

**The Parables of Jesus:**  
**The Parable of the Faithful Manager (Luke 12:35-48)**  
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on July 28, 2019

**Introduction**

- ❖ In the days leading up to **May 18, 1910**, people across the globe were preparing for the end of the world. Because on that day, **Halley's comet** was scheduled to flyby the Earth, as it does every 76 years. But this time, people all over the world were in a panic.
  - Months earlier, the *New York Times* published an article citing a French astronomer (Camille Flammarion) who theorized that, this time, the Earth would pass through the tail of Halley's comet as it swung by. **He speculated that the comet's tail contained enough cyanide gas to poison the atmosphere and snuff out all life on Earth.**
    - Even though other astronomers refuted the theory, mass panic set in. Sales soared for gas masks and oxygen tanks. People were sealing their windows and plugging up keyholes trying to keep out the vapors. Huskers were selling so-called "comet pills" that they claimed made you immune to the toxins. Churches were filled and religious processions took place on the streets of cities all over the world. But on the morning of May 19th, the sun came up and life went on. And there were reports of people in the streets dancing and embracing, believing they had survived a near apocalypse.
  
- ❖ That's one of many doomsday scenarios that came and went and now is just a footnote in the pages of history. It seems so silly that people can be so hysterical over such things. But it just goes to show that if you're convinced the world could come to an end very soon, then life is going to change. You're not going to go about your business as usual.
  - **You'll start doing things you've never done before. And you'll stop doing things that would be a waste of time if your days are truly numbered.** Maybe you'll get religious or you might lose your faith. Some people will bunkered down and do whatever they can to survive. Others will go home and hold their loved ones tight.
  
- ❖ It makes you think: **What would I do if the world was about to end? If I knew I only had one day left on Earth, how would I spend it?** What would I do with the time I have left? What would I not want to be doing? What would be a colossal waste of that precious time? How would you spend your remaining days on Earth?
  - Let's be clear, I don't think it's healthy for Christians to focus on end-time predictions. There's no point trying to figure out when the world is going to end. There are been thousand of predictions over the course of human history and 100% of them have been 100% wrong. Don't bother with end-time predictions.
  
- ❖ But there is something to be said about end-time preparations. I don't mean buying gas masks and stockpiling food and weapons. **What I mean by "end-time preparations" is that a bible-believing Christian – who takes Jesus's words seriously – should be prepared, at any time, for the end of time.**
  - If Jesus's teaching is to be believed, then the question of what you would do (and not do) if you had one day left on Earth – is a question that every Christian should know how to answer. Because every Christian ought to be living that way right now.

- ❖ We're in a summer sermon series going through some of the Parables of Jesus found in Luke's Gospel. **In this morning's parable, Jesus commands his followers to stay alert, to be ready, to be prepared, at any time, for the end of time – that is, for his own return.**
  - Our focus is on Luke 12:35-48, but let me quickly set our passage in its larger context. Chapter 12 begins with a warning to his disciples about the teaching of the Pharisees (12:1), which becomes relevant later in the parable when Jesus speaks of unfaithful stewards who abuse their position in the household of God. **Chapter 12 also address our anxieties, especially over money** (12:13-34). Jesus tells us not to be anxious, worrying about treasures on earth. But to trust in your heavenly Father and to store up for yourself treasures in heaven (v33).
  
- ❖ So what Jesus does in our passage is to give more reason *not* to spend our days stressing out over money – by reminding us that every day should be lived as if tomorrow Jesus might return. **Just think about it: If you knew that Christ was going to come back tomorrow to establish his kingdom on Earth – would you really be worrying about money?** No, you would be seeking first his kingdom and trusting that all these things will be added unto you.
  - Let me show you three things that Jesus calls his followers to do: (1) Be ready at all times, (2) be faithful in your stewardship, and (3) be aware of the consequences for unpreparedness and unfaithfulness.

### **Be Ready At All Times**

- ❖ Let's begin in v35. **Here we see a command to be ready at all times – because Christ could return when you least expect it.** The picture Jesus paints is of servants waiting up late for their master. The night is growing long, and he has yet to return from a wedding feast. Ancient near eastern wedding feasts were typically multi-day events, sometimes lasting up to a week. So these servants have been staying up late *for multiple nights*. They're at the point of exhaustion. Their eyelids are heavy. They're fighting off sleep. Because they don't know when their master will return. And they want to be ready.
  
- ❖ **When Jesus says “*Stay dressed for action*”, it's literally translated as keep your loins girded.** Jewish men in those days wore long robes that made it hard to run. So if you're about to engage in strenuous activity, you gird up your loins or, in other words, tuck that robe into your belt. So it's like saying today, “Roll up your sleeves. Fasten your seatbelt. Get ready!”
  - He goes on to say, “*keep your lamps burning.*” Like in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-3), the wise servant will have plenty of oil in his lamp and won't be caught off guard when his master comes knocking in the dead of night. Look at v36, “<sup>36</sup>*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.*”
  
- ❖ That brings to mind the image of Jesus knocking at the door in **Revelation 3:20**, “*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.*”

- ❖ That verse is often quoted when sharing the gospel to non-Christians. “Don’t you hear Jesus knocking on the door of your heart? You gotta let him in. Open your door to Jesus!” Now that might preach but don’t lose sight of the context. This was Jesus’s letter to the church of Laodicea. He’s not talking to non-Christians, kindly asking them to let him into their house.
  - No, he’s talking to the church. **This is *his* house, and he’s knocking on *his* door wondering where his servants are and why they’re not awake and awaiting his return.** He’s concerned that his followers have grown lukewarm. That they’re no longer alert. But just apathetic.
  
- ❖ Now in a few verses later, Jesus will address what he's going to do to the lukewarm and unprepared servant. But for now, he focuses on the prepared servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Jesus gives a beatitude in v37. *"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."*
  - **This is unheard of behavior for an ancient near eastern master of a household.** You're a servant (the word literally means "slave"). But here your master – who just got home after a long journey in the middle of the night – here he is putting on the garments of a servant and asking you to sit at his table. He's going to serve you!
    - He appreciates how you were so prepared for his return. V38 mentions being awake into the second and third watches of the night. The Romans kept four watches between 6pm to 6am, so the second and third equate to 9:00pm to 3:00am. The Jews customarily kept three watches, meaning 10:00pm to 6:00am. Either way, the idea is that you've been up into the wee hours of the night waiting for your master. And now he’s so thankful that he wants to bless you. **The master will serve his servants!** That’s unheard of.
  
- ❖ Unless, of course, your master is Jesus. This is characteristic behavior for Christ. He has no problem taking on the form of a servant. That's exactly what he did in his first coming. **He was born a king – but a Servant King.** He did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). His greatest act of service was bearing our burdens – our sin – upon his cross and making atonement by his blood.
  
- ❖ It’s because Jesus came the first time to serve, that it's only natural for him to come a second time with the same attitude. He will stand at the door and knock. And for those who were ready for his return, Jesus will be ready to bless us, to serve us.
  - But you've got to be ready at all times. You don't want to be caught unprepared. He could return when you least expect it. That’s his point in v39. **Jesus compares the unexpectedness of his return to the unexpectedness of a thief breaking into your house.** *“<sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

- ❖ You might find it strange that Jesus would use the comparison of a thief. But remember, in parables, not every character or object is meant to represent someone. That's what you'd expect in an allegory, but this is a parable. **The key to interpreting parables is to find the idea or principle being illustrated and to apply it.**
  - A thief breaking into your house, on one hand, **illustrates the idea of loss that you'll suffer if you're unprepared** – unprepared for a thief's arrival or Jesus's return. Now with a thief, the most you can lose are household goods and earthly treasures. But with Jesus – if you're not prepared for his return – you could lose far more. You could lose eternal joy. You could miss the kingdom. You'll suffer loss if you're not ready.
  
- ❖ **But the main idea in the parable is the unexpectedness of his return.** I find it ironic that so many people over the centuries have wasted so much energy trying to predict Jesus's return – when he said, from the beginning, that it's pointless. *“For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* The minute you set a date and expect him to come back – you can be sure that you're wrong.
  - The point is that – just like how a homeowner can't predict when a thief will strike so he's always ready and prepared for a burglary attempt – **in the same way, you can't predict when Jesus will return so always be ready and prepared.** Stay dressed for action. Keep your loins girded and your lamps lit.
  
- ❖ **Friends, can you honestly say that you're ready? Are you prepared for Jesus to return?** If you haven't given it much thought or if you always assume it won't happen in your lifetime – do you realize that means you're *not* ready? That means you're *not* being like the blessed servant whom the master finds awake when he comes. **Now to “be ready” doesn't mean to go study end-time prophecy charts.** It doesn't mean to bunker down, to quit your job, and drop all future plans and responsibilities – assuming that tomorrow never comes.
  - **No, to be ready for Jesus's return means, first of all, to get right with God.** Are your sins forgiven? Is your conscience clean? Are you ready to stand before an all-seeing, all-knowing, holy God? **The only way to be ready is to avail yourself of God's only way of salvation** – by relying on the death and resurrection of his Son. Be ready to face God by turning to Jesus in faith, having his blood and righteousness cover your sin and shame. Get ready for Christ's return by getting right with God.
  
- ❖ **Another way to be ready for his return is to live your life, in such a way, that you won't regret if this is your last day.** When Jonathan Edwards was only nineteen, he drew up a list of resolutions that he would read to himself once a week. Even as a teenager, he was committed to living out a God-centered life. Listen to his seventh resolution: *“7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.”*
  - Is there anything that you would be ashamed to be doing when Jesus returns? I'm not just talking about sinful things – but also wasteful things. Do you take Jesus's words seriously? *“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* **Let's resolve to not do anything that we'd be afraid or ashamed to be doing if it were the last hour of our lives.**

## Be Faithful in Your Stewardship

- ❖ Now there's always going to be push back – a warning against being so focused on Jesus coming back, so future-oriented, that you lose sight of what's in front of you. And that's a legitimate concern. **You don't want to be so wrapped up with a future-day event that you neglect present-day responsibilities.** Some Christians can be so focused on the second coming that they neglect to take care of their everyday responsibilities.
  - Jesus is well aware of that concern, and that's why he gives a second parable starting in v42. This is the second thing we see Jesus calling his disciples to do: **To be faithful in your stewardship – because everything ultimately belongs to the Lord.**
  
- ❖ Before we get to that second parable, Peter asks the Lord about his audience. Who is he targeting? Look at v41, “*Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?*” Sometimes Jesus would direct parables to the crowds in general; sometimes to his disciples in particular. **Jesus, when you say be ready at all times, who are you talking to? Who are you concerned won't be ready?** I think everyone assumes that Jesus's warnings are meant for someone else. We assume we already get it.
  - Notice Jesus doesn't answer directly. But how he answers with this parable makes it clear that Peter, the disciples, and everyone entrusted with a stewardship of God's resources – we're the intended audience. The warning is for all of us.
    - Listen to vv42–44, “*42And 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? 43Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 44Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.”*
  
- ❖ Jesus wants his followers to see themselves as managers or, more literally, as stewards. This ties into the earlier verses about not being anxious over money and material things. **There's no need to fret over your treasures on earth when you come to recognize that they don't belong to you in the first place.** Everything ultimately belongs to God, and he has given you stewardship over a tiny fraction of his belongings.
  - **A steward, in ancient times, was a particular slave within a household who was left in charge when the master was away.** He was entrusted with a privileged responsibility and authority to be stewarded well on the master's behalf. The main responsibility as a steward was to care for the welfare of your fellow servants. V42 mentions the task of rationing the food and making sure everyone is well fed.
  
- ❖ To be a steward is a great and awesome privilege. But it requires a change of perspective. **We're far too accustomed to seeing ourselves as owners, as masters in our own right.** It's my money, my phone, my car, my house, my kids, my marriage, my job, my time – it's natural to see it all as mine. **But the biblical reality is that it all belongs to God.**
  - We don't ultimately own anything. We're not masters or owners. We're stewards who have been given money, phone, car, house, kids, marriage, job, and time – to steward these things well on behalf of the Lord.

- ❖ Just think about **your kids**. Are you raising them with the mindset that – if Jesus returns tomorrow – you’ll have to give them back to the Lord? Or are you clinging so tightly to them, to your dreams and goals for them, that you would have a hard time letting go?
  - What about **your job or your career aspirations**? If Jesus were to come back on Monday morning, are there still a few emails that you feel like you really have to send? Are you so consumed by work, that you would have difficulty letting go?
    - What about **your money**? If he returns tomorrow, would you be ready to show Jesus how you invested the riches he entrusted to you – in kingdom work, in storing up treasures in heaven?
      - **If Jesus were to return, would you run out of your house to greet him?** Or would you linger behind in your house, rummaging through your things, running your fingers over everything, grieving that your stewardship is over – that you’ll have to give it all back to your master? What would you be thinking?
  
- ❖ Let me tell you what wise and faithful stewards think. They think: **I’ve been given earthly treasures. I been given an education, a career, resources, relationships. What am I doing with them?** Am I going to serve myself and do what’s good for me? No, a good steward is going to take all those treasures and use them to serve the good and welfare of others. That’s what preparedness looks like: **Selfless service. Self-denying stewardship.** That’s the mindset of someone who is ready at all times for the master’s return.
  - When the Lord returns, the good steward is going to be ready to open the door and welcome him home. The good steward will hand back the keys, relinquish control, and return to Jesus all that belonged to him in the first place.
  
- ❖ It says in v44, that the servant whom the master finds prepared will be set over all his possessions. **You’ll receive a more permanent position of honor and responsibility in the kingdom to come.** That’s how you’ll be blessed – with more work. That’s consistent with teaching in other parts of Scripture that describe the kingdom come, the new heaven and new earth – not as places of perpetual leisure and inactivity – but as places of work and responsibility, of course redeemed from all toil and frustration.
  - Now if that doesn’t appeal to you – if being given more responsibility doesn’t sound like a blessing – then you have to wonder if you’re going to enjoy eternity in God’s kingdom. **If you’re not ready for life in the kingdom come, then you’re definitely not ready for the return of the king.**

### **Be Aware of the Consequences**

- ❖ If you’re not sure if you’re ready, what might help is to consider the consequences. That’s where Jesus goes next in v45. This is the third thing he wants his followers to do: **To be aware of the consequences of unpreparedness and unfaithfulness – because you have been entrusted with much.**

- ❖ Jesus goes on in vv45 to describe a scenario where the steward 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, <sup>46</sup>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.*”
- ❖ Now that’s pretty graphic, but I think it’s safe to assume that’s figurative language. But if you’re stuck on this thought that God might cut someone in pieces, then how are you going to handle God putting that servant with “*the unfaithful*”? That can also be translated as “*with the unbelievers.*” That gets the idea across better – this unprepared servant is being cut off and assigned with the unbelievers. We’re talking about hell, about eternal damnation. **If you can’t handle God cutting someone in pieces, you’re not going to get a handle on hell.**
  - Because that’s the punishment for those who abuse their stewardship. Who assume – due to the master’s prolonged absence – that they can use their privilege, their authority, and the resources they were entrusted with to serve themselves rather than to give of themselves in the care of others.
- ❖ Peter must have taken Jesus’s words to heart. Because in 2 Peter 3, he talks about scoffers in the last days who scoff at the Lord’s return. They’ll say, “*Where is the promise of his coming?*” (v4) It’s been thousands of years, and he still hasn’t returned. You need to get your head out of the clouds and start taking care of yourself.
  - To that, Peter replies in **2 Peter 3:8-10**, “<sup>8</sup>*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.*”
- ❖ **Don’t be like the scoffer who misuses the precious time that Jesus gives us and fails to appreciate that his return has been prolonged for the purpose of giving sinners more time to repent.** To repent of our sin and self-serving tendencies.
  - Friends, if you keep putting off Jesus, putting off the big questions about your eternal salvation, about getting right with God, about whether you’re ready for his return – **if you keep putting off these issues, then sooner or later time will be up.** The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When you least expect it.
- ❖ If you keep reading in vv47-48, Jesus shifts attention from the steward, in particular, to the rest of the servants in the household. “<sup>47</sup>*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. <sup>48</sup>But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating.*”
  - **The point here is that no one has an excuse.** Whether you grew up with the Bible or never read it before. Whether you call yourself a Christian or an agnostic. It’s all the same. If you’re unprepared for Jesus’s return – whether you spend your days in ignorance of God’s will or in blatant disobedience – if you’re unprepared, there will be consequences. There will be punishment.

- ❖ **But apparently there will be degrees of punishment – in proportion to how much knowledge and responsibility you've been entrusted with.** Jesus says at the end of v48, “*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.*” So the unfaithful steward will be cut to pieces. The unfaithful servant who knew better will be severely beaten. And the unfaithful servant who didn't know better but was still unfaithful will be lightly beaten. So there are degrees of punishment.
  - **But the moral is *not* to stay as ignorant as you can about God's will so you'll only be beaten lightly.** If that's your takeaway, then you're misreading the text. A legitimate reading would conclude that all three of these unfaithful servants are in hell. Their experiences of eternal punishment will be different, but the point is that their punishment will be just and fair.
    - So none of them are to be envied or emulated. They are to be pitied and to be warnings to us all – especially to those entrusted with spiritual knowledge and spiritual authority.
  
- ❖ If you are spiritually responsible for others – for a spouse, for children, for a small group, for a disciple or mentee, etc. – **then just like a steward, you've been entrusted with much. So much will be demanded of you.** You'll be held to a higher standard. That's why James says in his letter, in chapter 3:1, that not many should become teachers in the church, “*for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*” That warning would apply to anyone who takes on spiritual responsibility in the church.
  - So what Jesus says here about degrees of punishment is not meant to give relief for anyone. **But it is meant to give pause to anyone in a position of spiritual stewardship over others or considering to take on such responsibility.**
  
- ❖ But in the end, the big takeaway applies to everyone – everyone needs to get ready. Are you ready? Take stock of your life. **Are you living like Jesus is coming?** Or are you living like he's going to be delayed? Or is the thought of his return not even on your radar?
  - If we're honest, we'd admit that none of us are as prepared for his coming as we ought to be. This is why we all need the gospel. We all need a Savior. A Savior who bears the consequences and suffers the punishment that we deserve for our unpreparedness and our unfaithfulness.
    - **Thank God that the gospel is *not* about a warning to be ready or else. The gospel is good news for unfaithful servants about the true and faithful Servant of God who bore our sins on the cross and buried them in his grave.** And he rose again on the third day, and he is coming again to make all things new.