

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Coming at an Hour You Do Not Expect.*"ⁱ

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through Luke's gospel. Go ahead and turn to chapter 12. We will cover verses 35 through 40.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word...

Luke 12:35 "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."

You may be seated. Let's pray.

In this section not only does Jesus tell us to look forward to his return, he tells us how to prepare for it. Look at verse 35...

Luke 12:35 "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,

There are two illustrations that have great application to the Christian life...

The first illustration requires us to take our minds to pictures and movies we've seen of men in Jesus's day. We know they wore long robes, which were not the most ideal for working or moving quickly, because they could easily trip. So they had to pick up their robes and tuck them into their belts. This was called "girding the loins," which is how it's translated in some Bibles.

The New King James says...

Let your waist be girded;

If you're using the ESV you'll see a footnote that says something like this.

A close equivalent today is, "*Let's roll up our sleeves.*"

We must be ready to act...and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: Christ wants us ready to serve Him.

This looks back to Passover and the Hebrews being ready at any moment. Remember how they were told to eat the Passover meal...

Exodus 12:11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.

I've told you many times that the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament. There is often an Old Testament physical account that foreshadows a New Testament reality, and that's the case here.

When they had to eat this way it wasn't just about being ready to leave Egypt physically. That's the superficial understanding. It looked forward to the way we must be ready spiritually.

Peter unpacks this for us so we can see the reality...

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, GIRDING UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Peter is applying this metaphorically to our thoughts. We need to get ready for action mentally and spiritually. Just as people in biblical times would gather up their long robes so they could move quickly and freely, we need to focus our thoughts on things that allow us to serve God quickly and freely and eliminate thoughts that would trip us up.

Simply put: we shouldn't be mentally or spiritually lazy.

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Listen again to the end of **1 Peter 1:13**...

at the revelation of Jesus Christ

Peter is talking about Christ returning...just like our verses in Luke. Christians who look forward to Christ's return have greater motivation to obey him than those who don't.

Let me say this one more time...

Peter is saying Christians who look forward to Christ's return have greater motivation to obey him than Christians who don't...and the reason I'm emphasizing this is we see this in **Luke 12**...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson two: focusing on Christ's return provides victory over sin.ⁱⁱ

I need to give you an elevated view of the chapter for you to be able to appreciate this lesson. So look back with me at verse one...

Luke 12:1 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to SAY TO HIS DISCIPLES FIRST, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

First, notice Jesus is teaching his disciples. This is the lowercase d disciples. They're simply the thousands of people following him.

Second, we won't read all the verses, but you should be able to look at the headings in the chapter to see what Jesus taught:

- In verses 1 through 12 he warns about hypocrisy
- In verses 13 through 21 he warns about covetousness
- In verses 22 through 34 he warns about worrying
- Then, between verses 34 and 35 he shifts the emphasis from being worried about the present to being watchful of the future.
- And in verses 35 through 40 he warns about carelessness

Here's what's interesting, and follow me for a moment...

When we think about resisting temptation and overcoming sin there are many tools that we know we have at our disposal. For example, we're struggling with temptation, so...

- we read verses that convict us about that sin
- we pray that God helps us resist that temptation
- we reach out to someone to help us be accountable

But have you ever thought that one of the best ways to resist temptation is to focus on Christ's return?

To conquer the sins Jesus discussed – hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry – we focus on his return.

Just think about it...

When we are focusing on Christ's return:

- We don't want to be hypocrites
- We aren't going to covet, because all earthly things we might covet don't seem very valuable anymore
- We aren't going to worry, because all the things we might worry about don't seem very big anymore

So, I would encourage you when you're tempted, go to these verses, read them, and focus on Christ's return.

Now look at the second illustration in the verse, which is that of a lamp burning and providing light...

The beginning of the verse is all about having our waist girded for action so we're ready to move quickly.

But we need to be able to see where we're going!

Imagine someone takes off running but they're blindfolded. It's only a matter of time before they run into something and hurt themselves or someone else.

And this is why we must **keep our lamps burning**...and this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson three: we need God's Word to see where we're going.

The Christian life is frequently compared to a race, but it's not one we're going to be able to run well if we can't see where we're going.

Our lamps provide the light we need.

In Scripture:

- Light is often compared with truth and righteousness
- Darkness is often compared with sin and unrighteousness.

We live in a dark world and we get the light – or truth – we need to see – not physically, but spiritually – from God's Word....

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

The light of God's word allows us to see where we're going and do what God wants us to do.

In ancient days, oil lamps provided people with light. They needed to be filled with oil to continue burning.

Think of the parable of the 10 virgins. It has many similarities to these verses. Both passages are about being ready for Christ's return. Listen to these verses...

Matthew 25:3 When the foolish [virgins] took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise [virgins] took flasks of oil with their lamps.

The foolish virgins didn't have any oil to keep their lamps burning, but the wise virgins did.

Matthew 25:10 And while [the foolish virgins went to buy oil] the bridegroom came...the door was shut. **11** The [foolish] virgins [said], ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ **12** But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ **13** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This is the same point the verses in Luke are making that we must watch and be ready for Christ’s return.

And just to see how much this passage in Matthew parallels the passage in Luke, look at **verse 36**...

Luke 12:36 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.

So we talked about being ready to serve Christ and that’s exactly what this parable illustrates: servants who are ready to serve their master. Notice the words **at once**, which emphasizes their readiness.

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Let me explain Jewish weddings. They’re so much different than ours if we don’t understand them we’re not going to appreciate what Jesus is saying...

For us we set the date of weddings months in advance and share with others so they can plan.

But for Jews it was almost like a game. The groom would show up at the bride’s house at an unexpected time to get her and bring her back to his father’s house.

This is the background to Jesus’s famous words about coming back to get us as his bride at an unexpected time...

John 14:2 “In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Jesus is describing exactly what would happen when the groom would come for his bride and take her back to his father’s house at an unexpected hour.

Verse 36 is about the servants who would be back at the house waiting for the groom to arrive. They had to be ready at any moment with their robes tucked in their belts, free to move and serve.

The groom reaches the front door and like the verse says...

So that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

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This is also the background to another famous verse with Jesus standing at the door knocking, but nobody opens it for him...

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

This is the opposite. It’s a pretty bad situation. You have the groom standing at the door and not only did the servants not open it for him when he arrived, they didn’t even open it for him when he started knocking.

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But for those servants who are ready for the master when he comes, look at **verse 37**...

Luke 12:37 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!

The keyword is **awake**. We see the theme continue that we must be ready at all times for Christ's return.

The mention of multiple watches makes the point that constant attentiveness is necessary because we don't know exactly when it will be.

In the days of the Roman empire, the night was divided into four "watches".

- The second watch was from 9:00PM until midnight.
- The third watch was from midnight until 3:00AM

I don't think this means that we need to stay up all night with toothpicks in our eyelids waiting for the Lord to return. We can be asleep, and I'm sure many people will be.

We just don't want to be asleep spiritually.

Now what is the blessing for those servants who are ready for Christ's return?

You almost wouldn't believe it if it wasn't written here: the master serves the servants...and this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson four: Jesus will serve those who faithfully served him.

We know there are rewards for faithfully serving the master, but we're probably surprised to see that this is one of them.

In an unbelievable reversal of the servant illustration Jesus says that he will serve the faithful servants who faithfully served him.

It is as though Jesus says:

- *You have worked so hard...*
- *You have done such a good job...*
- *You sit down and relax, and I will serve you.*
- *After all you have done it is now my turn.*

Now you're uncomfortable with this aren't you?

You don't like me saying this, because you say...

"After all we have done for Jesus? More like after all he has done for us. We owe him our lives. We owe him our service. He doesn't owe us anything else."

Which is true! I understand. I feel the same. But this is what the text says. He serves those who served him.

But maybe we shouldn't be that surprised, because it resembles one of the most famous accounts in the Gospels...

He tells us to gird up our loins to serve him, and it looks like what he did at the Last Supper...

John 13:4 [Jesus] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

I don't think Jesus is going to wash our feet in the future, but here's what I do think is in view...

At Jewish weddings, the groom and bride are treated like a king and queen. Everyone serves them.

I think this is looking to the marriage supper of the Lamb when Jesus serves us.

Now Jesus introduces another illustration intended to encourage us to be ready for his return, and it is that of a thief...

Luke 12:39 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."

It might seem odd that Jesus seems to compare himself with a thief, but that's not really what's happening. Instead, he compares the way he will return with the way a thief will rob you:

- A thief does not announce his arrival.
- He comes when it is unexpected.

The same is true with Jesus:

- The only way to be on guard against a thief is to live in constant readiness.
 - And the only way to be prepared for Jesus's return is to live in constant readiness.
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A couple months ago, Ricky raced into our room in the middle of the night, woke me up and said, "Someone is pounding on our front door!"

I raced upstairs, looked through the peephole, but couldn't tell who it was. I turned the light on, but still couldn't tell who the person was. I asked who it was through the door, recognized the voice, opened it, and the person said, "I need your help."

I said, "Okay, what can I do?"

He said, "There's a biker gang following me and they're trying to kill me."

I said, "So you came to my house in the middle of the night where my wife and kids are sleeping? Please come see me at the church in a few hours."

I guess Jesus will show up like this guy showed up. Don't be like me. I was not ready.

I'd like to address something that perhaps you have wondered about...

Christians talk about Jesus coming back soon...but he hasn't yet. Maybe the thing that has really confused you, or even bothered you, is the New Testament authors wrote about Jesus coming back soon...but it has been 2,000 years.

This makes it easy to do one of two things...

First, get upset at people who say Jesus is coming soon. And by the way:

1. There's a difference between saying Jesus is coming soon and saying a day that Jesus is coming
2. We can say that Jesus is coming soon, because that's what the Bible says
3. But we can't say that he is coming on a certain day, because **Matthew 24:36 says concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.**

Second, it's easy to believe Jesus isn't coming soon. It almost turns into a boy who cried wolf -type scenario. You sort of roll your eyes and think, "Okay, one more person who will be wrong just like everyone else who has said thing was wrong."

I would like to discourage you from thinking either of these things for one major reason. It seems clear from the Bible that we are supposed to believe Jesus is coming soon.

And that's because whether he is or isn't God wants us living as though he is...and this brings us to lesson five...

Lesson five: every generation is supposed to believe they're the last.

Jesus taught he was coming soon, and many others said the same:

- Paul: **1 Thessalonians 5:2 You are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.**
- The author of Hebrews: **Hebrews 10:37 Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.**
- James: **James 5:8 Establish your hearts, for THE COMING OF THE LORD IS AT HAND.**
- John: **Revelation 16:15 "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!"**

They all wrote about him coming soon...but he hasn't come yet.

So how do we explain this?

I think the clearest place resolving this is **2 Peter 3**. Hebrews, James, Peter. Go ahead and turn there. We won't turn anyplace else.

2 Peter 3:3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

There were scoffers, and what were they scoffing at?

Christ coming!

If people were scoffing in Peter's day, only years after Christ's ascension, how much more should we expect them to scoff in our day when it has been 2000 years?

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But the fact that people were scoffing in Peter's day doesn't help us understand things does it? It just tells us there have always been scoffers.

So let's look at a few things Peter said to resolve this for his readers.

Skip to verse eight...

2 Peter 3:8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

It has been 2000 years for us, but it has only been two days for God. Time passes differently for him. In light of eternity it hasn't been that long.

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Look at the next reason Christ has given us more time...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The Lord isn't really slow to fulfill his promise to return. Instead, he's waiting for more people to repent and be saved. I became a Christian in my early twenties. I'm thankful Christ didn't return before that.

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Look at verse 10...

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Here it is again: the Lord will return like a thief.

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The Bible presents Christ's return as something imminent. Let me be clear about what this does and doesn't mean:

- It doesn't mean that it's going to happen soon, which is why first century authors could talk about Christ returning at any moment.
- It does mean it can happen at any moment without anything having to precede it.

And what that means is every generation must live as though they are the last. That's what God wants us believing and living like...and that's why New Testament authors preached this, and so has every faithful preacher since.

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One more verse...

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that MUST SOON TAKE PLACE.

The words **soon take place** are very significant, because they affect the way people view Revelation. Some people - known as preterists - say these words mean the events within Revelation must take place soon after the book was written. So they see the events of Revelation fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

But the Greek word for **soon** is *tachos*; (tah-hoss). It's related to our word "tachometer," and it means "quickness or speed."

This is why some Bibles, like the New King James, have an asterisk that says it can also be translated as quickly or swiftly.

In other words:

- This isn't referring to WHEN Jesus will return...soon after John wrote this.
- It's referring to HOW Jesus will return: quickly...swiftly...unexpectedly...like a thief in the night.

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Let me conclude with this...

We don't want to be taken by surprise.

Even if Jesus isn't returning next week, next month, next year, or perhaps even in our lifetimes, let's live like he is because here's the thing...

Regardless of when he returns, we are going to meet him:

- It could be when he returns during our lifetimes
- Or it could be the day of our deaths

But we will meet him, and we want to be ready. And living like we can meet him any moment is the only way to be ready.

If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Commentaries used:

- EW
- JM sermon and commentary
- FT
- Wiersbe
- Nelson

ⁱⁱ We have a pretty good Old Testament example of this if we think about Abraham and Lot...

Remember they were together, their herds grew so much their herdsman started quarreling with each other. So they decided to part ways...

Genesis 13:10 Lot LIFTED UP HIS EYES and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. 11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

Lot was focused on the physical, and he introduced terrible wickedness into his life.

We aren't told in Genesis why Abraham went the direction he did, but the author of Hebrews tells us...

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Abraham was looking forward to that heavenly city so he had no interest in the world's real estate.