

BE READY!

Text: Luke 12:35-40 (read Luke 12:22-40)

Readings: 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Peter 3:1-14

Belgic Confession Art 37

Theme: Jesus tells two parables to emphasise the need to be ready and watching for his coming.

Purpose: To urge you to be ready, waiting and watching for the coming of our Lord.

I want you to imagine that you have been invited to a major function in the central city. This is an important awards ceremony, and it is formal, and it is by invitation only. Friends of yours have also been invited. They arrange with you that they will pick you up late in the afternoon. They emphasise that you need to be ready because all of you need to negotiate the traffic, arrive there on time, and get in and be seated.

But on the day you feel very relaxed and decide to go out for a coffee in the early afternoon, and then mow the lawns, and then read the paper in front of the TV. There is no rush.

When your friends arrive you are still in your work clothes and you need a shave and a shower; your wife needs to get dressed and do her makeup. Neither of you are anywhere near ready, so your friends go without you.

When an important event is coming up you need to be ready. You don't want to be late and miss out.

In this passage Jesus emphasises the need to be ready for his second coming. We don't know when he will come. He has not told us the year or the day or the hour; his arrival will be unexpected. So you must be ready!

As he often did Jesus illustrated this with parables, earthly stories with a spiritual meaning and application.

He gives one longer parable about servants waiting for their master to return home and then a short one about a thief coming to a house. Both emphasise the same point: be ready!

1. THE FIRST PARABLE is in verses 35-38. This parable is only recorded in the gospel of Luke.

The master of the house is away attending a wedding banquet. When there is a wedding family and friends usually gather for a wedding reception. Sometimes wedding banquets go late, and it looks as though this one did. The Jews divided the night into three watches, or three time periods. This wedding banquet began in the first watch of the night and it may have continued on into the second or even the third watch.

a. With this parable Jesus emphasised the need to **be ready** (v 35-36)

Jesus said, "Be dressed ready for service". Literally the Greek reads, "let your waist be girded". In those days everyone wore a long flowing robe. That was fine if you were sitting or lounging around but it got in the way if you wanted to do any activity. So if a person went out walking or working they would hitch their robe up in a belt around their waist. This is how these servants were dressed. They did not know when the master would come back, but they wanted to be prepared; they were ready for action the moment he returned home. And they had the lamps burning so that the master could come home into a well-lit house.

Jesus told this parable to urge us to be ready and waiting for him. Two of the verbs in verse 35 are imperatives, commands; "Be..." and "keep your lamps burning..." in other words, don't be caught out unawares, don't be sleeping.

In the Greek text there is an emphatic "you" at the beginning of each sentence in vs 35 and 36: "And *you* be dressed ready for service....and *you* be like men waiting for their master..."

Jesus contrasts *you as Christians* with the people of the pagan world whom he spoke about in verse

30, who are preoccupied with what they will eat and drink and wear. They are worried about their life and their homes and their retirement fund and their savings. Jesus says, “do not be like them!”

You be different. Seek the kingdom of your Father and all these things will be given to you as well (v 31).

And, as part of this, always be ready and waiting for the coming of the King. Be like those servants waiting for their master, ready to open the door for him the moment they hear him knock (v 36b).

b. Our reward (v 37-38)

Jesus went on in this parable to emphasise the reward for those who are ready and waiting. Twice he said, “**It will be good** for those servants whose master finds them watching/ready when he comes” (v 37 & 38).

Literally it reads, “Blessed are those servants...” Jesus uses the same word for blessed as he used in the beatitudes. These servants will be favoured by God, they will be happy; God will show them his grace and kindness.

Jesus also said, “**I tell you the truth...**” (v 37). He said this to introduce something very important that his disciples, and us, need to pay attention to. This is the first time Luke has recorded this phrase since it appeared in chapter 4 verse 24. So here is an important truth. “I tell you the truth, he [that is, the master] will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them” (v 37).

Often the parables Jesus told had an unexpected twist to them. Jesus would be telling a story from everyday life that everyone could relate to; he described events that were true to life, things that went on in their lives. But then the story would take an unexpected turn; something surprising would happen – like this!

The servants are waiting for their master to return home and they are dressed and ready to serve him the moment he came in. But when he arrived he has them sit down and he serves them! Unbelievable! Unheard of! Who would have expected that?!

This is what Jesus has already done for us. He became a man and took the form of a servant (Phil 1:7). He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). During the last Passover meal with his disciples he told them that he was among them as one who serves (Luke 22:27). And he demonstrated that by washing the dirty and dusty feet of his disciples (John 13).

Here Jesus is speaking about the great rewards he will give to his people when he returns. He will receive us into heaven, with all its blessings, and we will enjoy eternal happiness with him and with all those who have believed in him.

c. Jesus concludes this parable by urging us to **maintain** this readiness and to be always watching and waiting for him.

V 38: “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.”

The master might stay at the wedding banquet till late, so the servants might have to wait up for him a long time, staying awake, keeping the lamps burning, listening for his knock at the door.

The lesson is that as followers of Jesus we may have to wait for Jesus for a long time, staying awake, keeping ourselves ready, looking out for his arrival.

2. THE SECOND PARABLE in verse 39 has the same message of readiness.

This one pictures a thief coming to a house. Jesus said, “If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.” This makes sense; if you

know when a thief is coming you will be ready and look out for him. He will not catch you by surprise.

But the nature of thieves is that they come unexpectedly. They don't give you an appointment card. They don't notify you in advance of the time of their arrival.

The point of the parable is that Jesus will come unexpectedly. And the lesson is that we must be ready for his coming. Jesus warned the Christians in the city of Sardis, "I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (Rev 3:3).

3. THE LESSON of both parables is that "you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him" (v 40).

The expectation of Christ's return dominates the New Testament. Every book points us to his second coming and urges us to be ready for it. The entire New Testament is orientated towards the return of our Lord.

The NT writers describe this age between the first and the second coming of Jesus as "the last days" (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:22 Pet 3:3). We are living in this time period.

These "last days" have lasted a long time! 2000 years have passed since Jesus told this parable. All through the centuries Christians have lived in the expectation of the return of Jesus. This is how we are to live today.

Jesus assured the first century Christians, "Yes, I am coming soon" (Rev 22:20). That he will come is certain; the time of his coming is uncertain.

It may be delayed to the second or third watch. We don't know. So be ready.

Sometimes Christians have *lost this sense of expectancy*.

Some have thought it will be a long way off and have given up expecting his coming and do not pray for it.

Others have become too absorbed in this present world, too much like the pagans Jesus described earlier in this chapter, caught up in material wealth and earthly security. They are so busy with the present world that they forget about the world to come. They have no real expectation or awareness of the return of the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes Christians have gone to the other extreme and have focused *too much on the Lord's coming*; it is all they can think about.

They go and hear every speaker who has something to say about the second coming and read every book that comes their way on this subject.

Some draw up elaborate charts and diagrams trying to work out the signs of the times.

They make a careful study of Old Testament prophecies and draw up a detailed plan about the future.

Some have worked out schemes and dates for Christ's return, even though Jesus warned us that no one will know that time. All those predictions, of course, have proved to be wrong!

Often they are so preoccupied with the future that they lose sight of their present responsibilities in the church and kingdom of Christ.

But we do have responsibilities that occupy us here and now.

Your first responsibility is to put your faith in Jesus Christ, believe in him, trust in him for the forgiveness of your sins and then live for him!

But you have other responsibilities. The apostle Peter wrote, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:11f). "Since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:14).

We also need to be speaking about Jesus so that the full number of the elect may be gathered in.

And we need to keep working for the spread and advance of Christ's kingdom as Jesus has commanded us.

And we need to be watching and waiting for his return.

All of life is to be lived in the expectation that Jesus will come again. This is the great hope of the Christian. This is the longing of the believer. This is when our hope will be realised, when the kingdom will come in all its fullness, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and when we will be with the Lord forever!

Oswald Chambers was a well known Christian writer. He was the Principal of the Bible Training College in London from 1911 to 1915, so he was serving there in the outbreak of WW1. He often quoted from a poem of Rabbi ben Ezra with the phrase, "the best is yet to be." He told his students that the school's initials BTC not only stood for Bible Training College, but also, also "Better to Come". In a letter to former students written during the dark days of WWI he wrote, "whatever transpires, it is ever 'the best is yet to be'."

This is our conviction about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever happens in this life, the best is yet to be. So we are looking forward to his coming and all that will follow that.

There are times when we have an important meeting to attend or a big function and either we have forgotten about it or we are not ready when the time comes. We are disappointed that we missed such an important occasion.

The return of the Lord Jesus will be the most momentous occasion in all of history and will mark the end of this present age and the beginning of the age to come.

Are you watching and waiting for his coming?

Are you ready for his return?

Do you regularly pray, "*Maranatha*". "Come O Lord". (1)

Amen

(1) (1 Cor 16:22; cf. Rev 22:20)