READY

Luke 12:35–48

Key Verse: 12:42

“The Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?’”

We’ve been studying in Luke’s Gospel the section where Jesus is making his final journey to Jerusalem. This section is famous for its many parables of Jesus. Jesus was always using incidents and experiences from daily life to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God. Recently, when the Pharisees came to challenge him, he taught his disciples to watch out for their yeast, which was their hypocrisy. Then, when a man came with a dispute over an inheritance, he taught his disciples not to spend their lives in greed, storing up treasures for themselves, but to be rich toward God, and not to worry about their material needs, but to seek God’s kingdom. Now Jesus continues teaching his disciples. He’d just told them how **not** to spend their lives: full of greed or worries. Now he tells them how **to** spend their lives: as faithful and wise servants, ready for him to come back at any time. In today's passage he repeats the word “ready” four times (35,38,40,47). Have you ever felt like you were not ready for a test, not ready to meet someone, not ready to handle a shift at work? Smart, talented people can get by faking it without ever really being ready for anything. But in the spiritual world, no one can get by “faking” it; our unreadiness might be obvious to some people; it’s surely obvious to God. Then what does it really mean to be spiritually “ready,” and why should we live this way? May God speak to us through his living word today.

Read verse 35. Jesus starts off being intense right away. Today people don’t like to be uptight; they like everything to be chill. For example, they don’t like to get too dressed up, because they want to give the impression they’re not trying too hard. And people today certainly don’t want to be waiting around for no obvious reason, especially when it’s for someone else; they just don’t have time for that. What’s worse, in this parable the master gets to go to a wedding banquet, returning indefinitely, and the servants have to stay at home totally focused on waiting for him. No fair! But here Jesus teaches his disciples to be like that, to be like servants always dressed, ready and waiting to serve, to be in perpetual “stand-by.” To do it, they’d have to invest a lot of time and energy waiting, burning lamps, and it could be all for nothing. It seems kind of wasteful.

Why does Jesus want his disciples to be so invested and prepared? Read verse 36. It’s kind of like the ultimate customer service—no waiting, no delays, no lines, “immediately.” But surely Jesus isn’t just talking about promptness here. The underlying idea seems to be the servants’ relationship with their master. First off, they have a clear identity that they’re servants; they always remember that they’re there to serve him. They believe he’s coming back, though they don’t know when. Also, they have tremendous respect for him; they’d never want to leave him waiting outside knocking on the door. They’re actually loyal and eager to please him. Basically they love him. So they don’t mind the constant self-sacrifice that comes with living in perpetual “stand-by” mode, the uncomfortable dress clothes, or the constantly fussing to keep the lamps burning. It’s all an expression of love, a love that inspires them to serve their master with all they’ve got. This allegory is a great picture of what Christian life is like.

To really live like this, we have to be changed. The more deeply we’re changed, the more authentic our Christian life is. Naturally we human beings are self-centered creatures. The world revolves around us, we think. If ever we give our hearts to anything, it’s because we think it’s for us, it benefits us. Even many Christians at their core are still living like this. But to live the way Jesus describes here, like ready-go servants waiting for their master, our hearts and minds, our entire way of thinking and focus, has to change from self to Jesus. When we repent, this is what the Holy Spirit does; he changes us deeply from within. Apostle Paul experienced this. Before meeting Jesus he was living for himself. Everything was for his own profit and gain. But after encountering the Risen Christ and repenting deeply of his sins against him, the Holy Spirit worked powerfully and totally changed him. He began living for Jesus. He considered everything a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Php3:8). He was so changed that he wrote, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Php1:21). Apostle Peter also wrote to the early Christians about this tremendous love for Jesus: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy…” (1Pe1:8). These early Christians were suffering under fiery persecutions, scattering everywhere, losing their jobs, homes and comfortable lives. But because of their love relationship with Jesus, it was worth it all. Focusing life on serving Jesus, being ready and willing to serve him in any way, isn't a grudging, grumpy, “doing-the-bare-minimum,” complaining life. It’s a joyful, wholehearted life.

Jesus goes on to talk about an amazing reward for such servants. Read verse 37. At that time it was unheard of for a master to dress up like a servant to serve his servants. It would be especially unusual to do it right after coming home from work, to walk into a home full of servants, and instead of being served **by them**, to start serving **them**, to let **them** recline and the table and eat. Jesus is talking here about what will happen when he comes again. He notices and remembers those who’ve been living for him, loving him, waiting for him, always ready to serve him, and he’s going to reward them. He’s going to invite them to a banquet in heaven and shower his grace, love and mercy on them.

Next Jesus challenges his disciples again to be on constant stand-by. Read verse 38. Jesus isn’t teaching us to be insomniacs. Basically, this verse calls for perseverance. So many people can pull all-nighters when they want an A in a class. People can stay up all night partying, no problem, until it’s morning. But strangely, when it’s not for us, it’s hard to stay up all night. Falling asleep while waiting through the darkness of the night is another allegory of Christian life. It represents giving in to our sinful nature, giving up the spiritual struggle, ceasing to pray. “In the middle of the night” and “toward daybreak” are the sleepiest times; it’s when most people just can’t stay awake anymore and finally give in to the desire to sleep. Likewise, there are times in life when we feel so spiritually exhausted, so lonely, we just can’t seem to endure anymore. But Jesus wants us to remember that it may be at just such a time that he’ll come back.

To further inspire his disciples to constant spiritual vigilance, Jesus gives another allegory. Read verses 39–40. Thieves never text us, saying, “Hey, I’m breaking into your place at 3:00 AM.” In any break-in, there’s always an element of surprise. In our world we want everything to be easy on us, so we install car alarms and home security systems so we don’t have to even think about a break-in. But there's no easy way to be spiritually ready constantly. Actually, in our own strength we can’t do it; only God himself can restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast (1Pe5:10). By nature we’re all unfaithful and sinful. God is the one who began a good work in us, and he’ll carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Php1:6). Though we’re so weak, God himself is faithful; he’s the one who sanctifies us “through and through, in spirit, soul and body,” to be kept blameless for when Jesus comes again (1Th5:23–24). Still, Jesus says here, “You also must be ready.” He’s placing the responsibility for our readiness squarely on our own shoulders. We can’t live Christian life on cruise control.

Read verse 40 again. Jesus clearly says he’s going to come again when we don’t expect him. There’ll be no time to suddenly get ready; either we’ve been living in a state of constant readiness, or we’re not. Later in Luke Jesus goes on to explain what it means practically. 21:34–36 reads, “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” Are we taking Jesus seriously? Are we constantly striving to be spiritually ready for him to come?

Read verse 41. We’re not sure exactly what motivated Peter to say this. Probably he felt he was the most loyal to Jesus, so Jesus wasn’t talking to him. How did Jesus answer? Read verse 42. It’s not immediately obvious to whom Jesus is speaking. But clearly he’s talking to Peter and to all his disciples. In these words Jesus is expressing his heart’s desire for them all. It’s why he was pouring his life into teaching and training them. But he’s also saying that it’s not a given, that there’s no guarantees. In his heart of hearts Jesus was really hoping to raise all his disciples, all his future followers, as faithful and wise managers for all his other servants. It’s still his heart’s desire.

Then what does it mean? Read verse 42 again. To understand this, we first need to notice why the manager was put in charge of the other servants. It wasn’t for him to feel superior, for his honor. It was because the master needed a good manager and steward for all his other servants. To be such a person, the faithful and wise manager needed not to just know a lot; he needed to be doing something. He needed to be giving the other servants “their food allowance at the proper time.” Jesus wasn’t just talking about food, for he said elsewhere, “Man shall not live on bread alone” (Lk4:4). He was using an allegory about giving people God’s word. God’s word is like daily food for our souls (Mt4:4).

Luke in his Gospel account puts a strong emphasis on the word of God (1:2,37; 2:17; 3:2; 4:32; 5:1; 8:11–21; 11:28; 21:33). Luke portrays Jesus throughout his ministry as the original faithful and wise manager, constantly giving people the word of God, right up to the end of his life (21:37–38). In Acts as well, Luke shows how when believers made it their priority, the word of God continued to spread (e.g. Ac6:4,7a; 8:4,14,25; 11:1,19–20; 12:24; 13:49; 15:35; 18:11; 19:10,20). The word of God is the word of his grace, which can build people up, sanctify them and give them hope in heaven (Ac20:32). This is why we need to be giving it to people. At the very end of his life, Apostle Paul wrote to his spiritual son Timothy: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2Ti4:1–2). It’s easy to get distracted and involved in so many other things. But giving spiritual food—the word of God—should be our number one priority in Christian life and fellowship.

Read verse 42 once more. Some people are wise, but not faithful; others are faithful, but not wise. Jesus wants his disciples to be both wise and faithful. Here, “at the proper time” comprises both. It seems to mean the wisdom to give the right word at just the right time, when a person really needs to hear that word, which will be different for different people in different situations. To do this we need to know both the word **and** the person’s spiritual need. It requires being devoted on an ongoing basis to listening to and learning from God himself. Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.” If we just give people pat spiritual answers, based on our common sense or old knowledge or experience, it’s just annoying; we’re not really giving the life-giving, life-sustaining word of God. To give others God’s word, we have to keep listening carefully to it ourselves. To give people God’s word also requires faithfulness, because people need God’s word regularly, just as they need regular meals.

Read verse 43. Jesus is explaining here perhaps the best way to be ready for his return at any time. It’s not to sell all our possessions and climb up a high mountain in white robes; it’s to be engaged in the real world in doing what’s most important to him—giving people God’s word. Jesus again promises a reward for such spiritual readiness. Read verse 44. Here, “all his possessions” refers not to material things, but to God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is the best reward. Jesus goes on to give a terrible warning to those who misuse the trust he gives. Read verse 45. Such a person seems smart. So he takes advantage of his position, not caring for fellow servants but indiscriminately crushing them, and using what was given to him for self-indulgence. Read verse 46. It’s not at all what he expected; it’s a very severe punishment. Jesus concludes with another warning to his disciples. Read verses 47–48. This is a principle: God holds to a higher standard those to whom he’s given more blessings and privileges. And with more knowledge comes more responsibility (cf. Jas3:1). Are we abusing God’s blessings or using them for his purpose, to the best of our ability?

Today we heard Jesus challenging his disciples to live in a constant state of readiness. More than anything else, being ready is the best way to express our love for Jesus, our desire to see him in person someday. We learned from this passage some specifics on how to be ready for Jesus. To be ready, we need to be fundamentally changed, from self-centered persons to Jesus-centered persons. To be ready, we need to persevere, especially at times when we really want to give up. To be ready, we need to be alert and vigilant, not lackadaisical and lazy. To be ready, our spiritual life needs to be not on-and-off, but constant. Most of all, to be ready we need to be doing what our Master values most, listening carefully to God’s word and giving it to others with God’s wisdom and faithfulness. To do this, we have to learn to live before God, not before people. May God help each of us to grow as faithful and wise servants of his word so that our lives may be useful to our Lord Jesus and ready for him at any time.