

In last week's passage we were invited to live on a higher plain, to seek first the kingdom of God, to trust God for our needs, and to live in the security of knowing it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. It is a call to step out of the culture in which we live, wherever that may be, and live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven where complete trust is placed in the Lord. It is an invitation to calm assurance that our heavenly Father loves and cares for us. I ended the last week's sermon with the following two verses that tell us what that looks like in practical daily living.

³⁵ *“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.* Luke 12:35,36 The theme of Jesus' return runs throughout the New Testament. It is the half of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that were not fulfilled in the first coming. He is not coming again as the Suffering Servant but as the conquering King. Every soul that would ever be persuaded to receive the salvation He offers will have done so. The rapture will take place followed by the wedding feast of the Lamb. Then He will return with us following Him to the Battle of Armageddon. That will begin the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth (Jude 14,15ⁱ).

Jesus was telling us to always be ready to greet Him because His return could come at any time. But unlike the analogy of returning *from* a wedding feast, He will be taking us *to* one. He comes with His reward. Isaiah 40:10 tells us, ¹⁰ *Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.* Jesus is telling us that we should be like servants expecting His return with our lamps lit waiting for Him to knock, so that we can open the door.

This should also apply to our daily lives. When the Spirit knocks, are we ready to serve? Is the lamp of the Word in our mind and heart lit (Psalm 119:105ⁱⁱ)? Are we ready to open the door of service? Are we watching and listening, attentive to His instructions? This kind of attentive service is how we lay up treasure in heaven and become rich toward God as He was instructing us to do in the previous passage.

³⁷ *Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.* Luke 12:37 Jesus' instruction came with a promise to those who heed it. If they met the master at the door and welcomed him home, the master would see their faithfulness and would dress himself to serve them. Now that certainly wasn't something a slave would expect, but that is how Jesus will respond to those who long for His appearing. Jesus demonstrated this in John 13:1-5ⁱⁱⁱ, perhaps prophetically demonstrating that coming day of the wedding feast in heaven (Revelation 19:6-9^{iv}). The disciples had faithfully stuck with Him to that last week, so He girded Himself with a slave's towel and washed their feet.

This expression of Jesus might be one of the most shocking differences between Him and the rulers of this world. They expect to be served, but He had come to serve (Matthew 20:28^v). That service did not end at the ascension. Jesus is telling us that He will be serving us at His own wedding! He demonstrated it then - and will forevermore

exemplify His teaching that, “*The greatest among you shall be your servant.*” Matthew 23:11

The proverbs speak of the blessing of servants waiting for their Master, ³⁴ *Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.* Proverbs 8:34 I think it was possibly Jesus’ inspiration for this parable. It describes Brother Lawrence practice and these verses we are studying as well.

The blessing is that the Master will serve a meal to His servants who are waiting beside His doors. It reminds us of Revelation 3:20^{vi}. When we respond, He comes in and dines with us. It is a relaxed time of fellowship over a meal. Imagine what it will be like. Jesus speaking to your heart, serving the bread of life and living water to you. He is the bread of life and the living water, so He is feeding us Himself (John 6:56^{vii}). He is our portion. It is to be in Him and He in us. It will make the greatest physical feast on earth to appear as surviving on dry bread crumbs. It will surely open every spring within our hearts until we are pouring forth unceasing praise! Living with that future in view shouldn't cause us to appreciate the present any less, for we are experiencing the appetizers even now in prayer, the Word, and fellowship. But that future expectation will cause us to put worldly pleasures in true perspective. God has given us everything to richly enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17^{viii}), but the pleasures of this life are not our goal. We can see how limited they are compared to the pleasures we find in Him (Psalm 16:11^{ix}).

³⁸ *If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!* Luke 12:38 Unlike the Romans who had four shifts per night, the Hebrews had three watches per night: 6pm-10pm; 10pm-2am; 2am-6am. Saying that those servants who are ready at the second or third watch may imply either late in life, or at the end of this age when the love of many has grown cold (Matthew 24:12^x). I have met believers who say they served the Lord when they were younger, and it was time to retire and relax. **Our faith is a living relationship, not a duty we perform.** Our ministry may change as we age from physical service to prayer and encouragement, but there is no retirement in God’s kingdom.

Even now we can see the love of many growing colder. As the culture moves away from Biblical Christianity, we see people choosing churches for what they can receive. Many churches aim to meet felt needs to increase their numbers. We should be looking for a place to be spiritually fed so we can grow and serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13^{xi}). Is your lamp lit? Are you ready for service anytime the Spirit should call? Are you waiting at the door and listening for His voice?

³⁹ *But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.* Luke 12:39 Another concept of readiness is presented. Thieves come at night when we are asleep. But if we had information about when a thief was coming, we would be sure to stay home, awake, and prepared to confront him. How much more then should we wait expectantly for the Lord’s coming and our transformation, as the groom comes to take us to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

⁴⁰ *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*” Luke 12:40 This is not saying that the Lord is the thief, but that His coming is unexpected like a thief in the night. Both Paul and Peter reiterate this (1 Thessalonians

5:2-4^{xii}; 2 Peter 3:10^{xiii}; Revelation 16:15^{xiv}). That must mean it is certain to be entirely unexpected, unless we live in constant expectation of Jesus' return. Some people think they have God's timing all figured out. This verse and others tell us we really can't, but we can live ready and expectant. Are your eyes on the eastern skies? Do you long for His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8^{xv})? The world and even much of the church will be unprepared for that momentous event, but the faithful will see the signs of the times and be dressed for service with lamps lit while they go about their daily service of love.

⁴¹ *Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"* Luke 12:41 Peter wanted to know if the parable was for the disciples or for everyone. Jesus doesn't seem to answer him directly, but the following parable would indeed answer his question and thereby show him the previous parable was for all God's faithful people.

⁴² *And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?"* Luke 12:42 Jesus went on to use another parable. This time it was of a faithful and wise manager over the master's house. He has all the servants eat the food apportioned to them at the appropriate times. That is wise because it engenders the servants' loyalty. It is faithful because it is what the master expects of the manager.

⁴³ *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.* ⁴⁴ *Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.* Luke 12:43,44 And when the master returns from the trip and sees the servants are cared for and loyal, he will know the manager has been faithful and wise. The manager has not taken advantage of the trust placed in him. Perhaps this was Jesus answering Peter's question by giving him a parable that applied specifically to the disciples and all who oversee God's people. They are to feed their fellow servants with the Word of God, giving them what God has allotted for them when it should be given. In other words, the right Scriptures at the right time, faithfully serving them in unselfish love (Luke 19:15-17^{xvi}). That is to never abuse the freedoms we have in Christ (Galatians 5:13^{xvii}).

⁴⁵ *But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk,* ⁴⁶ *the master of that servant 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 put him with the unfaithful.* Luke 12:45,46 The parable now turns to "but if not". What if the servant abuses his authority, consumes others share of the food, and drinks their rations of wine until he is inebriated? In other words, he has the authority given to him to manage the house but used that freedom for his own selfish pleasures at the expense of the master. He has not only shown his master's faith was misplaced, but also harmed the other servants.

These overseers are those God puts in authority, pastors, elders of a congregation, who misused the congregation for selfish gain and personal pleasure (Ephesians 5:5-7; 1 John 3:10). We've seen it in the abuse scandals of the Catholic Church and in the financial scandals of the Charismatic and Evangelical Churches. You see it in TV ministries. They don't beat their parishioners physically, but they do beat them spiritually by their teachings or actions. And when they are found out, they damage the faith of many and give an excuse to unbelievers to reject the Gospel. What will God do about their abuses of authority?

⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. Luke 12:47 So often the Scriptures are black and white. Most things are. Good is good and evil is evil. Define sin any way you want; it is still evil. Change the name of a sin to something that sounds nicer and it is still a sin. The justice of God takes all things into account. If a servant deliberately disobeys his master, the master will deal severely with him or her.

We should understand that though the person is called a servant, he or she is not redeemed, for the servant is cut in pieces and put with the unfaithful, or as Matthew writes, "with the hypocrites" (Matthew 24:51^{xviii}). Consider the Levite Korah. He saw the power and holiness of God, but defied God's will and tried to start a rebellion to have his way. The earth opened and swallowed him (Numbers 16:32^{xix}). I could name recent well-known Christian leaders who are now disgraced. I've personally witnessed the fall of pastors who turned to the flesh and seen their families fall apart and their children despise them. That is a severe beating (James 3:1^{xx}). But the ultimate punishment comes when they are assigned a portion with the hypocrites. Their works showed they did not have a relationship with Christ (James 2:17,18^{xxi}).

⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:48 The justice of God takes every factor into account. Servants of God can act in ignorance and still do something worthy of punishment. Ignorance is no excuse. Either we did not read the Word of God or did not listen to the Holy Spirit. Sin is still sin. But God considers our ignorance. It does not excuse us. Our punishment is still deserved, but it will not be as severe.

I think back on well-meaning people who tried to interfere with what the Lord was doing. They meant well. There is a book entitled *Unintentional Dragons* that describes this common occurrence. Without realizing it they hurt others, split churches, and like those who choose the flesh, they give people a reason to despise the church. They will be punished, but less severely. Why? It's because God knows their heart, but He doesn't excuse their sin.

You might think, "But Jesus died for all our sins, so why is there talk of punishment?" The first example is of willful disobedience and indulgence in selfishness to the harm of others and applies to those who were never born-again (Matthew 7:23^{xxii}). They had opportunity and certainly heard, but they never surrendered their heart to the Lord. The second case of ignorance is like most of us, and the punishment is in this life. Our sins have consequences. Some of those consequences stay with us throughout this earthly life. Most of us deal with that in one way or another. That is a light beating. We deserve so much more, but we acted in ignorance.

Consider the Apostle Paul. The fact that he had murdered Christians stayed with him his whole life (1 Corinthians 15:9^{xxiii}). When God called him, He told Paul that he would show him how much he had to suffer for His name's sake (Acts 9:16^{xxiv}). Paul had caused so much suffering and now he would be a partaker in the suffering that comes from persecution. While persecuting Christians, he thought he was serving God. He

received mercy because he was acting in ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13^{xxv}), but he still received that light (momentary) beating (1 Corinthians 11:23-27^{xxvi}).

The fact that the more we know the more is required of us puts the fear of God in me. Think of how much an impoverished believer in the third world knows. Sometimes isn't much, and the preaching in his church may be very basic and sometimes distorted. God does not require as much from people in those situations. But we who have a godly heritage, Bibles, commentaries, who have grown up with good Biblical teaching, and seen God at work are expected to live according to the truth we've received. I'm accountable for a lot! Most of us are.

Those who are entrusted to lead are required to be even more obedient and faithful than most. That is why I tell people considering becoming a pastor to be sure they are called. Do anything else if you can. If the fire that is in you to minister to God's people is so strong that you won't settle for anything else, you are probably called. May God help us be faithful. If we do not have the fear of God, we will surely fall. God demands more from those in authority. We had better pray, study God's Word, and give godly counsel, not our own opinions as if they were God's will. This is one reason we are to pray for those in authority! Pray for your elders.

Our nation is so divided politically, and I see that same division around the world. Whatever side we are on, we can't understand why God allows people to get away with their actions and words. Don't worry. God is just. Leave it to God. You don't have to get worked up about it. Trust God. Know He is just. The governments of this world are soon to pass away. The kingdom of God is coming. Know that every person will give an account of themselves to God (Romans 14:12^{xxvii}).

Where do you as a servant of God fit into this equation? What do you know is God's will for your life? Are you doing it or are you letting it slide? Do you have a healthy fear of God? It is a privilege to be His servant, but it comes with responsibilities. It is an honor merited by the blood of Jesus. Yes, your sins are covered, but there are consequences in this life. Live in the light of that future day. Love is a much greater motivation than fear, but when our love is not so fervent, fear is a great restrainer (2 Corinthians 7:1^{xxviii}). Thank God for it. But better yet, grow in your love for Him. Serve Him out of love, for consider what great things He has done for you (1 Samuel 12:24^{xxix}).

Questions

- 1 What was the invitation preceding today's passage?
- 2 How do we keep our lamp burning and stay ready to serve?
- 3 What are two applications of "when He knocks"?
- 4 Who is the great servant? What should that teach us?
- 5 Relate this passage to Revelation 3:20.
- 6 What does the third watch symbolize?
- 7 When will Jesus return?
- 8 What determines the severity of discipline?
- 9 Why should we pray for our leaders?
- 10 How do these parables address you?

i Jude 1:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

ii Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

iii John 13:1-5 (ESV)

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

iv Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

v Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

vi Revelation 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

vii John 6:56 (ESV)

⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

viii 1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

ix Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

x Matthew 24:12 (ESV)

¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

xi Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

xii 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 (ESV)

² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

xiii 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

xiv Revelation 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

xv **2 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ 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.

xvi **Luke 19:15-17 (ESV)**

¹⁵ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.'

xvii **Galatians 5:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

xviii **Matthew 24:51 (ESV)**

⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

xix **Numbers 16:32 (ESV)**

³² And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods.

xx **James 3:1 (ESV)**

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

xxi **James 2:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

xxii **Matthew 7:23 (ESV)**

²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

xxiii **1 Corinthians 15:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

xxiv **Acts 9:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

xxv **1 Timothy 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

xxvi **2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (ESV)**

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

xxvii **Romans 14:12 (ESV)**

¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

xxviii **2 Corinthians 7:1 (ESV)**

¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

xxix **1 Samuel 12:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.