

LUKE 12:35-48—LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

INTRO: The coronavirus—more specifically, the response to the coronavirus—has put a number of things in perspective and caused a lot of people to think about what is most important in their lives. Some people had a panic response: buying up hoards of toilet paper or fearing to go out of their homes. The closing of movie theaters, and canceling all major sporting events have caused some people to conclude, “**Maybe those things aren’t so important after all.**”

Many people are able to work from home and I hope you have concluded that increased time with the family has been a good thing (at least if the kids haven’t driven you crazy). A girl I went to HS with (I say “girl,” but she’s 67 years old) who is an artist and art professor posted this on FB: “**Seriously, yesterday I thought ‘Forget painting. I’m gonna die.’ because I was sneezing and my nose was stuffing up. Today, I thought, ‘NO, I’m going to paint as if this is my last hurrah!’**” So she learned something.

What did we learn? More specifically, what should be the *Christian* response to all of this? Some people have likened the virus to prophecies of plague and pestilence in the Book of Revelation and say that it is a sign of the end times. I can tell you that that is false. And we will talk more about that later. However, that thought or the question—“**How does this relate to the second coming of Christ?**”—is a good one. And it is an issue that is addressed in today’s passage of Scripture: **Luke 12:35-48**. In this passage Jesus discusses his coming again to the earth and how we should be living with that in mind.

Let me first pray for us and then I will read the passage [PRAYER/READ]

PROP: In this passage, Jesus is telling us: **To prepare for eternity, faithfully persevere now.**

O/S: We will see this as we understand three important aspects of this passage: (1) *Be ready* (Jesus will return, but when he comes will be a complete surprise to everybody); (2) *Be faithful* (persevere in what you have been called to do); (3) *We will be judged* (and if we have been faithful it will be more than worth it).

I. Be ready, because when Jesus returns to earth will be at a time we do not expect.

We see this primarily in vv. 35-40. In v. 35 the ESV says, “**Stay dressed for action.**” The NASB says, “**Be dressed in readiness.**” The picture is that you are not just lying around in your PJs but are prepared. Jesus indicates the same thing in v. 37 where he says, “**Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.**” The NASB says, “**whom the master will find on the alert.**” He concludes this parable in v. 40 with the same thought: “**Be ready.**”

Be ready for what? Be ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. Now, you need to know a little about eschatology. What is eschatology? Eschatology is a fancy Greek word that means the study of the “last things.” The Bible has a clear eschatological structure. That structure is the “two ages”: this age and the age to come. We are in this age now. It is the age of marriage; it is the age of sin; it is the age of death. This age is temporary, and will come to an end. On the other hand, the age to come is permanent; it will last forever. In the age to come there will be no marriage; there will be no sin; and there will be no death.

What divides the two ages? The specific time when “this age” will end and the “age to come” will begin in all its glory is the Second Coming of Christ. Christ’s second coming will include resurrection of everybody (the just and the unjust alike), judgment of everybody (the just and the unjust alike), and the renewal of the earth (or the inauguration of the new heavens and the new earth). Several times Jesus said he will come on the “last day”; he will raise his people on the “last day.” IOW, the “last day” of this age is the first day of the age to come. (BTW, if you want to learn more about these things, I discuss them all in detail in my book *Biblical Eschatology*.)

There are a lot of people who think that the Bible predicts when Jesus will come again. Some people look for “signs” like earthquakes or something happening in the Middle East or the coronavirus as indicating at least the generation when Jesus will return. Don’t listen to anybody who says such things. Jesus made perfectly clear that there will be *no signs* that will give you even a *clue* as to when he is coming. In **Matthew 24-25** which is often called the Olivet Discourse (because Jesus was speaking from the Mount of Olives), he said “**no one knows the**

day or the hour” when he will return. When he said that he wasn’t saying that you could know the week or the month or the year or the decade when he’s returning. Not at all. **“The day and hour”** is a technical term that stands for the Second Coming itself. It is not a time reference contrasted with week, month, or year, or century.

Additionally, in **Acts 1:7**, when His disciples asked when He would restore the kingdom, Jesus replied, **“It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.”** The words Jesus used refer to entire eras of successive kingdoms. What he was saying was **“It is not for you to know the various epochs of history or how long they will last for these are matters only God knows and actuates.”** IOW, we are not be able to predict within 1000 years when Jesus will return. He could come tomorrow; he might not return for 10,000 years. His coming will be a complete surprise to everybody, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Jesus stresses the unexpected nature of his return in today’s passage. In **v. 38** he says he could come in the 2nd watch or the 3rd watch. He is using an example from sailors: the 2nd watch was 9:00PM-Midnight; the 3rd watch was Midnight-3:00AM. He is saying, **“Who knows? Nobody knows—so be ready at any time.”** In **v. 39** he says **[READ]**. Jesus’ point is that the head of the house did NOT know when the thief was coming. In **Matthew 24** Jesus tells us he will come **“like a thief in the night.”** In **vv. 40 and 46** he specifically says that he is coming on a day and hour we do NOT expect. However, I should point out that, while Jesus’ return to the *earth* will come as a complete surprise, we know that he will be coming for every one of *us* within a maximum of about 80 years or so. Since I am 67, it will be considerably less than 80 years. If you are in a car crash, it could be today or tomorrow.

Why is it important that Jesus’ coming back to the earth will be a complete surprise? It is important because “being ready” does not mean looking up at the sky every five minutes. It means to live with the awareness that we are not alone but are part of a great worldwide, cosmic drama. We are actors in that drama, and the author of that drama—who is also the main actor—is Jesus Christ himself. Even though he is the author, he has already come onto the stage once and he will be coming back to the stage to usher in the final act of the drama. The interesting thing is that, unlike a play or movie, even though we are we are the actors in this drama, all we know is the overall plot line. We do not know in advance how any particular scene we are involved in will play out, and we do not have any prescribed lines to memorize. And we don’t know when the final act will begin.

So “being ready” means being aware of what is going on and that we are an integral part of this great drama; but it also involves something else, namely, “being ready” means:

II. We need to be faithful now (IOW, persevere in what we have been called to do).

The parable Jesus tells in **vv. 42-46** makes the point that we need to remain faithful and persevere precisely because we do *not* know when he is coming.

This is a parable of a faithful versus an unfaithful servant. The faithful servant remains at his post, doing what he is called to do, whether his master is there or not. The unfaithful servant says, **“My master has been gone a long time. Who knows when he’ll be back?”** So he starts beating the other servants, and spends his time eating and getting drunk. We need to remember something. Even though Jesus physically left the earth when he ascended back to the Father, he sees what we are doing. We cannot hide anything from him. And why would we want to? He’s done everything for us. He’s given us eternal life. We call him our Lord. Do we love him?

If you are married or in a love relationship with someone, we naturally want to share what we are doing with the one we love. Consider a little kid: the most natural thing is the world is for him or her to say, **“Mom, look what I did!”** The only things we want to hide from our spouse or parents are the things we know we *shouldn’t* be doing. How big a part of your life is your spouse or your kids? It’s when they *cease* being a big part of your life—when you don’t want to be around them—that’s the sign of real trouble in the relationship.

It’s the same in our relationship with Jesus. How much time do we spend with him—in his word; in prayer? How is he changing us—what we do; how we spend our time; how we treat people; what we do with our money? All that shows what we really think of him. At root, everything is spiritual.

It doesn't matter what we have been called to do. Maybe you are a housewife and mom. That is an incredibly high calling. And believe me, it is a calling. You may be a student or have a job of any kind at all. These are all *formal* callings—IOW our work. Paul talks about that in **1 Timothy 6** where he tells workers to do things honorably and well **“so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.”** IOW, everything we do—even our jobs—ultimately is spiritual and shows what we really think of Jesus.

But there are also what I call *informal* callings, namely, your relationships and what you do with your time when you are not engaged in your formal calling. In this area the opportunities that God presents to us are virtually unlimited. What do I mean? As a result of the coronavirus we may have more time to seek God and to listen to Him for his insights now that he has our attention. One Christian I know is sewing masks, and would never have done that but for this opportunity. But it goes beyond this. Ask yourself: Am I discipling anyone? Am I a friend to a person in need? What about our relationship with our children or grandchildren? How we do our job, how we relate to people, what we do with our time and money are all callings in which we can model Jesus to others, help build the kingdom, and help lead people closer to Christ.

The attitude of readiness and faithfulness in light of the unexpected coming of Jesus was perfectly highlighted in an example from early American history. In his book *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, Stephen Travis says, **“At the meeting of the Connecticut Assembly in 1780 there was a sense of approaching judgment, of the world coming to an end. Outside, there was a threatening roll of thunder. The Speaker said, ‘Either this is the end of the world or it is not. If it is not, we should proceed with the business. If it is, I prefer to be found doing my duty.’”** The same should be true of us in our response to the coronavirus, in how we treat people, in what we do with our money, in how we do our jobs, in how we model Jesus in all areas of our lives—because that is what he is calling us to do—reflect him: his values, his compassion, his love.

That leads us to the 3rd thing Jesus is telling us in this passage, namely:

III. We will be judged (and if we have been faithful it will be more than worth it).

One day we will all stand before the Lord and give an account of our lives. A lot of Christians seem to think that the only thing that will be asked is, **“Did you pray the sinner’s prayer? Did you receive Jesus into your heart as your personal savior?”** That is not what will happen at all. Take a look at today’s passage or *any* passage in the Bible that deals with the judgment. They all say that our entire life will be judged. What is done in secret will be shouted from the rooftops. It’s easy to *say* that Jesus is our Lord, but it is our *life* that demonstrates whether the words we say are true or not.

Take a look again at the parable in vv. 42-46. Verses **42-44** deal with the faithful servant. In **vv. 43-44** Jesus says **[READ]**. Notice that he is “blessed” whom the master finds “so doing” (IOW doing what he has been called to do). His life is not just *lip*-service, but a *life* of service. The exact opposite is true of the second servant. He may have started out obediently but then he abandoned his post. It’s like what Jesus says in **Revelation 2-3** where he promises rewards to those who “overcome.” To overcome is to remain faithful all the way to the end. In all of those messages in Revelation Jesus repeatedly says things like **“I know your deeds,”** and he stresses the *perseverance* of the overcomers. What will be judged will be our whole life.

Verses 47-48 give us a key principle regarding the judgment [READ—the key is the last half of v. 48: READ]. Verse **48b [REPEAT]** is my life verse. Why? Because much has been given to me in every way. But I venture to say that much has been given to all of us. Even the things we take for granted: We are from America; we weren’t born in Outer Mongolia or Haiti or Central African Republic. We live in the 21st century, not the 7th century. None of us is living in squalor. We can all read. We have the benefits of drinkable tap water, education, and rights and liberties unthinkable to most people in most places throughout most of human history. And, most importantly, God has come to us. Most people listening to this are Christians, and we all have heard the gospel proclaimed. We all have Bibles (most of us more than one) and other books and resources at our fingertips.

Do we recognize that all of this is from God? More importantly, do we recognize that God has made us *who* we are, placed us *where* we are, and given us *what* we have? He has done all of that for a reason. **Eph 2:8-10** say **[READ]**. What are the “good works” he has called *you* to do? *Your* family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and life situation are different from mine. But whatever our particular circumstances are, God is calling

us to manifest him—his goodness, his love, his presence—to the people in our lives. We are his instruments to show others the truth of the gospel. That is why he has put us here—and for that he will hold us to account.

But if we understand this—if we are ready; if we are faithful; and if we persevere now—he gives us perhaps the most amazing promise in the entire Bible. It is found in v. 37, which I have purposely left to the end. Verse 37 says [READ]. Do you see what's going on here? In v. 44 Jesus said that if we are faithful now he will put us in charge of *everything*. But v. 37 even goes beyond that. In v. 37 Jesus says that, if we are faithful now, then in our eternity—in our glorious new bodies on the glorious new earth that we will inherit when he comes again—we won't be serving *him*, but *he* will be serving *us*! This is incredible. There is no other religion or worldview that has God say that he will serve us.

But we know this is true. Why? First, this is what Jesus himself says. Second, he already gave an example of this very thing. The night before he died, in **John 13** Jesus girded himself—just like he says he will do in v. 37—and served his disciples by washing their feet. And in that setting, they were all reclining at table, just as Jesus says is going on in v. 37. He was giving a little foreshadow of life in the heavenly banquet of eternal life on the new earth.

In John 13 Jesus said that what he did was an example and that now, in this life, we are to serve others as he served his disciples. If we do that, if we faithfully serve one another now—in the power, spirit, and love of Jesus—then *we* will be the ones who will be served for all of eternity. With a promise like that, how can we *not* do it? Think about what that means for you in your particular circumstances. How can you show the love of Jesus to those he has put in your life? Think about what to do, and how to do it, and then start doing it.

CONCL: Jesus is coming again. We have no idea when that will be. So we need to be ready. Being ready does not mean looking up at the sky to watch for him. It means living in the awareness that we are part of a great drama of which he is the author and main actor, and that he is coming back. It also means being faithful in what we have been called to do. It means persevering in faithful service to others day in and day out. When you want to and when you don't. When you are recognized by others for what you do and when you are not recognized by others for what you do. Because know that *Jesus* recognizes what we do. And Jesus will hold us to account—accountable for our very lives. In his great grace, he has given much to all of us. Therefore, he has the right to require much from us. And if we are faithful with what he has given us in manifesting his nature now and serving others now, he makes the most amazing promise to bless us beyond our imagination, and he will do that for all of eternity. So persevere now—eternity will soon be here!