peter knew that the Lord would come at any moment, unexpectedly, like a thief. Christians needed to be ready, but he also knew that God's idea of "near" is vastly different than ours. Thus, he was careful to admit that it could be much longer.

"Given the benefits of being ready and the risks of not being ready, the disciples would do well by looking for him" (Bock, 1176, 1177). The parable that follows answers the question as to why the disciples would need to be included in such a warning.

12:41 Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?"

Peter asked who Jesus was addressing. Luke 12:22 states that the audience is Jesus' disciples, and there is nothing to indicate that that has changed. Jesus does not answer Peter explicitly, though He does answer implicitly.

The parable in Luke 12:41-48 identifies two kinds of people: one is like an unfaithful steward who says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming," and he beats his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks and gets drunk (12:45); the other is like a faithful steward (12:42) who does what the master expects him to do (12:43). The former will be assigned a place with unbelievers (12:46- which can only mean he is an unbeliever); the latter will be entrusted with much (12:48). Therefore, the parable is addressed to believer and unbeliever alike.

Some may wonder how an unbeliever can be called a servant of the Master. The answer is simply that these verses reiterate that all people are children of God by creation and as such, all are stewards and are accountable to God for how they use what has been given by Him. Ultimately, every knee will bow to Jesus Christ because He is the master of all, sovereign of all, and the judge of all. However, a second, very plausible possibility is that the disobedient servant represents the nation of Israel. Israel is called God's servant in the OT and in Luke 12 Jesus was addressing Jews. The servant Israel, who had rejected her Messiah, would see the gentiles blessed with the promises of God while the unbelieving in the nation would be bypassed. John the Baptist had warned the Jews of their need for repentance. In Matthew 3:8-10 he told those who were coming for baptism, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." In Matthew 8:11-12 Jesus said, "I say to you that many will come from east and west (the Gentiles), and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom (the Jews) will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." In Romans 11:11 Paul says, "by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles." In both interpretations the unfaithful servant is an unbeliever, though the latter view specifies him as an unbelieving Jew.

12:42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"

12:43 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

12:44 "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

The Lord begins by calling the master's servant a steward. A steward is a person who manages another person's possessions. Because God is the Creator, He is the Owner of all things. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (cf. I Chron. 29:11-12). A good steward is one who faithfully manages the resources he has been given in a way that benefits his master, not himself. Paul says that it is required of stewards that they be found faithful (I Cor. 4:2), and Jesus says that it is the faithful and wise steward whom God puts in charge of His household (Lk. 12:42-44, cf. Lk. 16:10). Of course, this is just common sense; who would put an unfaithful servant in charge of their whole household?

In verse 42 the servant/steward was given the responsibility of caring for the other servants – for giving them "their rations at the proper time."

In verse 43 a second beatitude is given. The earlier beatitude was directed toward the disciple who is watching for Jesus (12:37–38); this beatitude is directed toward the disciple who carries out the responsibilities that the Lord has given him. That the disciples should be likened to slaves is not unusual, for a slave was one who was totally devoted to the wishes of their Lord (i.e. their master; Danker, 253). A faithful and sensible steward is one whom his master finds doing what he is supposed to be doing when the master comes.

The master's confidence is won by the steward's faithfulness, and as a result, the servant will be blessed by being put in charge of all the master's possessions upon the master's return (12:44). This is synonymous with inheriting the kingdom. In Luke 12:32, Jesus had told His disciples, "your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom."

Next, the unfaithful servant is described and the consequences of his unfaithfulness:

12:45 "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk;

12:46 the master of that slave 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 assign him a place with the unbelievers.

The unfaithful steward's activity is described by a third-class condition in Greek; this is a conditional sentence where *uncertainty* is implied (Dana and Mantey, Grammar, 290). What if the steward is not concerned with the master's return? What if he says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming?" What if he lives irresponsibly and "begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk." What will happen?

The master will come on a day that that steward does not expect and will judge him severely for his disobedience and abuse of responsibility. The steward had beaten his fellow slaves; he will be punished in kind, only more harshly; he will receive a mortal blow.

As Edwards notes, the behavior of the steward not only “dishonors the master, it despises his kindness and grace (Rom. 2:4), exalts self over the master, and makes a debauchery of his well-ordered house” (Edwards, 380). His behavior is more than just foolish; it is evil, and it results in one of the harshest recorded condemnations of Jesus (Edwards, 381); the steward will be cut to pieces. The horrific imagery of being cut to pieces is deliberately severe to impress itself in the memory of those who heard Jesus’ warning.

“The wicked servant's security is a house without a foundation (6:49), a fleeting mirage that will be taken from him in a moment's time (Rev. 18:7-8). V. 46, like John's image of “unquenchable fire” (3:17) and Jesus’ later image of slaying of enemies (19:27), should be understood as an eschatological judgment of those who contemptuously refuse God's gracious invitation of the kingdom and abuse God’s forbearance before the return of the Son of Man (v. 40)” (Edwards, 382).

12:47 "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,

12:48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Verses 47 and 48 teach that there are varying degrees of punishment for varying types of unfaithfulness. The punishment for unfaithfulness in verses 47 and 48 is not as severe as in verse 46. Punishment varies according to one’s knowledge of the master’s will.

There is a relationship between knowledge, responsibility, and punishment. The one involved in active tyranny will face death; the one who deliberately neglects it will face a severe beating; the one who unintentionally neglects the master’s will receive the fewest lashes (Talbert, 160). Jesus had taught the same principle in Luke 10:12-14.

“Contextually, this remark is directed at the disciples, since they know more about Jesus than anyone else. They bear the most responsibility of anyone that Jesus addresses, and they need to be faithful as a result” (Bock, 1185).

In sum, Luke 12:35–48 shows that all will be held accountable to Jesus for their response to Him. The faithful servant will be awaiting His return at any hour. He will be prepared, watchful, and a good steward in discharging his responsibilities. This servant will be blessed and rewarded by his Master.

The unfaithful servant has little concern for the master’s return; he decides to use his master’s possessions for his own pleasure, he indulges in the food and drink, consuming the supplies that were meant for others, while at the same time he abuses the servants under his authority. He lives for himself as if he was accountable to no one. This servant will be severely punished.

“Given the choice, Luke's reader is to see that faithfulness pleases the Lord and results in long-term benefits to the faithful follower. One is to serve, knowing that God's eye is on each one. The disciple serves with one eye looking for Jesus' return and the other knowing that the disciple will give an account of service. Faithfulness means walking with God and responsibly serving his children” (Bock, 1186).