



WAITING READY: BETWEEN THE TIMES

Part 55 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Dr. Ed Stetzer | Luke 12:35–48 | November 21, 2010

Luke 12:35–48

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! 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.”

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.”

INTRODUCTION

Hi, Mars Hill. Pastor Mark Driscoll here wanting to introduce you to a good friend of mine, Dr. Ed Stetzer. He'll be preaching for me today as we continue our studies in Luke's gospel. I am actually preaching and teaching on a bit of a tour with my dad in Ireland. And it's a great opportunity for us. We have never been to Ireland, and as the O'Driscolls, I was really excited to bring my dad with me as I'm preaching and teaching. And in my absence, I'm really excited and honored to have Dr. Ed Stetzer cover the pulpit for me and for us. He was one of the founding board members of the Acts 29 Church Planting Network. He's written dozens of books, articles; two master's degrees, two doctorates. He's lectured on five continents. He's planted multiple churches. He is a professor adjunct at least at fifteen theological seminaries. All that to say you're in good hands. I think he can more than handle one sermon from the Bible. He's very gifted, very helpful. He's a dear friend of mine. And since he was in town for our Re:Train curriculum and classes, we invited him to stay over and preach for me on Sunday. And so I hope and I know you will enjoy my good friend, Dr. Ed Stetzer. And Ed, thanks for covering the pulpit for me, buddy. I really appreciate it.

Thank you. It's good to be here. I want to thank my mother for writing that introduction out and for Mark actually reading it. And so that's great. Appreciate that. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you here at Mars Hill and to open God's Word together. We're gonna be looking at Luke 12. I want you to turn there. Luke 12 is gonna be our text. It's beginning in verse 35, so turn there in your Bible if you have a Bible. If you don't have a Bible, well, I mean, repent and look on with somebody who does and we'll kind of follow through this Luke 12 passage.

It's kind of a lengthy passage, but it's gonna be worth our time to walk through it. It's a challenging passage in a lot of ways. It's gonna be some challenging things in here. Matter of fact, in this short passage from Luke 12, from 35 to 48, we are gonna see pictures and parables that include a lot of stuff. You ready? Clothes and lamps and servants and weddings and thieves and drunkenness. Someone being cut into little pieces. Beatings, big and small, all based on your stewardship. And that's all that we're gonna cover in this message. So I'd like to thank Mark for inviting me this week to share on this message. And while he's over in Ireland, hiding from this text behind his father, I'm gonna go ahead and open up God's Word, do the heavy lifting here, and look as we—he's gonna hang with the O'Driscolls and I'm gonna hang with the New Testament. And so I want you to take out your Bible and turn to Luke 12 with me now.

STEWARDSHIP

Now really, this is—it's got some challenging things in this passage, but some wonderful things. God's Word is powerful and applicable and we're gonna look today and we're gonna see that very thing in this Scripture. Because here we're gonna find some strong words, but some important words. And as I was kind of even wrestling through this passage this week, I was humbled and challenged in my own life of what it means to be a steward.

You know, so much of this passage is built upon the earlier passage. The whole theme here of through Luke 12 thus far has been in the area of stewardship. And so, as I look at this and some of the ways it's described here, I'm challenged in my own life and I believe it'll challenge you in yours. Because in this passage, we get a picture of stewardship all the way through chapter 12, right? Verses 1–12 are stewardship of the gospel. And then we follow the parable of the rich fool and the rich man as his unexpected death and is forced to face the judgment of God. And then Jesus tells us not to be anxious just before this and for earthly things, but instead to steward even our worry in the midst of that. And then we get to this passage here. We're gonna walk through this together. And then it follows this with a section dealing with the certainty of God's judgment, so there's a continual theme, though, of stewardship throughout this passage and I think this is gonna help us to ask and to answer, "How are we stewards and how are we stewarding our time here?"

The title of my message is "Waiting Ready: Between the Times." "Waiting Ready: Between the Times." Because this passage is about—the big question here is what should characterize a steward in light of the certainty of coming accountability? What should characterize a steward in light of the certainty of coming accountability? So I've titled this message "Waiting Ready." We're waiting for the return of Christ. This passage is gonna tell us we're waiting ready between the times.

BETWEEN THE TIMES

Now that phrase, "between the times," is gonna be important. It's an important phrase theologically because we live between the times of the first coming and the second coming of Christ. I actually blog at a site, betweenthetimes.com. And I love the phrase because it points us to where we live now, between the times.

Now I want you to take your Bible and turn with me. I'm gonna read the whole passage first and then we'll come back through it a few times as we break it down little by little. It says this, beginning at verse 35. "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 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. 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. If he comes on the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! 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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Peter said, 'Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?' And the Lord said, 'Who then is the faithful and the wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 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 to get drunk, 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. 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. 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 have entrusted much, they will demand the more.'" Let's pray together.

Father, speak to us through your Word. We see this passage. We're already challenged by this passage, but we know that you have given us your Word. You've given us this teaching, Jesus. We want to learn. We want our thinking to be shaped by your Word and by this principle of stewardship, that we're a servant, a slave, and we've been entrusted to wait ready, to be between the times, to be about this season between the first and second coming of Jesus, to be representing you and your kingdom well, but to be doing so as a steward of our time, our talents, and our treasure. So speak to us. Shape our thinking by your Word in Jesus' name we pray. Amen and amen.

And that's what this passage does. It points to this idea of the coming and the return of Jesus. Now this is gonna be a key thing that we're gonna have to understand and get a hold of because one of the key verses in this whole thing to get what's going on, before we can even get much further into the text, is verse 40. It says in verse 40, it says, "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

And so Jesus is referring to himself, actually, here. That's the two things that can be a little confusing, 'cause on the one hand, Jesus is referring to himself in third person. The Son of Man, referring to a reference in the book of Daniel, but also to kind of what the people in that day would have known is the idea that the messiah would come. And so he's referring to himself when he says the Son of Man, but it seems a little strange to refer to yourself in third person. He says to be ready, for the Son of Man is coming. And it seems a little strange, but it's not unheard of. It's not unusual, even. We just have to think a few years ago, Bob Dole used to do this all the time. Said, "Bob Dole doesn't like that bill." And it's like, "Well, but you're Bob Dole. Just say, 'I don't like that.'" But he'd refer to himself consistently, sort of. And that's not an uncommon way to do so. And Jesus would say, therefore, "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

But that's not the only thing we have to consider, even looking at that phrase. Because if Jesus is the Son of Man—and he clearly is. It's one of his favorite self-designations. And so if Jesus is the Son of Man and he says that you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect, you're sort of at that point saying, "But you're here." I mean, because—so it almost—it's a little confusing perhaps. And this may be one of the reasons Peter asks the question. Because when he says the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect, that part of what it is the Son of Man is already here. Jesus is already here.

And this is so key for us to get a picture on because we're talking about the first and the second coming of the messiah. And we're talking about the idea that the kingdom of God has come because the king has come. And part of the challenge is, is when you look to this passage, is this is actually told in, if you will, in a sense, just a metaphor, it'll break down eventually, but it's told in almost two volumes. I mean, because what you have here—and I

asked the staff here to give me a two-volume commentary, something that's told in two volumes here. And so they got me—this is Calvin's *Institutes* in two volumes right here, which is not surprising to me because I know that here John Calvin is the fourth member of the Trinity. And so I kind of expected no less. And so you have Calvin's *Institutes* here.

But what you kind of see is when you understand what's going on, that the coming of Christ, the coming of the messiah, the coming of the Son of Man, I mean, Jesus is coming. He's setting up his kingdom and that kingdom will last forever. But the reality is that there is a season between the times between the first and the second coming of Jesus. This is a two volume—it's one story told in two volumes. And between the first coming and the second coming is where we live right now, between the times.

See, the kingdom of God has already come. Jesus said so. Jesus said that the kingdom of God has come near and he wasn't talking about that chronologically at that point, that it's almost about to happen, but he's saying that God, who reigns over eternity from his throne in heaven, that God the Son—that God has sent God the Son and God the Son is born Jesus the Christ. The king has been born on this earth. And in the coming of the king, the kingdom has come. And so the kingdom of God is already here. The Bible teaches that on so many occasions. It's already, but it's not yet, because the kingdom has not been fully consummated. It will be at the second coming of Christ, at the return of Christ, that at that point the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our God and king. But we're living in the already, but the not yet. We're living between the times.

This is technically what theologians called *inaugurated eschatology*. Now I think if you can learn to order coffee at Starbucks, you can learn theological language at church. So, again, because this matters. Inaugurated is the president. He's inaugurated at the beginning—he was inaugurated at the beginning of his term. And so his term has begun. It's started, but it is not completed. And so the kingdom of God has started. Eschatology is the study of the end, so what we have is the kingdom has begun, the end has begun, but it's not yet been completed.

And so Jesus says that the Son of Man is coming at a time you will not expect. So he's talking about the second coming. He's talking about the fulfillment of the kingdom, when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and king. It is a certain event, but at an uncertain moment. Verse 40 is reminding us, "You must be ready. The Son of Man is coming at a time you do not expect." It is a certain event, but at an uncertain moment. Now Jesus came and established his spiritual kingdom, but his promise here is that he will come back to consummate his kingdom.

READINESS

And I want us to walk through the implications of that through this text. Okay, it tells us the Son of Man is coming at a time you do not expect, but the point of the parables and the teaching of the Savior talk about stewardship between the times, talks about us waiting ready, waiting ready between the times. That's what we're gonna look at. A couple things, big headings if you will. We're gonna talk about two big headings. First is readiness. The first part of the passage deals with readiness. The second part of the passage deals with faithfulness. And then we'll break those down sort of as we walk through each of them, so let's begin with this issue of readiness.

In verse 35, it begins. It says, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for the master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 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 the table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! 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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Now there are a lot of pictures in here, right? We got to talk about being dressed and ready. We're talking about our lamps lighted. And we're talking about being ready for the master to return from a wedding feast. And so all these things are at work. So there are these pictures, but there are also these themes. I want us to look at three themes under the area of readiness.

ANTICIPATION

The first one is in the area of anticipation. Anticipation. Verses 35 and 36 get at this. It says, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast." So several things here, right?

First, stay dressed for action. That's kind of—if you have a King James Bible, let's translate it a little differently. And the translators here have sort of made it more readable in our context, but what it says in the King James translation, and in a sense what it's talking about in the original language, it's—King James says, "Gird up your loins."

Now that's probably a phrase that would kind of creep people out if you started using it around other people. So the exhortation here may be—I mean, the point is—'cause gird up your loins—'cause they wore robes. And so you can't run in a robe very well. And so the idea here is kind of cinch up a belt and kind of pull up your robe. And so then you can be ready for action. And so gird up your loins for action.

And it says, "Keep your lamps burning." Now the concept here is that what would happen is when they were waiting for somebody to return, they would keep the lamp burning. They didn't have streetlights and so you would look for that burning lamp to know where your home is. They would keep the lamp burning so people could get home. And we still think of that concept today, right? Motel 6. They'll keep the light on for you. So the idea here is not dissimilar to what we saw then is that keep your lamps burning, but I don't want you to forget that one because keep your lamps burning, the idea of keeping that candle burning in preparation, even in the midst of the darkness between the times, keeping the lamp burning because we know that the master is coming back will be a key and recurring theme throughout this passage.

He says to be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast. Now the wedding feast here, these wedding feasts could last for days or a week. And so they never knew when the master would come home. And so their role was to be in anticipation and don't miss this because we don't know the day that Jesus will come back. And so all of this is gonna lead up to verse 40, which says to be watching, to be ready, to be waiting for the Son of Man to return.

So all of these pictures, to be dressed for action, to have your lamp ready, to be waiting for the master to come home from the wedding feast, all of these pictures speak to readiness and anticipation between the times, between the first and the second coming of Christ, readiness and anticipation, dressed for action, lamps burning, servants waiting.

ASSURANCE

But it's not just anticipation. It's also assurance. See, I don't want you to just walk through this passage with me—because there are gonna be warnings, but the central focus of this passage is this faithfulness as we wait ready, as we're waiting ready. But there's so much promise in here, so much assurance about blessing and reward that comes along with stewardship.

So look with me as we're waiting ready. Look what it says, blessing is promised for those who wait well. And it says we're to "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. 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. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third," no matter what time, if it's late in the day, if it's in the middle of the night, "and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!"

See, everybody gets to wait. The whole world is waiting between the first and the second coming of Christ. Some—as believers, we say, "Maranatha," "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." So we're waiting and we're waiting with joyful anticipation. But others, they don't even know for what they are waiting, but the messiah will come. Jesus will return. Everybody gets to wait. The question is whether you wait well, whether you're waiting ready.

See, and part of that for Christians has to do with this issue of stewardship. It has to do with this issue of stewardship. These verses are in the context of an ongoing theme about stewardship. And really, even here at Mars Hill, you're in the midst of an ongoing theme about stewardship with the Generous campaign. And so one of the reasons that we live generous is because of biblical stewardship between the times. So early on in this message, let me challenge you that one of the things you need to consider and I need to consider as we're living between the times is the stewardship of things that sometimes people call our time, our talent, and our treasure. Our time, our talent, and our treasure. So that stewardship is an important and recurring issue in the Scriptures.

And part of the challenge is we miss the assurance and we miss the blessing when, for example, you're spending your time on your own commitments so that you're too busy for God's desires. See, that takes back from the blessing and undermines the assurance. When you're spending your talents on your own pursuits to the point that you're not using them for mission or ministry. When you're spending your treasure on your own concerns to the point that you're unwilling to give for the work of Christ globally or locally.

But the assurance here is that, as we live between the times as faithful servants, waiting for the master's return, that there's blessing promised. You can't miss God's promised blessing here. You'll see as you study throughout the book of Luke that Jesus consistently promises his blessings.

Now, we get nervous about that because of some of the crazy people on television, right? You watch 'em on TV and they say, "Listen, if you'll just send in this money and if you'll send it into me, then you'll never be sick and, you know, you'll live forever and you'll get taller." And there all these things that are promised. And you know, and so you watch this and you think, "Wow! So if I give, I'll get a blessing and God will provide me with a Hummer with fog lamps."

But the abuses of that should not drive us away from the promises of Jesus because there's an assurance that we'll be blessed for our faithful stewardship between the times, for our vigilance, waiting for the master to return. And we'll see clearly, more clearly later, for our stewardship. This whole section's about stewardship.

ALERTNESS

So anticipation, right? Assurance. But also alertness is a principle, is a theme throughout this passage. Alertness. Verse 39 says this. "But you know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming." Now something's changed. There's no thief mentioned in the verses before, so Jesus is giving us yet another example. And this example's gonna be an interesting one.

It says, "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." Then he says, "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Be on alert. He is coming when we do not expect.

Now you've got—if I'm you, I'm asking the question, "So are you telling me, Ed, that Jesus is coming to steal my stuff?" 'Cause Jesus is the thief in this passage, right? This is about him. Is Jesus coming to steal my stuff? Is that what the Generous campaign is all about? Is he like a thief and he's gonna steal—no.

But the picture here is like a thief in the night. But I want you to see that when he's referring to a thief in the night, it's referring to the surprise and the rapidity of his coming, not the character of somebody who steals and takes. Can I just tell you this? God doesn't need to steal your stuff because, if

you're a Christian, it's all God's stuff. So he comes like a thief in the night, emphasizing the rapidity and the surprise of that. So it's not saying that Jesus is coming to steal your stuff, but instead it's pointing out that you have to stay alert because you don't know when he will come. The emphasis here is preparation, waiting ready, and alertness.

Look at Revelation. Jesus speaks again. Look at Revelation 16:15. It says, "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!" And that's just good advice at any time, right? You probably don't need this verse in your life, 'cause you're thinking, "I knew this." Okay, you don't want someone surprising you when you're naked. You just don't. And you might say, "Well, Ed, does this mean I can't sleep in the raw?" No, that's not what this verse is about. What this verse is about is that we are going to be ready, we're going to be dressed and ready spiritually because of the stewardship between the times. And he's coming like a thief, with rapidity and surprise.

THE END TIMES

The point here is this, is Jesus is coming back and it's gonna be a surprise. Now listen, it's important to think on and understand the importance of the return of Christ in Scripture. Again, just because there are a lot of crazy people out there with charts and timelines and big things with like dragons and crowns on them and all that kind of stuff—people love this, like love to study the end times. John Oropert once said that if you want to draw a crowd to church, you could speak on three things. He said, "People will come and they'll pack the church if you talk about sex, if you talk about the end times, or thirdly, if you talk about will there be sex in the end times. And any of those things, people will just pack out a service." You get charts and dragons and all that sort of stuff. And people—there are all kinds of crazy ideas about how and when Jesus comes back.

But listen, that doesn't mean that it's not important that Jesus does come back. One of the fundamental principles of our faith is the bodily return of Jesus. He's coming back and it's gonna be a surprise. And Jesus teaches his disciples, and by extension he teaches us, that knowing that he will come like a thief in the night should lead you to live as a steward between the times. So we talk about the end times, right?

Are we in the end times? And people ask me all the time as a pastor, "So are we in the end times?" I'm gonna settle this once and for all. Yes, we are in the end times. Please don't e-mail me or call me and send me e-mails. People forward me e-mails that President Obama or Newt Gingrich is the antichrist. Don't send me that anymore. Listen—and really, I mean, can't you do the math? Let me show you. I can tell you right now who it was. Here it is. Ready? Are you ready? Here it comes. Ronald, R-O-N-A-L-D. Wilson, W-I-L-S-O-N. Reagan, R-E-A-G-A-N, 666. What more do you need to know? And he lived—I'm not lying to you. He lived at 666 St. Cloud Lane until they changed the address because they didn't want to live at 666. You can't imagine why. Well, I didn't get e-mails back then, but that's 'cause we didn't have e-mails back then. But people are just crazy, talking about, "Is this the end times?" And, "Can we look at this sign or that sign?"

You know how you know it's the end times? Because of the idea of inaugurated eschatology. The end times have started because Jesus the King has come and set up his kingdom. It's a spiritual kingdom, but then he'll come back and set up a kingdom—or the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and king. And so the end times have begun. We're in the end times.

Matter of fact—and so all the crazy people out there, right? Right now, there are all these billboards being put up. Take a look at these billboards that are being put up all over America, right? "Save the date." Like you're gonna break out your planner. That it appears that at 8 o'clock in the morning—this person is so specific. Now I want you to know, I can tell you right now, with absolute certainty, that Jesus will not come back on May 21, 2011. Because if he was planning on it, he has now changed his plans so that crazy people can't be proven right. 'Cause the Bible says that no one will know the day or the hour, not even the Son of Man. So nobody knows and so, again, but we see these things and we're like, "These people are crazy. Let's not think of the return of Christ." Don't make that mistake.

We are in the end times. And because we are in the end times, you are to live differently between these times. 1 Peter 4:7 puts it this way. "The end of all things is at hand." The end of all things is at hand, right? The end of all things is at hand. Why? Because Jesus has come. He lived a sinless life. He died on the cross for your sin and mine. God raised him from the dead on the third day. He's established his kingdom. Now he's reconciling people and the world to himself. The end has started, but the end is not finished. See, the end of all things is at hand.

"Therefore," don't miss this. "Therefore be self-controlled." This is now living between the times. "Be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." So what we are dealing with here in the context of Luke 12 and in the teaching of Jesus about the servants and the masters is the fact that we are living between the times and we are called to steward our lives, our time, our talent, and treasure as those living in light of the imminent return of Jesus. So that means we got to stop looking for the antichrist and start eagerly waiting for the savior.

So, because of that, there are things to be, self-controlled and sober-minded. There are things to be. And yes, there are things to do, works of ministry, faithful stewardship, using of our time, talent, and treasure while we are waiting, ready. So there are things to be and there are things to do while we're waiting ready.

Hebrews 10:24 explains it this way. It says this. It says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another, stir up one another to love and good works." So we're to stir one another to love and good works, "not neglecting to meet together." This is all good, but don't miss where it heads up. "As is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." We are to live in the light of the imminent and soon coming return of Jesus.

DON'T POSTPONE FAITHFULNESS

See, and this changes you because so many of us, me, you, so many of us postpone faithfulness. “Well, I’m a student and so I don’t have the money to be generous.” “You know, I’m starting a new family, so I don’t have the time to be in service in mission and ministry.” “I’m starting a new job, so I have to use all my talents there. I can’t use my talents to serve Jesus and his kingdom.” And so we postpone faithfulness. And God’s—the point that Jesus is bringing up here is when you live in the light of the soon and imminent return of Jesus, you do not postpone faithfulness. You live in the light of that reality.

Well, that’s not always easy. Sometimes we—what does that mean for us? You know, there’s this bumper sticker that’s kind of been spreading all over the country and maybe you’ve seen it as well. “Jesus is coming! Look busy.” It’s all over the place. And, but sort of. In a sense, right? But if you’ve not been born again and you’re here at Mars Hill, one of our campuses, if you’ve not been born again, I don’t want you to get busy. I want you to get right. Right? The gospel is not you do. It’s Jesus did. And you don’t need to leave here ready to turn over a new leaf. Instead, you need to receive new life and to live out that new life, which then you’re gonna become a citizen of this kingdom between the times and you’re gonna be a steward in that season.

MARS HILL’S FAITHFULNESS BETWEEN THE TIMES

Well, let’s talk a little bit about your church, right? Let’s talk about Mars Hill’s faithfulness between the times. Actually, I’ve been following in some ways learning about Mars Hill since about 2002. Matter of fact, in 2004, I was a consultant on an ABC news program that aired on all the ABC stations, an hour-long program, and one of the churches that I recommended they used and worked through this process with them was Mars Hill. And at that time, you were about a fifth of the size you are right now. And just to see how God’s been working is a marvelous thing.

Few years after that, I sat on the porch with Mark at their home and I asked him, “What do you want to be known for?” And he said to me, “I want to be known for church planting and good theology.” And to see how God has used that passion of your church for theology and to see how your church has been, in a sense, busy about the kingdom work between the times is a remarkable thing.

Let me quote some statistics, right. I’m the president of LifeWay Research. Every time I quote a statistic, an angel gets its wings, so let me quote a couple. You’re now the fifty-fourth largest church, according to the Top 100 list, fifty-fourth largest church in the country; thirtieth fastest growing. Right, the attendance, weekly attendance, is about ten thousand every week. Just recently now passing that and seeing about ten thousand every week, up fifteen hundred from last year. The church is growing.

I asked them to send these statistics because I wanted to know. I wanted to celebrate with you. You know, it’s hard when you’re here and you’re the pastor here. But I don’t—as an outsider, I want you to know—I want you to know that this is remarkable how God has blessed your church. Remarkable. Over 420 community groups. Think of Acts 29. Nearly three hundred church plants in the U.S., \$1.4 million given from Mars Hill this year to plant churches. Or think of Re:Train. I just had the privilege of teaching Re:Train students, over one hundred students taking courses, going and doing master’s level work to get deeper into theology. I taught missiology, but to dig deeper. Think of online and I think of things like marshillchurch.org, and theresurgence.com, and acts29network.org. Close to nine million visits now per year across the site. Over 4.6 million downloads per year. This is a remarkable thing.

And you should thank God for how he’s blessed you and allowed you and then how you have stewarded his blessing. This is stewardship as a church, an action between the times. The point of this passage is that stewardship and action between the times, but it’s not just—this passage is not just about us as a group, but it’s about you as a person and it’s about me as a person.

See, that’s why I’m encouraged that you’re in the middle of this Generous campaign. Actually, I’ve been reading Pastor Jamie Munson’s book, *Money: God or Gift*. And hopefully you have as well. You can pick a copy up for free in the hallways and pick these up and take them home. Why? And I hope you’ve been reading as well. Because you can—this can help you to be a good steward in your own life as well because stewardship is an issue related to the end times.

When I told them and I started asking Jamie some questions about, “What do you guys believe about the end times?” he started getting nervous. He said, “You’re gonna be talking about the end times?” He was kind of expecting me to show up with like charts and naming names. But when you think about the end times, Jesus talks about our stewardship in these end times.

So this passage, Jesus’ teaching ties these things together. Listen, too many people are waiting for the antichrist rather than waiting for the savior and living as stewards. And they write books about him and they speculate about—listen, the answer is not fiction about the end times, but faithfulness in these end times. The answer is not fiction about the end times, but stewardship in these end times. So faithfulness and stewardship, that’s what Jesus is pointing us to in this passage. That’s what we’re beginning to see between the times. We’re waiting ready, ready waiting, between the times.

FAITHFULNESS

Now, let’s talk about that faithfulness issue. Faithfulness. ‘Cause the second part of the message tonight deals with the issue of faithfulness. We talked about readiness, but now the topic shifts. Shifts maybe is the wrong term, but the topic maybe changes just a little bit and we see a focus on faithfulness, the proportional rewards to faithfulness, and we begin to see that it starts with Peter asking a question.

I wonder if Peter gets a little uncomfortable with all these warnings and all these things talking about the thief and the master and the servant. And you know, maybe the first parable’s about the delayed master and involves all the servants. The second one’s about their coming, the thief coming, and deals with the owner of the house. And so I think Peter wants to know, is this about—he says, “About us or others?” I think in sort of a sense he’s saying, “Jesus, are we in trouble?” I mean, he’s sort of not sure.

And Jesus doesn't really answer his question directly. It's kind of interesting. But instead, he gives a couple more parables about how we are to wait ready. Jesus was preparing them, I think, for the delay in his return. See, I think one of the things we see, and we see this theme throughout the New Testament, is that one of the things we find is that the disciples seem to have had a perception that the first and second coming of Christ, that this was—it's one story and I mentioned sort of in two volumes. And I think the way that they perceived this was going to happen was a lot closer than it was, than it has been. Because we see many times people say, "Don't despair at the delay of the Lord." And so I think many of them did because they kind of were expecting this to happen quickly.

We even see that in Acts 1, the disciples, they asked Jesus—right, now this is after his resurrection and God's last words here on earth in that sense. And the disciples say to him, they said, "Lord, at this time are you going to restore your kingdom in Israel?" 'Cause what they were expecting is that he would come and he was a suffering savior and he died on the cross for the sins of men and women, but then they said, "Now at this time, is this it? At this time, are you going to restore your kingdom in Israel?" They thought it was just days or weeks apart. But Jesus told them, and he said to them in Acts 1:7, he says, "It's not for you to know the times or the periods the Father has set by his own authority." He says, "You can't know."

But then he says this. He says, "But instead you shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you." And then he starts telling the future, starts speaking of the future that's gonna be laid out in the book of Acts. He says this, "You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." 'Cause that's the unfolding of the book of Acts, that Jesus speaks in Acts 1:8, then becomes the description of the movement of the church of Christ under the power of the Holy Spirit out from there.

And so they begin to see that now they're living between the times and for us now, it's been two thousand years, but the Scripture's just as true then and is just as true today. We are to live waiting and expecting the imminent return of Jesus. Let's take a look at this, at the text. It says this: "Peter said, 'Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?' 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? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he returns. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and he begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 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. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act in accordance to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.'"

Wow, now when you talk about stewardship and theology, you don't build your whole theology of a theological issue around a parable, but we don't want to miss the incredible, important truths about stewardship and proportional rewards in these parables. So let's walk through 'em.

THE FAITHFUL STEWARD IS PRAISED

First thing we see is the faithful steward is praised. The faithful steward is praised. And in verse 42 and 43, it says, "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? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.'"

We get to get a picture of a few things in verses 42 and 43, talking about the faithful and wise manager. Now remember, the manager, or the steward, does not own. The owner owns. The master owns, but the steward is to have a stewardship. The manager—and *manager* and *steward* are often translated from the same original word. So the steward, the manager, is to manage the affairs and the belongings of the master, waiting ready and faithful. And blessed because of his stewardship.

So we see this picture because what we see is this promise, this promise of blessing because of the stewardship that's evident. Verse 44 puts it this way. "Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions." So this manager, this steward is being blessed and even promoted, which is a recurring theme that Jesus will refer to, that those who are faithful in little are rewarded.

Luke 16:10 puts it this way. It says, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much." And so we begin to get a picture that Jesus is calling us to fidelity and faithfulness between the times. These parables point to us over and over again, a master putting a servant—a better translation actually is a slave, is putting a slave who doesn't own anything, but putting a slave in charge of the belongings of the master. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have given everything over to him. You no longer own it. He owns your time, your talents, and your treasure. And in doing so, your role is to be a faithful steward of what he has loaned to you. That's rubber meets the road. That's hard stuff.

Listen, it is great to say, "It's all about Jesus," but this is about living like it's all about Jesus. And that's a difference. See, we can say it's all about Jesus, but then if it's not reflected in stewardship, if it's not reflected in our giving, in our serving, in the way that we use our talents and the gifts, if we say it's all about Jesus but it's not all about Jesus in our time, our talents, and our treasure, then I would question whether it is for us, really, all about Jesus. It's great to celebrate phrases like it's all about Jesus, but in the stewardship—and these are where the implications of that become personal and actionable.

But the reward is promised. The blessing is promised. The faithful steward is praised and receives blessing right here in the passage. "Truly, I say to you, he will set him over his possessions."

THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD IS WARNED

But the challenge is too many of us want to postpone faithfulness and even through this Generous series, I know that there are many of you who have said, "I'm just gonna postpone faithfulness." Do you know why you can't postpone faithfulness? 'Cause Jesus is teaching you that you don't know if

he'll come back tomorrow and you should live in light of the imminent return of Jesus.

See, now here's the challenge, right? Because what happens is we start thinking about it as our stuff and we postpone faithfulness. But listen, when you start thinking it's your stuff, Christians—now I'm not talking to unbelievers here. I'm gonna address that. But when you start thinking it's your stuff rather than living like it's God's stuff, soon it's all about the wrong stuff. 'Cause you'll notice that the head servant, the slave really, starts abusing people because he no longer thinks of himself as a steward, but instead becomes an abusive owner. Well, you can too. Listen, when you start thinking it's your stuff, rather than living like it's God's stuff, soon it's all about the wrong stuff. The servant here lives for himself rather than for his soon and returning master. And then what happens is they're supposed to be living for the one who owns and they're supposed to be serving the one who owns the stuff. And here's the thing. When you are not living as a steward, it's a bad day when the master comes back. Don't miss that. When you are living between the times and you are not living as a steward, it's a bad day. This parable says it's a bad day when the master comes back. See, the servant's using the master's stuff for his own pleasure.

So what happens to the unfaithful servant? Let's take a look. Verse 46 says this. Says, "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." I'd like to thank Mark Driscoll for inviting me this day to come and share from this passage. 'Cause he knew this is actually one of my favorite Scriptures. It's kind of a life verse for me. I've framed it. I've put it on my house. Got it on my refrigerator. Right now, my kids and I are memorizing it together. "Let's look at this one, kids." It's a hard verse, isn't it?

But I think what we've got to not miss here is—you know, whenever there's something that's sometimes hard to interpret, what we want to do is it's kind of what we call an interpretation rule or a hermeneutic principle, is that when something's unclear, we try to interpret it in light of the clear. And this passage is very similar to a parallel passage in Matthew. And in the parallel passage in Matthew, the words "and put him with the unfaithful," that's gonna be a clue for us, right? "And put him"—this servant is gonna be put with the unfaithful. And so that phrase is a clue, but in Matthew, in the parallel passage, it talks about where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And so I think what we begin to see here, I think he counts them among the unfaithful. This servant he counts among the unfaithful because they're unbelievers. And the consequences are eternal and severe when the master returns. And this servant is not a believer. Not all servants in this parable are representative of believers. And so I think what we see here is the horrible and terrible consequences. You see, when Jesus comes back, for us it's celebration. But for the world, it's judgment and it's consequence. And we see that in this challenging phrase.

FAITHFULNESS IS PROPORTIONALLY REWARDED

Let's take a look at one more thing. Is that faithfulness is proportionally rewarded. Verse 47 puts it this way. It says, "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. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating."

So a couple of beatings being passed out here. It seems that the severe beating is for the intentional servant, who knows what he should do and does not do it. In other words, you say, "Well, I know, I know, I know. I should do this, but I'm not going to." And then the unintentional bad steward gets a light beating. He did not know, but he did what deserved a beating. He'll receive a light beating. So there seems to be an intentional, and that receives a severe beating, and an unintentional or an ignorant, and that receives a light beating.

Now—and that's great, but I got kind of bad news for you. Now you know. Sorry about that. But I think we have to read this passage in—not in light of sort of our modern sensibilities, but in the context in which it would have been understood in that day. And actually, Christians and scholars kind of debate, "What does this mean? What is this here?" In my best reading, I believe what this is pointing to us is the discipline of God. And yes, on the lives of believers. Okay, so if you're not put among unbelievers, yet there's still discipline. And see, we see this from our modern sensibilities and sometimes we're even offended, but don't judge this passage by today. Judge this passage by the Scriptures because a loving father disciplines his children. And we see that in the Bible. It says—we hear it quoted, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

We know that and so I think we point here to a sense that faithfulness is proportionally rewarded. And verse 48 puts it this way. It says, "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." We've heard this before. "To whom much is given, much is expected." That's like—that's almost a statement that people use in culture. And judgment and rewards are proportional to what we have been given.

But the primary motivation here is not judgment. The primary motivation is the glory and goodness of the master. And so when we look to this passage, we should look to the blessing and the assurance of living as a good steward between the times.

WOULD YOU LIVE AND GIVE THE SAME WAY?

And I shared with you some of the wonderful things your church has been doing between the times and I believe God blesses your church because your church chooses to be a blessing. But can I speak to you just for a moment 'cause I asked your staff to share some stats with me. 'Cause your church is being such a wonderful steward, so your church is just a—it's a remarkable church, but you actually have kind of an average giving pattern among the families in your church. So is average good? Well, I mean, in some ways, listen, you know, when I was in high school, I remembered, "C's get degrees." I mean, that was sort of my strategy through high school. But you know, for a remarkable church being a steward, I would encourage you to consider could you be a remarkable steward now.

You see, the reality is—we've done some research. We did seven thousand churches in a study. And one of the things we found is that in the majority

of churches, the majority of people are unengaged in ministry or mission. And that should break our heart because they're called to live as stewards between the times. And I want you to hear this, is that I get nothing out of it, if you serve more, if you give more, if you use your talents more. I have no motivation personally, but what I want to say to you is this: It won't help me, but it will help you if you will live as a wise steward between the times. Your job and the theme of this passage is to live as a steward because Jesus is coming back, and to wait ready. And to live as if, if Jesus were to come back tomorrow, you'd be able to rejoice and not say, "Lord, I was postponing faithfulness and you kind of surprised me." 'Cause he says, "I'm gonna surprise you." And he says that so you might be reminded to live as a steward in light of the imminent and soon coming return of Christ.

Now, what does the Bible tell us? Luke 21:34 puts it this way, "Be on your guard, so your minds are not dulled from carousing, drunkenness, and the worries of life, or that day will come upon you unexpectedly." I mean, what a great verse. I mean, carousing. When was the last time you used that word? So don't do that. And drunkenness and the worries of life. Or it will come upon you unexpectedly. 'Cause we've got to have that light, that lamp burning in the midst of the darkness between the times. So we got to have this between the times because there's gonna come a time when Jesus comes back and yes, the world is going to end. And it's gonna be recreated. There comes a time.

And there's actually a fascinating story that I want to share with you that might help us to consider how we might live in light of the imminent return of Christ. It actually took place on May 19, 1780. You can look it up. You could Google it. It's called New England Dark Day. On that day—let me read it to you. I got this off of Wikipedia, so you know it's accurate. Let me read it to you. It says this. It says, "New England's Dark Day refers to an event that occurred on May 19, 1780, when the unusual darkening of the sky was observed over New England states and parts of Canada. The primary cause of this event is believed to have been a combination of smoke from forest fires, a thick fog, and a cloud cover. The darkness was so complete that candles were required from noon on. It did not disperse until the middle of the next day."

Now imagine you're in New England at this time. There's no forest fire near you. It actually came from Canada, way up in Canada, and kind of drifted down in the midst of all this. But you're just going about your day on May 19th, 1780. And all of a sudden, at noontime, what happens is the sun turns blood red, the sky turns black, and it feels and looks like the end of the world. As a matter of fact, to this day, conservative Seventh-Day Adventists see this day as a sign of biblical prophecy leading to the end of the world. They think it is to this day.

And on that day, the Connecticut legislature was meeting. Wouldn't that be a neat thing to watch? They were meeting. And then, all of a sudden, the sun turns red, the sky darkens, and they have to bring in candles in the darkness. And they're in fear. They think the world is ending 'cause they can't turn on the news and see if it's going on in Chicago. All they know is yesterday the sun was shining and now it's blood red and the sky is darkened and fear gripped that legislature that day. And they looked to a Christian man named Abraham Davenport and they said, "Should we cancel? Should we stop meeting? Should we go home to our families so the end might come?"

And here's what he said. Listen to what he said. "This well may be the day of judgment, which the world awaits," he said. "But be it so or not, I know only my present duty and my Lord's command to occupy till he come. So at the post where he hath set me in his providence, I choose for one to meet him face to face. No faithless servant frightened from my task, but ready when the Lord of the harvest calls. Therefore, with all reverence, I would say let God do his work. We will see to ours. Bring in the candles." And they did.

I want you and me to live in such a way that, if we knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow, we'd say, "We'd still be doing what God has called us to do today." And that's the teaching that Jesus calls us to. But it's a recurring theme throughout Scripture. Look with me at Titus 2:11-13. It says this. It says, "For the grace of God has appeared." Jesus, God the Son, born Jesus the Christ. "With salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live," between the times, "to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

We're living between the times and God is calling us to use our time, our talent, and our treasure as stewards, to use them generously for his glory, for his kingdom, for his honor. And I think the question that I would encourage you to ask today is would you live and give the same way if you thought Jesus was coming back tomorrow? And if the answer is no, then Jesus' message for you through his Word today is live in light of the imminent and soon return of Christ. I don't know how long it'll be. And anyone who thinks they know how long it will be doesn't. It might be a year. It might be a century. It might be more than that. But I still live in the light of the soon and imminent return of Christ.

My encouragement to you is to examine your life as I examined mine as I wrestled through this passage. And say, "Am I living as a faithful steward? Am I waiting ready?" See, the big problem with your time, your talent, and your treasure is that it's not really your time or my time, or your talent, or your treasure. So how you deal with it now is really how you're dealing with God's time, God's talent, and God's treasure he's entrusted to you. Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that you might remind us once again through your Word, the Word of God sharper and active than a two-edged sword might pierce our hearts right now, Father. 'Cause I believe that there are men and women listening to this message today who need to ask the question, "Would I live differently if I was living in the light of the soon and imminent return of Christ?" They've postponed faithfulness. And they can't say, as Abraham Davenport said, we can't cry out and say, "Let God do his work if he's coming back, but I am doing what I'm supposed to do." Just in the quietness of this moment, would you just take a moment and just pray and talk to the Lord and say to him, "Lord, what is it that I need to steward now?" Maybe God's calling you to serve in a way you haven't, to give in a way you haven't, use your talent in a way you haven't. Would you just ask the Lord, say, "Lord, what is that, that next actionable step?" If you're not a believer, it's to cry out to the Lord Jesus and to say, "Forgive me of my sins." Trust and follow Christ. But if you're a Christian, for you the question has to be, "How would I live different if I believed Jesus was coming tomorrow? And how will I live different tomorrow because of that truth?" In Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.

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<http://marshall.com/media/luke/waiting-ready-between-the-times>