

“LIVING IN LIGHT OF CHRIST’S RETURN”

I. Introduction

- A. The 18th-century itinerant evangelist John Wesley was once asked what he would do the next day if he knew that Christ would return at the end of that day.
- B. Wesley responded by taking out his engagement book, reading over the things that he had planned for the next day, and then saying this: “These are the things I would do tomorrow if I knew the Lord was returning then.” [cited in Ferguson, *Let’s Study Mark*, 221]
- C. Now, it is not surprising that an evangelist would say such a thing.
- D. After all, Wesley’s whole life revolved around his preaching ministry.
- E. But most Christians are not called to be pastors or missionaries.
- F. Most Christians serve in vocations outside the church, and the Lord expects them to be faithful in the discharge of the duties that pertain to those vocations.
- G. I’m sure your engagement book looks very different than John Wesley’s, and there is nothing wrong with that.
- H. Nevertheless, Jesus’s teaching in this text from Luke makes it clear that every Christian should be able to echo what Wesley had to say when he was asked that question.
- I. As we study this passage today, we will see how it instructs us to live every day in light of Christ’s Second Coming.

II. Stay Awake

- A. Our text begins with Jesus issuing the command, “Stay dressed for action.”
1. As the footnote in the ESV indicates, the Greek text literally says, “Let your loins stay girded.”
 2. This phrase is drawn from the Middle Eastern custom of wearing long robes, which had to be gathered at the waist in order for a person to be able to move about quickly.
 3. This is obviously an image of preparedness.
 4. Jesus is saying that you need to keep yourself ready as you make your pilgrimage through this world.
 5. Don’t look for a permanent resting place here.
 6. The author of Hebrews says that Christians are like the Old Testament saints who only saw the things promised and greeted them from afar.
 7. We live as strangers and exiles on the earth.
 8. We desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.
 9. As John Calvin explains, “God does not bestow the honorable title of his children on any but those who acknowledge that they are strangers on the earth, and who not only are at all times prepared to leave it, but likewise move forward, in an uninterrupted ‘course’, towards the heavenly life.”
- B. Jesus uses another image of preparedness when he says, “keep your lamps burning.”
1. Because there was no electricity in the ancient world, you had to make sure that you had a lamp ready if you wanted to be able to move around safely when darkness fell.

2. This is a picture of how we are to conduct ourselves as God's people in this world.
 3. While Scripture refers to this present age as "the domain of darkness", it also says that as Christians we are to walk in this world "as children of light."
 4. Though we are surrounded on all sides with darkness, we have the lamp of God's Word to help us chart our course as we travel through this world.
- C. This image of a lamp that is kept burning leads right into the parable that Jesus sets forth in this text: the parable of the servants who stay awake as they wait for their master to return home from a wedding feast.
1. In this parable, staying awake means persevering in faith and striving to live in accordance with God's Word.
 2. This is the way to keep yourself prepared to receive Christ when he returns.
 3. Conversely, falling asleep means living as if there will never be a day of judgment.
 4. Sadly, this is exactly how so many of the people around us are living.
 5. They immerse themselves in the pursuit of pleasure, health, wealth, and earthly security, assuming that life consists in satisfying their dreams and desires.
 6. This makes it all the more important for us to keep ourselves from being lulled into a state of spiritual slumber.
 7. We need to remember that the very last words spoken by Jesus in the Bible are, "Surely I am coming soon." (Rev. 22:20)

- D. In verse 37, Jesus says that those who keep themselves ready for his return will be richly blessed by him when that day arrives.
1. Though he is our master and we are his servants, he tells us that he will put on the garb of a servant and serve us.
 2. This brings to mind the occasion when Jesus washed his disciples' feet.
 3. That remarkable instance depicted what is most fundamental about being a Christian.
 4. Being a Christian is not first and foremost a matter of our serving Jesus but rather of Jesus serving us.
 5. The thing that fuels us in living for Christ is remembering that he died for us.
 6. As Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospels, he came into this world not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.
 7. And because he did that, we are promised that if we endure, we will also reign with him. (see 2 Tim. 2:12)
- E. As Jesus continues with the parable, he says that the servants will be blessed if the master returns in the second or third watch and finds them awake.
1. The Jews divided the night into three watches, so the second and third watches are the latest hours of the night.
 2. The point that Jesus is making here is that we do not know the hour when he will return.
 3. This is why we always have to be ready, living every day as if it could be the last day.

4. Jesus underscores this in verse 39 by shifting to the metaphor of a thief who breaks into a house.
5. Obviously, if the master of the house knew the time when his house would be burglarized, he would not have left it unguarded at that hour.
6. Again, the lesson that Jesus is conveying here is that he will return at an unexpected moment.
7. Those who are not keeping watch will be caught off guard.
8. This is the fate that lies in store for those who are at ease, those who go about their lives as if God does not exist.
9. Such people think that they are free to live however they please, ignoring God and what he requires of them.
10. But while they are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, and they will not escape.

III. Do Your Master's Will

- A. As we come to the second half of our text in verse 41, we see that Peter wants to know if the teaching set forth in this parable is directed toward the twelve or if it is for the crowd in general.
 1. Jesus does not give a direct answer Peter's question, which suggests that Peter was missing the point in asking it.
 2. Nevertheless, the things that Jesus does say in response indicate that the parable is directed to everyone who has a connection to Jesus while also having a special application to church leaders.
 3. In verse 42, the master places one servant over his other servants in order to ensure that the entire household is well-cared for while he is away.

4. This is a picture of what Christ has done in giving the church its officers.
 5. Those of us who serve in these positions need to be faithful in the discharge of our duties, because we will have to answer for what has been entrusted to us.
 6. As it says near the end of the epistle of Hebrews, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, *as those who will have to give an account*. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Heb. 13:17)
 7. Church leaders will have to give an account for those who are under their care.
 8. It is a sad fact that there are many church leaders in the world today who fail to nourish Christ's flock with the Word of God, who fail to protect the flock against falsehood, who feed the flock the poison of false teaching, who do not try to bring straying members of the flock back into the fold.
 9. This is why it is so important to pray that the church's leaders would be faithful stewards in the household of God.
- B. While the nature of the parable that Jesus employs here especially lends itself to being applied to church leaders, there is certainly a broader application to all who profess to be Christians.
1. All Christians have a role of stewardship in the household of God.
 2. We are all called to encourage one another, to help one another, to bear one another's burdens, and to watch out for each other.
 3. We are all called to seek the peace and purity of the church.
 4. We are all called to make the advance of God's kingdom the controlling factor over every facet of our lives.

5. And we are all called to do our Master's will, the will that God has made known to us in his law.
 6. Those who live to please themselves rather than God will be called to account on the day of Christ's return.
 7. Jesus illustrates the dreadful fate that awaits such people by saying that the wicked servant will be cut in pieces when his master returns.
 8. We need to take this warning seriously.
 9. The reason why Jesus gave it was to open our eyes to the danger of ignoring God's revealed will.
- C. We have seen that this passage repeatedly emphasizes that Christ's return will be both sudden and final.
1. This stands in direct conflict with the notion of a two-stage return of Christ, the view that has been popularized by the dispensational theology of the Scofield Reference Bible and the "Left Behind" books.
 2. According to this teaching, the initial stage of the Second Coming will involve a secret "rapture" of believers to heaven, leaving the rest of mankind behind with more time to repent before the final judgment.
 3. When this rapture takes place, the world will be enveloped in chaos.
 4. Unpiloted airplanes will crash to the ground, restaurant patrons won't be able to find their waitresses, and you will come to church and find that I am not here.
 5. In all seriousness, the passage that is typically cited as the proof-text for this notion of a rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4.

6. The problem with this is that 1 Thessalonians 4 says absolutely nothing about a two-stage return of Christ.
7. It simply describes what will happen to deceased believers and living believers at the Second Coming.
8. There will not be a rapture, because Christ's return will be sudden and it will be final.
9. This is why we need to be ready at all times.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As we consider our Lord's teaching in this passage, we all have to admit that we are not living in perfect conformity to our Master's will.
 1. Only Jesus lived a life that was in perfect conformity to the will of God.
 2. This is the basis of our comfort and security.
 3. Our faith rests upon what Christ has done for us, not upon what we do for him.
 4. At the same time, our Lord surely wants us to heed the warnings that he sets forth in this text.
 5. What would you change in your life if you knew that the Second Coming was going to take place tomorrow, or next week, or six months from now?
 6. Are there things that you need to stop doing?
 7. Are there duties that you need to stop neglecting?
 8. These are the kinds of questions that this passage encourages you to ask of yourself.

- B. Brothers and sisters, let us not be among those who are caught by surprise when the last day arrives.
1. May it not be said of you or me that we were caught in spiritual slumber on that day.
 2. Instead, may God graciously prick our consciences and move our wills, that we might grow in our hatred of sin and worldliness, and all the more embrace and pursue his will.
 3. Ponder again the words that were written by the apostle Paul when he knew that his death was drawing near: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:7-8)