

Faithfully Awaiting the Return of our Lord

Luke 12:35-59

Liz and I have our first baby due this Friday. Anyone who has had a child knows that this means we could be rushing off at any moment. We are overwhelmingly excited. We've received various gifts from people here at church and others we know. We've bought a pram and a baby seat. We're borrowing a capsule and a change table. We've got baby clothes and nappies and wipes. We've read books and brochures and articles – though I need to say that Liz has read more than me. We've prepared a room for this child; Liz has painted furniture and hung bunting and organised all the clothes. We literally have our bags packed ready to go to the hospital when the time comes.

We don't know when the baby will come but we're ready. We're waiting for an unexpected hour. We know the baby will come soon, so we are prepared.

Are you prepared?

Not for our baby of course but for someone infinitely more important.

The New Testament is clear: our Lord, our Master is going to return to earth soon. Christian author R. Kent Hughes points out that there are 260 chapters in the New Testament and the return of the Lord Jesus is mentioned 318 times (repeat). That means on average the return of the Lord is mentioned once every 25 verses.

Verse 40 from our passage this morning says,

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Our master is coming back soon. For Christians, those with the Lord Jesus as our Master, our lives ought to be different because we know our master could come back at any moment. We live as people awaiting the return of their Lord.

The question for most of us is: what does that look like? How exactly am I supposed to wait for the return of my Lord? Today's passage helps us to understand this question and it breaks down nicely under three headings: Be proactive, be prepared and be dependable. Proactive, prepared and dependable.

Firstly, be proactive: from verse 58:

When you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny." (paid the last cent).

Now, at first, this would appear to be strange advice to receive from the Bible. It sounds like what the Lord is telling us is work out some sort of deal before you go before the judge in order to get out of gaol. Well, technically avoid going there. Jesus would soon give up his life in part because of his devotion to justice, so what's going on here?

Our Master wants us to be *proactive* / in our dealings with God. I don't know if you've ever thought about it this way but I reckon we can think of our whole lives as simply a walk to the courthouse to stand before the judge. Some of us have been walking a while, some not long at all but we're all heading into court, knowing we ought to be condemned.

I've never been to court. I don't know what it's like to do that in real life. But when you strip everything else away, we're all slowly walking towards the judge. And our Master is telling us here, 'work something out before you get there, because if you don't, you'll never get out of prison'.

So, friends, I say to you: have you settled out of the heavenly court? The Lord Jesus is walking ahead of us on the way. He's saying "I've paid it all. Let me cover you. I died to pay this for you, trust me to take care of it."

Friends, be proactive! Don't wait until you stand before the judge. The Bible says that the judge will hand you over to the officer and he will throw you in prison and you won't get out until you pay every last cent and, friends, you never will. So be proactive! Take the Lord Jesus' offer. He died for you, his death will satisfy the Judge and you will be free to live the life you were made to live. It's like he's made a deal with the judge. His death is big enough to cover the sins of the whole world and the deal is: if you trust in the Lord Jesus for your forgiveness and ask him to be your Lord, your Master, you will be saved from the punishment you owe. Take the deal before you get to the judge. Take it today. Be proactive.

(Pause)

Now, if you've realised for the first time that you haven't been proactive on the way to the Judge, and you want to take up Jesus offer, or if you want to know a little more about what that looks like, come and find me or Ken afterwards and we'll happily do our best to answer all the questions you have over a cuppa at morning tea.

But for now I'm going to move to our second heading: be prepared.

We've been proactive and now we belong to our Master. We know, the Lord Jesus is not on earth but he's coming back soon. What is the message he gives us while we wait? From verse 35 again,

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.

Be ready for the master's return. He could come back at any moment. So be ready to answer the door, have your lamps lit and be dressed for action.

I've read during the week that wedding feasts at that time could go for days, sometimes as long as a week, so if you were a slave back at home you wouldn't know when your master would return. One had to be ready at all times. You had to live as though he could come back at any moment.

And being 'dressed for action' is literally '*let your loins be girded*'. It means to wrap your clothes around your legs so you can run. 'Gird up your loins' is a famous phrase in the Bible. It gets used in the Old Testament a few times. (Can anyone tell me the most famous 'gird up your loins from the Old Testament)? The most well known times it's used was in Exodus 12:11 when the Israelites were preparing to leave Egypt. As they were eating that first Passover meal they were told, have a staff in your hand and gird up your loins. They were waiting for the signal to leave and had to be ready to go at any moment.

The Lord Jesus is invoking the language of the Exodus to teach us how important it is for us to be prepared.

Be like God's first people, dressed and ready to leave. Be like expectant parents, packed and ready to go. Be like a slave waiting for the master to return: be dressed, have the lamps lit and be waiting at the door. Be prepared.

And, as if Christians needed a reason to do this beyond the command of our Master we also read there will be rewards for those who listen.

From verse 37

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

Our Master will bring blessing if he so finds us. Our Lord commands it of us, and will reward our behaviour if we do so.

So, we've heard that our Master wants us to be proactive and get right with God while there is still time. We've heard that he wants us to be prepared and ready to go, ready to welcome him home at any moment. But what does it look like to be prepared? Do we keep candles lit in our houses? Do we keep someone awake during the night? What do we actually do?

Well, the Lord explains what it looks like by drawing a comparison between the behaviour of two managers. The master of the house is away and so he sets a manager to take care of things until he returns. The example of the first manager is from verse 42.

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.

It's the faithful and prudent manager that gets the rewards. It's the manager on whom the master can *depend* that is blessed with greater responsibility.

With the master away, there is a temptation to slack off. With no boss around you can cut corners in your work and you won't be discovered. It takes greater effort and diligence to remain hard at work when the boss's eye is not on you. I'm certain if we're honest with ourselves we have all probably eased off at work when the boss isn't there to drive things.

Our Master has been away a long time. And, brothers and sisters, we can fall into the temptation of thinking that how we live our lives doesn't matter. We sometimes live our lives as though it does not matter what condition our master returns to find us. But it does because He will return.

And so the question is: how will the master find us? Will he find us devoted to *his* business or our own? What preoccupies our time? Our thoughts? Our actions? Where do our priorities lie? Is it more important to us to attend to our own needs than that of our Lord?

Let me read to you what our Lord says from verse 45,

But if that slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut in him pieces and put him with the unfaithful.

The **un**faithful slave will be punished and punished severely. We must take care to serve our master faithfully while we await his return. We must live upright and godly lives until he gets back. We need to get on with the tasks he has set for us: proclaiming the gospel, caring for the needy, in short: serving people's needs.

Our lives are not an opportunity to make ourselves comfortable while we wait. There is work to be done. We have orders from the boss. And not just any boss, but our Lord and Master who purchased us with his very own blood! We owe him *everything*. Our lives, our eternal future, our money, our houses – all of it.

No *worker* would expect to last long if they simply ignored the boss's instructions and left their work undone. The excuse: 'I was busy with my own stuff' wouldn't cut it, would it? Imagine if someone tried that at your work: "I asked you to take care of this stuff while I was away. Why isn't it done?" 'Yeah, I know that's what you wanted but I thought would work on this instead because I didn't really think you would come back.'

How much less can we expect to say to our Lord and Master that we didn't *have time* to do what he told us to do because we were busy with our own priorities.

So, what do we do?

How do we ensure we are being faithful, dependable workers? Here are some questions we can ask each other: What is most important to you? What is the most important thing you do? Do you think it would please the Lord?

Have a think through the activities in your week. Are you using them in service to your master? Or are they only for our own benefit?

If other people looked at our lives, could they even tell that we're Christian? Are our lives clearly marked by the fact that we are striving to do our master's business before our own?

Perhaps it all comes down to one question: how are you using the time your master has given you? Are you faithfully doing his work, or your own?

I don't know your hearts. I'm not here to condemn you for not being faithful. But the Lord's warning is clear: Be prepared and be faithful, dependable workers while you wait.

Perhaps, like I have this week as I've prepared, you've realised that if the Master came back now it wouldn't look that good. I know I can't stand up here knowing that I have been perfectly devoted to my master's work.

But I know that my master has paid my debt and will take me home. I know the one who has squared things up with the Judge for me will not lose me.

I'll finish this morning with the same words I started with. As you live this life, as you walk towards the magistrate, hear these words:

When you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last cent.

Be proactive, be prepared and be dependable. Amen.