

“READY OR NOT...?!”

PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANTS

LUKE 12:35-48

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Jesus’ teaching on living our lives in light of the end of the story (last sermon, 12:13-34) ended with his clear saying concerning discipleship: “*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (v. 34). He has taught his disciples that they are not to be anxious, worried or fearful because this is walking with little faith and acting like pagans rather than Kingdom people who are heirs to all of God’s glorious riches in Christ (12:22-34).

Jesus has told all his disciples who believe in him that it is the Father’s good pleasure to give them the Kingdom because of God’s glorious grace. In Luke 12:32, Jesus tells the disciples: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give to you the Kingdom”. By God’s grace, believers are heirs of the Eternal Kingdom of Jesus.

We should read our entire passage today in light of verse 48b that teaches us:

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.

How should one live as already an heir of the world and of the glorious riches found in the Eternal, Unshakeable Kingdom? ***One should live as one given much (v. 48b). How are those who have been given much grace recognized as true Kingdom disciples and blessed servants?***

Because of God’s grace in Christ, as heirs of the Kingdom, they should live watchful and ready for the Lord’s return and faithful as servants in His house to the Lord until he returns. If a servant gets merely caught up in searching for permanence and security in the world that is passing away, they will not be eagerly awaiting and watching for the Lord when he returns.

Our ultimate and Eternal Treasure is the glorious riches found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we must understand as God’s people who are recipients of his grace that part of the treasure that we lay up for ourselves that “does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:33) ***is in our eagerly watchful and faithful service to Christ in the Kingdom.***

In other words, how does the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the Kingdom encourage your watchfulness and drive you toward more service and faithfulness to God as a response?

As we rely upon the grace of God given to us in Jesus Christ because we are united to Him by His Spirit, His disciples are to be watchful and faithful as they serve God and neighbor in this present age. It should be remembered that eschatology according to Jesus (that is, Jesus' teaching concerning the end of the story or this present world that is passing away) is not merely to inform us of future events as much as it is to prepare Christ's people to serve God faithfully *today* (see Bock, NIVAC, pg. 355).

Again, it is important to be reminded that when Jesus says to whom much is given (v. 48b), he is speaking of the grace that all Kingdom Disciples possess by virtue of their being united to Jesus Christ by faith as heirs of His Eternal Kingdom- -and so for us who have much grace, much will be required with regard to watchful-readiness and faithfulness.

The heart of the passage is about readiness, expectation and faithfulness in light of Lord's imminent return because of the grace of God in Christ that we have received as his servants. Two verses at the heart of this parabolic passage:: (vv. 40, 48b) "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (v.40)/ (v. 48b): "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."

I. Readiness and Unreadiness (Luke 12:35-40)

ESV Luke 12:35-48: "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.

Words that describe Jesus' teaching here: readiness, alertness, sobriety, eager expectation to celebrate at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb!

In the reality of the Kingdom that has come in Jesus Christ, Jesus wants his servants or Kingdom Disciples to be busy about laboring for his Kingdom until he returns to make his rule and reign known climatically on Judgment Day.

In our passage, Jesus uses two images from the ancient culture to depict readiness and preparedness: (1) Girding up loins and (2) Keeping lamps burning.

"Let your loins stay girded"- This was to fasten up the long outer garment so that one could travel or work; this describes taking the lengthy robe and tucking into one's belt. The NIV translates this "Be dressed ready for service" which is helpful. The meaning of this is to have a state of mind that is ready to leave at anytime ("All That You Can't Leave Behind"- U2).

The perfect imperative [Ἔστωσαν] with the participle [περιεζωσμένοι] in Greek alludes to a state of constant or perpetual readiness to act and serve (see Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1174).

The Apostle Peter uses this same kind of language and imperative when he says in light of God's grace to his people in Christ (And notice how the indicative grace of who we are as heirs precedes how we are to behave; Peter is teaching us to be who we already are; to live as the Kingdom heirs that we are by his grace!)

ESV 1 Peter 1:3-4: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...

ESV 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Israel's History of Preparation and Watchfulness

From the beginning of Israel's national existence, and each year in the Passover meal God taught His people the importance of readiness for action as they seek an eternal resting place or land where God dwells in their midst (see also 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1; Job 38:3; 40:7). Israel was taught to seek a Kingdom that is not of this world (cf. Rom. 4:13; Heb. 11:13ff) and to be prepared for continued action:

Exodus 12:11: In this manner you shall eat it [the Passover meal]: 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.

In the larger context of Luke's Gospel, Jesus is alluding here not only to Israel's instruction on being prepared for YHWH's coming, but also since the Passover was eaten with unleavened bread (Exo. 12:8), the people of God should be reminded that part of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy (that he warns the disciples about in Luke 12:1) is a lack of preparedness or watchfulness in the teachers that should be avoided by all true disciples.

Throughout redemptive-history God sent his servants the prophets to prepare Israel for YHWH's coming on the Day of the Lord, and to be prepared and watchful:

ESV Isaiah 13:6 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!

ESV Ezekiel 30:3 For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

ESV Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

ESV Malachi 4:5-6: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. His main mission was **preparatory to make Israel ready for Messiah's coming**. As Luke wrote earlier in his Gospel (quoting the words of the angel to Zechariah):

Luke 1:16-17: And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

Throughout the Old Covenant, and particularly through Word (proclamation) and Sacrament (Passover Meal), God taught Israel to be a watchful and prepared people.

Jesus uses more language from that culture to describe the eager anticipating and watchfulness that should characterize his disciples:

"Keep your lamps burning": This depicts being able to see in darkness and to continue to serve instead of sleeping. It recalls images from Exodus 27 in the Tabernacle as well as in Leviticus 24:2:

ESV Exodus 27:20 "You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn.

ESV Leviticus 24:2 "Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

Israel's worship in the Tabernacle revealed by the regularly burning lamps that they were to be the light of the world, ***awaiting their Messiah-Master's arrival as they worshipped God continually in spirit and truth at that point in redemptive-history***. Israel was eagerly to be watchful and greatly anticipate the Wedding Supper of the Lamb when Jesus Christ returns.

Israel was to be waiting for their Master the Messiah to come and to be ready to open the door for him as he returned to his house (v. 36). Jesus is teaching the disciples that they are to be ready after his death (9:22ff) to be ready and prepared to receive him when he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

A wedding in Jesus' time would be celebrated for a week. The servants in the house would not know when the Master would return. There were no cell phones to call ahead and let them know when to have everything prepared—they could not email each other to tell them what their expectations were upon arrival. Rather, the Master left to celebrate the marriage feast telling his servants simply that he was to be home soon, and to be prepared for his arrival. ***This is what Jesus is doing here; preparing his Kingdom disciples for his departure.***

“Blessed are those who are waiting...”

The servants were to have their long robes tucked up in their belts, the lights would be continually burning, the servants would be looking out the windows, keeping watch, and listening carefully for the Master’s approach. As the Master approached the door, the servants would gather at the door welcoming him home, and taking his cloak and sitting him down to a good supper.

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!

In verse 37, Jesus pronounces a beatitude or blessing upon those servants who are awake in the doorway, eagerly awaiting the Master’s return- they will be blessed as servants. But after the Master’s return, the Master in a typical Lucan fashion will become the servant and the servants treated special by the Master as part of his blessing and favor (v. 37b). ***The Master will be the servant*** – the Master will dress himself for service and have his people recline at table and he will come and serve them (v. 37b). His servants must be awake.

As Jesus revealed a foretaste of His service to his disciples as Master like this in John’s Gospel account:

^{ESV} John 13:1-4: Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

And later in Dr. Luke’s Gospel, Jesus says:

^{ESV} Luke 22:27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

When Jesus returns not only will all of Christ’s disciples be vindicated and formally receive all the glorious riches and treasure of God hidden in Christ’s Eternal Kingdom, but they will take part in a glorious Wedding Supper of the Lamb. This is described in the New Testament in Luke’s Gospel in this way:

^{ESV} Luke 13:29 And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.

^{ESV} Luke 22:30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And in other passages in the New Testament:

ESV 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.

ESV Revelation 19:6-9: Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Jesus' enthronement-glory at God's right hand will be publicly manifested before the whole world at the Great White Throne Judgment as the kingdoms of this world are all placed under his feet and as he judges the Living and the Dead (1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 20:11; cf. Rev. 12:10ff).

Jesus teaches all of his disciples a watchfulness that is alert at all times of the day (v. 38). The Roman schedule for guard duty during Jesus' day divided the time for the soldiers between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM into four equal units. The second and third watches would be between 9:00 PM and 3:00 AM (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1175).

The Jewish custom was a three-watch pattern at night where the first watch was in the early evening, and the second and third watch was in the middle of the night, or right before daybreak (10:00 PM to 2:00AM and 2:00AM to 6:00 AM respectively).

The point that Jesus is making with the cultural relevance is to be watchful and "awake" (vv. 37-38) **at all hours of the day, including the most inopportune times of day.** In other words, one had to be on a perpetual watch for Jesus Christ's return.

David Brown wrote: "To find them ready to receive Him at any hour of day or night, when one might least of all expect Him, is peculiarly blessed."

The Master of the House

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.

A person's house is robbed because they are not expecting, or anticipating, or watching for a thief to break into it. If they had been expecting, or anticipating, or watching for a thief, then his house would not have been broken into. Again, Jesus' point is to be on watch and alert for His return.

Another character is introduced in our passage: the master of the house. The Master of the House is the one who is given the primary responsibility of stewardship to watch over the house on behalf of the Master, to take care of his other servants, take care of his land and property, and watch for possible thieves who seek to break into the house (There no automatic lights that turned on outside the back door, no security systems to bring peace of mind).

Similar to Adam in the Garden of Eden on behalf of God, he is to exercise dominion or service as a vicegerent or vice-regent on behalf of his Master. Like this parabolic illustration and like Adam, so Christ's disciples are to exercise this faithful service to God on his behalf.

An example of a faithful master of a house or steward for one's Lord is the patriarch Joseph:

ESV Genesis 39:4-6: So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.

⁴⁰ *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Jesus says that like a thief ("in the night") he will come (v. 39).

Also the Apostle Paul writes in a similar manner to the Thessalonians:

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10: Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

Jesus is saying that he will leave but return to the disciples who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb. 9:28).

ESV Hebrews 9:28 ...So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

We are to seek to make his rule and reign known through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of God that includes not only Christ's salvation that is revealed for all who have ears to hear, but also his judgment for those who turn away from the only Hope of the World! We are to be those who are "eagerly waiting for him" because in HIM we find our ultimate and climatic salvation: the very resurrection-glorification of our bodies (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:21ff).

To Whom is this Addressed, Lord?!

⁴¹ *Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"*

Here is revealed as we have seen earlier that Jesus is speaking primarily to his disciples, but the crowds are able to hear and to listen to the words of Jesus (cf. 12:1 ("Many thousands" of people are around Jesus as he teaches)).

Peter's question is important for all of those in the visible Church who confess and witness to the Glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus as servants in Christ's Kingdom. Jesus' teaching is aimed first of all in priority at the Apostles who had the privilege of hearing and seeing and touching the Lord of Glory in his incarnation, who were witnesses to his intimate special revelation from God (Luke 10:23-24; 1 John 1:1ff). Second in priority, Jesus is speaking to those who minister as officers or servants in Jesus' Church, building upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. 2:20; 4:11ff).

But we all should be reminded that there are sobering implications and applications here addressed to all those who confess Christ and call themselves Kingdom Disciples.

So is he speaking merely to the Apostles or to the crowds?

YES!!

How does Jesus answer Peter's question? He tells them another parable.

Remember that a parable was (is!) to reveal to those God had given ears to hear and eyes to see, as well as to conceal the truth to those who opposed Christ (Luke 8:9-10: ^{ESV} **Luke 8:9-10:** And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'")

II. Faithfulness and Faithlessness (Luke 12:42-48)

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.*

Jesus is teaching his disciples to continue to be faithful and wise managers or stewards of his household. Notice how Jesus describes the "wise manager" as faithful to his master, but not interested in the entitlement it might bring to him, or the importance; there is humility revealed in his faithfulness.

The idea of wise manager or steward of the master's household was a cultural phenomenon of Jesus' time. The steward was a slave left in charge of the master's household or estate when the master was away. He was to serve in the master's absence, keeping his home and estate and to watch over the other servants (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1179).

Leon Morris writes “If he was faithful and wise he would see that the estate was properly run, which included making sure that all members of the household were duly fed. Jesus speaks of a situation where the master is absent but returns unexpectedly (v. 43)” (*Luke*, pgs. 238-39).

The faithful steward or manager will inherit all of Jesus’ possession as King of the Kingdom (v. 44). Jesus gives an encouraging blessing to the faithful steward or “wise” managers who serve God and their neighbor faithfully by His grace. Jesus pronounces another beatitude upon the servant who is serving faithfully when he comes: ***Blessed is that servant...!*** (v. 43).

A Blessed Servant...But also Three Other Kinds of Servants

Our Lord compares the “blessed” and faithful servant or steward or master of the house with three other kinds of servants. This judgment is made according to how they were faithful or unfaithful to the Kingdom Gospel of Grace (cf. 12:48b):

(1) **A servant who is defiantly disobedient**; he knows the will of the master and does not do it even though he is aware of his assignment in his master’s absence (12:45-46). These would be the Pharisees and teachers of Israel in the present context (Luke 11:37-54), but this also refers to any unbelieving person who knows what God requires of them and who may serve as part of the visible Church of Christ, but blatantly is defiant to his will. In the end the person is revealed as a faithless unbelieving hypocrite (cf. Luke 12:1, 56).

(2) **A servant who is disobedient to his master but not as defiant as the first one** (12:47). This refers to believers, who serve God, but will be disciplined but not rejected when he returns for their lack of faithfulness in service (“severe blows”). This faithful service is determined by how faithful to the gospel the servants were; how they fed others with the truth of God’s Word.

(3) **A servant who is disobedient to his master in ignorance** (12:48); this one also is disobedient, but ignorantly so (“light blows”); this refers to believers who will be disciplined, but will not be rejected when the Lord returns. This servant is someone who is truly part of God’s Kingdom in Christ but is ignorant of certain expectations the Lord has especially with regard to knowledge and proclamation of the Gospel of Grace.

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.*

These are severe warnings for manager-stewards who prove unfaithful in Christ’s Kingdom. Jesus is telling a parabolic story of a servant of the house that thinks his master and lord will not return speedily and ***so he can live as he likes without any regard for the consequences of his living.***

Jesus teaches that the first servant acts ***as if he is the master of the house*** in the absence of the true master-lord, and so he lives riotously and tyrannously over those who have been placed in his charge.

Here Jesus gives us a picture of those who confess that they are in the Kingdom but they are truly faithless or unbelieving by their very actions. Their fruits are rotten and they care not for Christ or His Household (as the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law). Jesus describes their actions as “drunkenness and gluttony”. The picture of drunkenness in the steward’s life is an Old Testament image of irresponsibility (1 Tim. 3):

ESV Isaiah 28:1-4: Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine! ² Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters, he casts down to the earth with his hand. ³ The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden underfoot; ⁴ and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer: when someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it is in his hand.

ESV Joel 1:5 Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.

This is another reminder that all that we have, especially with regard to our callings and vocations, we are given as stewards of the Kingdom to be used for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor. Because we have been given gifts to serve God and neighbor we must be responsible before God.

There are some who claim to be in the Kingdom (like the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law), who think that because of their works, or because of their ethnicity (see Luke 3:7ff), that they have a right to this position. The first servant is someone who serves visible in the Church but knows not the true Gospel of the Grace, nor is known by the Lord Jesus Christ. This one is like the people the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 5:5-7:

ESV Ephesians 5:5-7: For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not associate with them...

ESV 1 John 3:10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

In order to understand this graphically violent language that Jesus uses (“cut him to pieces”), we should be again reminded that God’s Kingdom is not a democracy but a monarchy. The picture is of the Master who returns, who finds his servant being unfaithful in his service.

The Master returns and this servant is eating all of the master's food, drinking all of the master's wine, beating and mistreating the other servants who have been placed under his care, and not caring for his land. The Master returns and his home is in devastating and sinful ruins and the Master takes the unfaithful servant out in one of his many fields and with his sword cuts him into (this may have reference to Judas' ultimate demise and death).

The language that Jesus uses here is the severe language of rejection, what Jesus says on the Last Day as recorded in Matthew's Gospel (25:41):

'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

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.

Here is Jesus' second and third example of all of God's servants as creatures who live in this world and those who particularly serve in Christ's Church. The second servant received greater discipline from the Lord ("severe beating"- v. 47) because of his greater knowledge of the Gospel, but rather than make this truth known disobeyed the Lord.

The third servant was ignorant to the Gospel of God and the will of God revealed through his Church in the Kingdom; but he is still accountable, although to a lesser degree ("light beating"- v. 48).

Degrees of Future Punishment

It is important to note that the Bible clearly teaches that there are degrees of future punishment for the knowledge one has of the Lord and his will (v. 48b: "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").

The Bible teaches degrees of judgment for disobedience:

^{ESV} Luke 10:12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

^{ESV} Luke 10:14 But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

^{ESV} Luke 23:34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

^{ESV} James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Those who enjoyed the pleasure and privilege of the light of God's revelation will be held to a greater account and judged accordingly (like the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law). Those who did not have as much light will not be judged as ultimately as unbelievers or the unfaithful who are truly not known by God, but they will be disciplined for their actions and service to Christ.

We must remember how Jesus ends this parable with the sober saying:

“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.”

[**Excursus**] What is important to remember here is that all mankind have no excuse before God no matter how little light they had of God’s special revelation (whether they are part of the visible Church or not), because like God’s special revelation in the Bible that is authoritative, necessary for salvation, clear, and sufficient, so God has also clearly revealed himself in creation and men’s consciences as Romans 1 and 2 teaches:

ESV Romans 1:18-20: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

ESV Romans 2:12-16: For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Kingdom Works: “Kingdom Disciples are Known by their Works- -Not Saved by them!”

We should take note here of the teaching of scripture elsewhere so that we interpret scripture with scripture and understand better what our Lord Jesus is teaching.

In Romans 2:4-8 the Apostle Paul says something similar to what Jesus is saying here when he 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.” :

ESV Romans 2:4-8: Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

The Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul **are not teaching salvation by works**, or a right standing before God because of what we have done for God (see Paul's clear argument for the grace of God in Christ in Romans chapters 4-8).

What the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul **are teaching** is that those who have received God's grace in Christ, those who are recipients of God's mercy **are those who are given much and because of this they are accountable: "...Much will be required of them."**

What the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul **are teaching** is that the world will know Christ's disciples by their fruit that is borne because of their response to the Gospel of Grace (cf. Matthew 5:14, 7:20):

ESV Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

ESV Matthew 7:20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

A disciple of the Kingdom is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but this salvation is known by their works. A disciple of the Kingdom is not saved by works or what they do for God, but what Christ has done for them *as well as what he is doing in them by His Spirit*. In light of this reality of being united with Jesus Christ however, Paul can say that God will "render to each according to his works" (Rom. 2:6).

This means that our works reveal that we are truly saved, but our works are not what save us. This again is the importance of understanding that the grace of God has been given to his people so that they might perform good works in reliance upon God's grace in Christ because that is what they were created and regenerated to do:

ESV Ephesians 2:8-10: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Appreciate the balance here between saving faith that is all of grace and the good works which God has prepared for his disciples to do or "walk in them" (v. 10).

James says it this way:

James 2:14-20: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

The Apostle James is NOT disagreeing with the Apostle Paul and our Lord Jesus. He is teaching that our works show forth our true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his servants. Our works, or deeds done in the body in response to grace show that we are truly recipients of God's grace.

We should again be reminded of these sober words:

ESV Matthew 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

It is important to be reminded as Kingdom disciples who are indeed heirs of the Kingdom (v. 32) and recipients of God's grace and mercy, that God's grace and mercy to us does not mean there is no accountability to our Lord.

Accountability to God for Our Stewardship of His Gospel Treasure

Accountability to God for our service is as clearly revealed in Scripture as the sweet grace of God found in Christ.

In fact, our accountability to God is in reliance upon his grace, and only by his grace can we serve faithfully! Notice how the Apostle Paul speaks of accountability to God in reliance upon God's grace in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:10-15: According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

For the believing disciple, his or her life is spent in reliance upon God's grace, serving obediently until the Master comes back. The believing disciples are given the grace of God to persevere and to remain faithful while eagerly anticipating His Master-Lord's return.

Remember the teaching of the Apostle Paul in Titus 2:11-13 where grace and sober watchfulness and faithfulness are all linked together:

ESV Titus 2:11-14: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

As New Testament Professor Darrell Bock has said commenting on Titus 2:11-14: “The goal of grace is to create a people who are faithful and zealous in their service for God” (NIVAC, pg. 356).

Our Glorious Union with Christ Jesus

I think this is an important time to remind all of us that we have many benefits because we are united to Jesus Christ by faith. In Christ, we have ***justification*** (or right standing before a holy God by faith); we have ***adoption or Sonship*** where we have been made God’s children; we have ***sanctification*** where we are daily being conformed in the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord; and we have ***glorification***, that is, that we will one day be permanently glorified by our Lord and the possession of the Spirit of God is already a down payment on that reality NOW (Eph. 1:13-14; cf. Romans 8:28ff).

We can easily get imbalanced though in our walk with Christ. I hear some Christians speaking of justification by faith alone and celebrating God’s grace in their lives (as they should!), and yet they can focus on this one benefit or aspect of our union with Christ and forget their sanctification, or the work of God in them to produce good works.

I hear some Christians speaking of Adoption and Sonship and celebrating this aspect of God’s grace (as they should!), and yet they can focus on this one benefit or aspect of our union with Christ and forget the ongoing work of God that is being worked in them.

For example, I have observed pastorally that those who have been in ***legalistic-type congregations*** where only Law is preached in an imbalanced manner can find themselves only reveling in one aspect of the gospel of our union with Jesus; these people can easily forget their accountability to God and His gospel-good news in their sanctification, or growing in Christ-likeness through dying to self and resisting their sin.

Those who have been in ***antinomian-type congregations*** where grace means a license to sin against God and neighbor, and there is a disregard for God’s Law revealed in the Ten Commands, they can find themselves only reveling in one aspect of the gospel of our union with Jesus, and think that if anyone teaches about the commands of Jesus then that makes one automatically a legalist! These people shrink from any imperatives that are given by our Lord! And we must be reminded that it is the imperatives that Jesus gives to us in Him to grow in him in light of the grace that he has revealed and extended to us in our union with Him!

It is hard for the mind tainted by sin to get our thinking around ***both aspects of the Gospel of our union with Jesus Christ!***

There must be a balance, and we find that in Christ Jesus. In our union with Christ we have the gospel promise of grace and the freedom to be obedient, watchful and faithful servants of the Living God!

This passage should not cause Christians to unnecessarily fear the Day of Judgment. Rather, it should cause us to be reminded as heirs of the Eternal Kingdom and the

Grace of God revealed in Christ that he has given and will continue to give what we need to become more like Jesus Christ our Lord- -as we watch for him eagerly and as we serve him faithfully.

Let us thank God for all that we have in our time as Christians, but let us be reminded of our accountability to God for what we have and what we know!

Let us not forsake all of the grace that God has given to us in Christ- -let us not live as if we are NOT those who have been given much! As Kingdom Disciples united to Jesus Christ by faith, we have so much to be thankful for, especially the good news that we are saved by grace, released from our bondage and slavery to sin, death and the devil, and freed and redeemed by his blood to serve him in his House.

We have so much in the Gospel of the Kingdom that we should never reject (as the first servant), misuse or resist (as the second servant), and be ignorant of (as the third servant). Rather, we should be the “blessed servant” in how we live as Kingdom Disciples- -because we are the blessed servant in Jesus Christ!

Some might dispute with me in saying that the much that is given that Jesus is speaking of here in this passage is merely grace. Well, it is nothing less than the Gospel grace of the Kingdom that has been given to us as heirs in Jesus Christ. **BUT IT IS ALSO SO MUCH MORE!!!**

The grace of God in Christ includes all of the benefits that God gives to his Kingdom Disciples such as Word, Sacrament, prayer, fellowship, service, intimate knowledge of God. It includes such things as the Word of God in our own language (having our very own Bibles to read—with study notes!); it includes the orthodox teaching and doctrines revealed and compiled progressively throughout church history; it includes each other and our love and fellowship; it includes the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ in the fullness of the times, as those who are part of the Last Days or New Testament era.

But all of these benefits flows from the grace of God found in the Jesus Christ and his Kingdom!

As Pastor Kent Hughes says: ***[By God’s grace]*** “We have so much. We have the word of the Old Testament, the word of the prophets, the word of the covenants. We have the word of the New Testament, the revelation of the Incarnation, the gospel of grace, the life and teachings of Jesus, the apostolic witness and teaching. We have 2,000 years of the church’s testimony. We have abundant preaching. We have Christian education. We have thousands of books. We have a wealth of opportunities. Consequently, much is required of us! (*Luke*, Vol. II, pg. 66).

The believing disciple is ready, and is watchful, and is blessed as he or she continues by God’s grace in Christ, and longs for the great eschatological encouragement and invitation of Christ that Matthew records for us in his gospel:

Matthew 25:21-23: His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'²² ***And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.'***²³ ***His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'***

We should be ready, serving God and neighbor; we are ready and blessed in Christ. So in light of this reality, gird up your loins, light your lamps, don't be discouraged or dismayed, but continue to serve faithfully and obediently in reliance upon the grace of God found in Christ.

ESV Luke 12:32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Be ready then for its appearing, and be faithful by His grace!

ESV Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

CRB

Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Exodus 12:11-15:** 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. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

1 Peter 1:13-25: Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. ²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

^{ESV} **Matthew 24:37-42:** As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

^{ESV} **Romans 9:1-6:** I am speaking the truth in Christ- I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them

belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

2 Peter 3:8-14: 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. 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. 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. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

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