

Ready for the Master?

In **Luke 12:35-48**, the Lord Jesus gives some serious warnings and instructions about the time leading up to his return in glory. Christians are right to look forward to the Second Coming with joyful anticipation, but we will do well to look carefully at these words.

Jesus talks about the servants of a household waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast. As with most parties, the exact finishing time of this feast is unknown, so all the servants have to be ready whenever he turns up. Normally they could expect to run about and attend to the master's needs but Jesus says in this case, that if the master returns and finds his servants on the alert, the roles will be reversed and the master will attend to the servants' needs.

To illustrate how prepared they need to be, Jesus once again uses the picture of a thief coming by night - that is how unpredictable the time of the master's return will be!

Peter asks the question which we would have asked and perhaps would still like to ask now, "Who is this parable for?" In other words, "Do I need to take this to heart personally?" Notice Jesus' answer! At first it seems as though he doesn't give one but his reply shows how widely the parable needs to be applied.

He starts by applying it to a servant in responsibility, whom his master has entrusted with looking after the well-being of the other servants. The stakes are very high for this man. If he is obedient, diligently looking after the other servants according to his master's plans, he will be promoted to the post of steward, the one who administers all the master's household business and possessions.

On the other hand, if he treats his position as being one of power rather than responsibility, eventually behaving as if he was actually the 'boss' and abusing his fellow-servants, his master's return will see him come under total condemnation, completely excluded from the household and removed from contact with his former master.

But the senior servant is not the only one to get into trouble if the household is in disarray when the master returns. Jesus makes it clear that every slave is responsible for their own disobedience, according

to how much they know of the master's will. And in this case, not doing what is required is just as serious as doing the wrong things.

So, who is Jesus talking to? Not just the twelve or other disciples at the time but to anyone who knows any part of the master's will and is either doing it or not doing it at the time of his return. All believers down the ages have shared this responsibility and each has faced the question of how obedient he was up to the end of his life. We, like they, do not know when the master may return and many believe that he will return soon. Are we living in the generation which will see his coming?

If so, how will he find his servants occupied? Diligent and alert to the master's priorities?

Doing our own thing?

Part of our problem is that we have been 'brought up' in a 'household' where there are already established ways of doing things and it is often difficult to question these, even if it is clear that they run against the master's intentions, but we cannot use that as an excuse.

Perhaps we may even say that we 'prefer not to know', in the hope that we cannot be held responsible if we don't know. In Jesus' parable, though, even the slave who didn't know his master's will was punished for disobedience. Does that seem unfair? Surely it is every slave's responsibility to find out what his master's will actually is - and then obey it!

The Lord Jesus has priorities

When the master went away, the priority task which he gave to his appointed and trusted servant was to look after the others and make sure that they each had their rations at the proper time, in the way that the master knew was best. His top priority was the household itself.

One of the most telling passages in the Gospels is **John 17**. The Lord Jesus knows very clearly that he is about to be crucified and that the Father's plan on earth will need to be taken forward without his own physical presence. As he talks with his Father, his words centre around relationships;- between him and his Father; him and the disciples; the disciples with each other and the disciples with the rest of the world. (Read the whole chapter!)

Out of these relationships spring personal holiness, strong visible unity between believers and demonstration to the rest of the world of the truth which is in Jesus. His priorities are clear.

"So that the world may know . . ."

A.W.Tozer wrote that the first responsibility of the Church is not to preach the gospel but to be fit to preach the gospel. In evangelistic situations from near at home to far afield, it is so often the case that the message is stifled because of the visible disunity and even animosity which exists between those who name the Name of Jesus. If we are not prepared to follow the master's clear instructions about putting things right with other believers, we may as well forget real growth and look forward to at least a reprimand from our Lord.

Foundations in the right place

In **John 17:3**, the Lord Jesus makes it clear where real eternal life starts, in knowing the Father and the Son. This was the characteristic of the remaining eleven disciples, weak as they were. The Lord Jesus had revealed the Father's nature to them, and they had received his words, understood and believed that he had come from the Father, There was still much learning and experience to follow for each of them, but the right foundation had been laid.

In spite of this and many other passages, including Paul writing to the believers in Corinth (**1 Corinthians 3:11**), down the years we have persisted in building organisations and 'churches' which do not place a relationship with God through Jesus Christ as the essential foundation stone in individual lives. It is possible to be a member, even to rise to a position of responsibility and authority in these manmade structures without any such relationship, even while denying the possibility of it! Are these the master's priorities?

A clear distinction between disciples and the world

In this country, we once suffered under the Victorian pretence that everyone is a Christian. Although the rest of British society seems to have accepted that we now live in a 'post-Christian' era, many Christians seem to believe that we have a right to expect society to behave in a Christian way. It is (thankfully) true that much of this country's law and practice has been shaped by Christian men and women in the past, but we have as much right to expect our society to

be 'Christian' as did the early believers who lived under Nero's rule of persecution!

Yes, we have a responsibility to act as 'salt' and 'light' in society (**Matthew 5:13-16**), and for that to result in visible demonstration of the grace and truth of God. The world needs to see and hear the message through our actions as well as our words, but the transformation of society as a whole is not our master's goal. He is concentrating on 'bringing many sons to glory', calling people *out of the world setup and into his church*.

"It's all impossible - but it has to be done!"

We have been reminded recently of the 'impossible' rescue of more than three hundred thousand British troops from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940. All the excuses could have been found to prevent them from even starting. It had never been done before, there were not enough boats, the weather was unpredictable, the enemy was too close on land, the evacuation was vulnerable to air attack. All 'good' reasons to do nothing, to not even try to rescue some. But fortunately there was a strong sense that it had to be done, even if it was impossible.

Just going on. the same as always . . .

That's what the servant thought as he was playing 'lord of the manor' and disregarding the master's priorities. He had grown so accustomed to the master not coming back that he began to assume that it would never happen, and that he could just go on with his own plans. His master coming back was an *unpleasant* surprise, not the joyful occasion which he had looked forward to when he had been left in charge.

Peter says that one of the signs of the 'last days' is that 'mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "*Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation*" ' (**2 Peter 3:3.4**)

Do we dare to make the same mistake?

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