

Blessed Are Those Servants
Luke 12:35-48
January 23, 2022
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 12:35-48

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

Introduction

Frank Barker was one of the founders of our denomination. He was the pastor of Briarwood Church in Birmingham, Alabama that hosted the first General Assembly of the PCA back in 1973. He died a couple days after Christmas; he was a wonderful man and will be greatly missed. I have a collection of his sermons and in one of them, he tells the story of one of the pastors on staff at his church, Tom Cheely. Tom had struggled with rheumatoid arthritis for almost a decade. He didn't have much help from doctors until one doctor said definitively, “You are going to die from this. We don't know when, it may be in two weeks, it may be in two months or two years, but you are going to die.”

Tom was in shock, but after talking to his wife, he resolved that he wanted to make his life count for whatever remaining time he had left. He looked at his life and decided that his first priority would be making sure that his children knew and followed the Lord, his second priority was serving his church, and his third was talking to people in his community about Jesus. For two years, he lived with a burning passion to love and reach those groups. Because he was still alive and doing well, he decided to talk to a different doctor, who essentially said, “Tom, you have rheumatoid arthritis, but you are not going to die from it.” Suddenly, Tom had no urgency that he was running out of time. But then he realized that he had no urgency and not as much motivation, and he told Frank Barker: “I almost wish I was back under that other situation where I was living in constant expectation that anytime I might face God. It had a good spiritual effect in my life and ministry.”¹

We all have a lot on our plates, a lot to think about. If you're a student, you're trying to pass your classes and get into the right school or job later in life. If you're already working in a job, you're gauging how much you like what you do, whether you will be moving up or moving out of your position. We're trying to figure out if we can plan a vacation this summer that won't get cancelled with travel restrictions. Everyone is trying to figure out if they're saving enough to live on later in life; we're trying to raise our kids right, love our friends and family well. There's so much to think about every day. And we lose sight of the fact that death could come for us any day or that Jesus come back and bring with Him the end of all things. Do we let that reality frame and motivate our lives? Like Tom Cheely, do we have an urgency for God's priorities in our lives?

Today's Scripture passage is about being ready to face God at the end of your life or when Jesus returns in glory. It is a warning that we need to be ready and to be found faithful. But are we like most people who assume we have plenty of time to get our lives right and little urgency to be faithful and obedient in all things? Or do we take Jesus at face value and know that it is vital to be constantly vigilant and ready for the His return?

¹ Frank Barker's sermon “The Opportunity and Danger of Stewardship” from *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 1* (self-published).

The first four verses say that

I. Blessed Are Those Servants Who Are Watching and Waiting (vv. 35-38)

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. 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. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!*

From time to time, Kath and the kids will go out of town or stay up in Maine when I can't be with them because I have to work. And when people hear that I've been home for a couple days alone, they joke about how completely wrecked the house must be, how I'll need to clean like crazy or hire cleaners before Kath gets home. Because they don't know me very well. Aside from liking a clean house and preferring to clean things as I go, I also don't ever want a situation where my family comes home and is appalled by the mess they find. When they come home, they find the counters wiped down, everything picked up, laundry fully done, all those things. Because I want them to be glad to be home and not feel like they need to spend the first few hours home straightening up. Even if they surprised me and came home early, I might have some laundry to do, but there would be very little cleaning I had to do. Because I also remember the feeling of when we let a family stay in our house when we were gone for a few days. They apparently mixed up the day we were coming back, because we walked into a complete disaster, and we were not very happy.

Now, my wife is not my master (and I am not hers), so it's not an exact parallel to this parable, but it's similar in that I want her to be glad that I've been ready for her arrival in the same way that the servants want their master to approve of their being ready for him. The second and third watches of the night (verse 38) are the hours between 9 pm and 3 am. The master could have stayed very late at the wedding, well into the morning, or he could have decided to leave early. There was no way for the servants to know, so they had to stay awake and ready the entire time. The application to our lives is not hard to understand: we are the servants of our Master, Jesus, and He has gone away for some undetermined length of time. We don't know if He will come back soon or much later. It's been just under 2,000 years since Jesus left the earth with the promise to return. But just because He's been gone that long doesn't mean He won't be back soon. We should be living our lives as though He could come back at any time, *because He could*. Blessed are His servants who are ready for His return. This parable works well in conjunction with the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, where Jesus compares His followers to servants who are given different amounts of money that He expects them to invest and grow while He is away. So this Luke parable of being ready doesn't just mean we're idle, doing nothing until the Master comes back; we are to be busy using the talents He gave us to see increase and gain in His kingdom.

I would say the biggest surprise in this passage is not the time that the master comes home; it's in verse 37. The master is so glad that his servants have everything ready for him that he does something that masters don't really do: he puts on the clothing of a servant, has his servants sit down at the table, and he serves them dinner. What kind of craziness is that? What master would ever take the form of a servant? I hope your mind jumps immediately to Philippians 2:7 – *“(Jesus) emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* Of course, the master here is Jesus and He came not to be served but to serve, having taken on the form of a servant in becoming a man. He demonstrated this most vividly when He washed His disciples' feet at the end of His life. And He has already promised to feed us for eternity, setting a table for us in heaven. Jesus rewards His followers, His faithful servants, by serving them.

The next two verses have a little different emphasis, though a similar encouragement,

II. Blessed Are Those Servants Who Are Always Ready (vv. 39-40)

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. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

How many of you have had your house broken into? When I was in high school, our house in Houston was broken into. We came home from being at church on a Wednesday night and it was clear that someone had forced open the front door and rifled through everything. I don't remember what all they took, but I remember the incredible sense of feeling violated and vulnerable. Home had always felt so safe, but it didn't feel as safe anymore. Clearly, we would have taken more precautions if we had known someone was going to break in. But the point of these verses is that even though you don't know when a break-in will happen, you need to be ready at any moment for it to happen. And this break-in is not for someone to steal your things, it's for the Son of Man to steal His people away to heaven.

There are plenty of other Scriptures comparing Jesus' returning to a thief in the night:

2 Peter 3:10 – *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...”*

Revelation 3:3 – *“...if you will not wake up, I will come like a thief...”*

Revelation 16:15 – *“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake...”*

It's such an interesting analogy, because we're used to thinking of the master of the house as being God. That's who all the servants serve, right? But who is the thief? The thief is God too, God the Son, sent by God the Father when He returns in power and glory. So we're the masters of the house.

Because the Lord is coming at an hour when no one will be expecting it, it's a bit ridiculous that preachers and so-called prophets have tried to predict the time that He would return. And yet they've been doing just that since the early days of the church. People would quit their jobs and sell their things to wait for Jesus' return only to be disappointed when it didn't happen. Through the ages there were predictions and prophecies that never panned out. Lots of people predicted that Jesus would return in the year 2000. I remember very vividly the prophecies of Harold Camping, a radio preacher, who said that the Rapture and Judgment Day would be May 21, 2011. I was on a leadership retreat that day and we have a picture of us all looking into the sky waiting to be raptured. If you predict a date for Jesus to return, it seems to me that that immediately means that it won't be that date! The whole point is that it will sneak up on us when no one is thinking about it. Otherwise, we'd all be ready. But the question is, “Will you be ready no matter when He comes?” Have you been working on your life so that it is a life that pleases Him? The first question, of course, is: “Do you know for sure that God will let you into heaven because your sins have been paid for by the blood of Jesus?” And once you are sure of your salvation, then you should be asking whether you are developing a Christ-like character and the fruit of the Spirit in your life. That's being ready.

The last eight verses are another slant on this angle of our readiness for His return, and

III. Blessed Are Those Servants Who Remain Obedient (vv. 41-48)

⁴¹ Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” 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? 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. 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. 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. 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."

Jesus asked who the faithful and wise manager is. A manager was also called a steward, and was set over all of the other servants in the house. If you've seen *Downton Abbey*, it would be Mr. Carson or Mrs. Hughes. If the manager did well, he was rewarded and entrusted with even more; think of Joseph at the end of Genesis, who was so faithful and wise that he rose to manage all of Pharaoh's house. But a household manager/steward could easily make two mistakes when his master was gone: 1) act as if he could do whatever he liked while the master was away, and 2) think that he had plenty of time to put things right before the master returned. If he was supposed to be helping the rest of the servants know what to do but began beating them instead, he was violating his master's trust. If he was supposed to be dividing up everyone's portion of food but instead helped himself to the food and had so much wine that he got drunk, he should fear his master's return. That is a servant that will be punished severely when his master returns and finds out what really happened. In that culture, Jesus said, the master could have him cut in pieces or beaten for his disobedience.

So this passage has much to say to anyone in a leadership position, whether you are a parent, a teacher, a ministry leader, or a pastor. You have been entrusted with much, God will hold you accountable for what you did in your position. If you were faithful in teaching, in helping lead others in ministry, in loving and serving your fellow believers, you will be rewarded. But if you shirked your responsibilities, or worse, you abused your position or you abused those you were supposed to be leading, consider yourself warned: God will hold you to His high standards. We are nominating potential church officers this month, men who might become elders and deacons of this church. This is a great reminder that there is a heavy weight of responsibility for those who would lead in the church. Much will be entrusted and much will be expected and required.

I think that the people who should be the most afraid of this parable are pastors and theologians who have abandoned the Scriptures and embraced the culture. Those who teach and preach as if they have the authority of God, but do nothing but cast doubt on God's word. They look to the culture to see what is acceptable and palatable, and change the Bible to fit the spirit of the age. Rather than feeding their fellow servants with the true Word and taking care of their master's house, they have decided that they know what's best. And they've decided that the Word of God is too much of an embarrassment. They may accept some of it, the parts they like, but they'll explain away the parts they don't like and tell us that we don't need a bleeding Savior who is a victim of cosmic child abuse to save us from our sins. We just need to be tolerant and loving. But that's not the Gospel and churches should teach the Gospel foremost.

My calling as a pastor, and your callings as Christians, ministry leaders, and parents is to faithfully communicate God's truth from His word. It's not open to revision, God hasn't asked us to sift through the Bible and vote on what we think sounds true and what sounds false. I want to be able to echo the Apostle Paul when he was speaking to the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:26-28: *"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole counsel of God**. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."* Those are the words of a faithful manager who understood and carried out the tasks on behalf of his Master, who has made His will known.

Conclusion

Did you know that the return of Christ is mentioned 318 times in the New Testament? The only books that don't mention the second coming are Galatians and 2 and 3 John.² I didn't know that until I studied this passage. We have some amazing promises in those references:

-John 14:3 - *"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*

-1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - *"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them."*

-Philippians 3:20 - *"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body."*

Jesus' return is sure. No one knows the day or the hour, it may not be in our lifetime, it may not be for another two thousand years. Or it might be next week. Don't spend time calculating obscure prophecies from Daniel or trying to match visions from Revelation with current events to figure out the exact date, that is a waste of time. What is not a waste of time is conforming your life to the Scriptures; reading and then proclaiming to others the excellencies of His word; loving others as you obey Jesus in every area of your life.

Frank Barker told another story, a parable of sorts, in another sermon and it's similar to a passage from C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*:³ The story goes like this:

There were four junior demons who were going to be sent to the world to lead men astray, to ruin their souls. They had been trained by senior demons and for their final exam they were asked by Satan to explain their best plan for how to lead men astray.

The first demon said, "I am going to tell men that there is no God. That the world came about by chance." Satan replied, "We have tried that one a long time and have had limited success with it. The design of creation is so evident."

The second demon said, "I am going to tell men that there is no truth. I will allege that the Bible is not true and they are not to concern themselves with what it says about Jesus." Satan said, "We've had limited success with that one, too. The Bible has the ring of truth and the enemy uses it to penetrate men's hearts."

The third demon got up and said, "I am going to tell men there is no Hell." Satan sighed, "Humans have consciences and deep within them they know they are guilty, they know they deserve to be punished, as much as they would like to deny it."

It came down to the fourth one who said, "I'm going to tell men there is a God, the Bible is true, and there is a Hell. But then, I am going to tell them there is no hurry. They have got time.

They can turn to God later." At that, all of Hell applauded and Satan said, "You will ruin many souls. That lie works better than all of the other lies put together."

Have you decided that you can put off getting your life right with God? Are you convinced you have many years, more than enough time to seek to live in a way that pleases God? You might be right, you may have decades ahead of you. But you might not. And either way, delayed obedience is disobedience. The time to start living your life to please your Master is now. If you know that God is sovereign, that Jesus is your Savior, there is zero reason to delay walking in the truth and obedience. If you don't have a saving relationship with Jesus, if you have not come to the place where He is your Savior and Lord, today could be the day of salvation. Once you have your questions answered and know that He is who He said He is, there is no reason to delay. Embrace Christ and know that your sins are forgiven and you will have eternal life.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), p. 705.

³ Frank Barker's sermon "The Parable of the Rich Fool" from *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 1* (self-published).

Sometimes we hear that Jesus is like a thief in the night and we're scared by that. The end times are scary, death is scary. But those things mean God's people go to heaven. And heaven will be glorious, it will make all of our struggle here worthwhile. We have a poet in our congregation, but they do not want to be identified. But this person gave me a copy of a poem that he or she wrote:

“Thank you, Lord, You have blessed me beyond measure
By saving my soul and granting me pleasures
Though I am unworthy, still you saved.
When on the cross at Calvary, Your only Son you gave.
He died my death, and paid the fine,
So when He arose on that third day, He claimed, ‘You’re mine!’
To that Heavenly home where pure and whole all things will be,
And our sorrows and cares will all flee.
When with the Heavenly throng we sing a glorious song
That the angels do not know, while dressed in garments white as snow.
We will sing praises to the Spotless Lamb, for He is the Great I AM.
I will cast my crown beneath His feet, when at least face-to-face we meet.
But till that day, He will guide me all the way.
Lord, make me more like You, I pray, and do not let me run astray.
So I will abide in Thee, always saying, “Thank you, Lord, for still loving me!””

Benediction

1 Kings 8:57-58 – *“The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His rules, which He commanded to our fathers.”*