

Sermon: Are You a Wise Manager?

Text: Luke 12:35-48

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Introduction: Luke's gospel at this point becomes increasingly parable-rich. There are two parables in this section of scripture with a proverb thrown in for good measure. You will notice these are the words of Jesus (**red letters** in some of your Bibles). Jesus is providing teaching and warnings to those who are thinking of committing to Him. And even though Peter poses a question about who is the actual intended audience (v. 41), it seems clear the answer is: *everyone!* **Luke 12:41 (NIV)** ⁴¹Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

Today, if you want to follow Jesus, there are some requirements that still hold true. Our involvement in the kingdom of God requires that we act as stewards, good stewards. Jesus expects us to be "wise" in our actions on his behalf. Let's define how these expectations Jesus has of us are to be lived out.

If we are to be wise managers, Jesus expects:

I. We Will Be Ready at All Times (vv. 35-40).

Luke 12:35-40 (NIV) ³⁵"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. ³⁹But understand this: 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. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

A. for service (vv. 35-36)

The older translations (KJV) have the Master saying "gird up your loins." It seems a little foreign in our ears, but what it involved in Jesus' time was a man gathering up his loosely-flowing garments up around his waist to facilitate his ability to move freely and work.

Just like a person would not dress in formal evening wear to run a marathon or play hockey, here the expectation is that nothing will restrict our ability to serve or run the race so to speak.

The second phrase used to make Jesus' point here is: "keep you lamps burning." Both phrases are commands for the servants indicating their need for a constant state of preparedness and readiness.

When our children were little, and family wasn't available, we would sometimes hire a person to watch our two *perfect* children. We knew our children would always be on their best behavior and would never even think about breaking our rules or taking advantage of the fact we were not there to correct them. It was always good when we came home and found everything the way we expected rather than emergency personnel with their vehicles in front of our home.

B. for being served (vv.37-38)

The wonderful twist in this story is when the master returns maybe after a week or so away - rather than letting his servants wait on him which was their duty, *he serves them*. In fact, the picture in heaven is that of a wedding feast where we the guests (servants) are gathered. And people without any real standing are welcome at this banquet simply on the strength that they are known and invited.

It's that way, too, sometimes when I go and try to be a blessing to someone - that they bless me. I remember a mission trip to San Luis Potosi, Mexico. I went to give, and it was I who received. I went to teach, and it was I who was taught. It is true that if you lose your life for the sake of Christ, you will indeed find real life, abundant life, life without end. God still surprises me sometimes because:

Matthew 20:28 (NIV) ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

C. for the unexpected (vv. 39-40)

What sounds odd here is that a thief is literally compared to the Son of Man. Certainly, this is not in character, but the idea that both would hide their timetables for their coming (appearing).

Those who do not believe the words of the Bible are not expecting Jesus to return. He is a man (historical?) who they think merely died and whose body cannot be found.

There are other, maybe well-meaning, but misinformed prophets who try and predict Jesus' second coming. They embarrass themselves if they live beyond the date of *this* appearing. They also bring discredit to people even loosely associated with them. It is clear from Scripture these things cannot be calculated.

Matthew 24:36-39 (NIV) ³⁶“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **Yet they had been warned!**

If we are to be wise managers, Jesus expects:

II. We Will Be Pursuing His Agenda (vv. 42-44)

Luke 12:42-44 (NIV) ⁴²The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

A. during his absence (v. 42)

As the church is waiting for the return of Jesus, we are not without instruction. We have been given the Bible for a guide to our activities. As managers of his house, we are responsible for carrying out his wishes. The text here is clearly talking about a leadership position. These are workers who are responsible for the well-being of those under their care.

Leaders must provide for the physical and spiritual needs of the flock in the master's absence. These managers are counted as wise because they obey the Lord's wishes. They also will provide a godly example of how we all are to behave in the Lord's absence.

It is a testament to the character of anyone who can follow instructions and carry out someone's wishes with no *apparent* accountability. Yet, no one should doubt God's omniscience. He sees and hears everything just as if there were hidden cameras wired for sound in every room we ever enter. Jesus does not need to return to discover how things are going. He already knows.

It is the wise manager who will be caught pursuing the master's agenda and be blessed:

B. during his presence (vv. 43-44)

Because our master finds us doing good in his name, he will reward us. We do not receive a trip to some exotic Caribbean Island resort for our efforts like a sales contest winner. Jesus actually gives us more work once we demonstrate our commitment to Him.

When you look at the relationship here that is found in the Greek words, you will notice the nouns are *Lord* (kurios) and *slave* (doulos), not exactly a business relationship. *Our* Master did not hire us; He owns us. We were bought and paid for in the currency of his blood. Yet because of his mercy and grace we are treated better than we could ever have expected. It is a graduated assignment. Our reward is to hear words of praise from the one who loves us.

Matthew 25:21 (NIV) ²¹“... ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

If we are to be wise managers, Jesus expects:

III. We Will Be Evaluated for Our Work (vv. 45-48)

Luke 12:45-48 (NIV) ⁴⁵But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. ⁴⁶The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

I have observed that rarely do you have “pop quizzes” right after you have studied hard. When I was in the food industry, the inspectors seemed to always show up on the worst days. Earthquakes are only projected, not predicted.

Here in our text it appears that we will be judged at one level:

A. according to our responsibility (vv.45-46)

If I can say it this way, even in the church, the higher the office - the higher the responsibility. There is no more important activity than the Lord's work.

For some, football is their religion and more important than God in their list of priorities. I suppose if the Steelers have a terrible year in the coming season it will seem like the end of the world, however, no one is going to blame the 3rd-string punter. They may blame the quarterback, though, if he doesn't get his act together.

With the responsibility that comes with leadership (anywhere), there has to be a moral and ethical compass. This is especially true in the church. People under our care are not to be neglected or intentionally hurt in any way. Leaders who would consciously show disregard for their need to be a good example will be severely punished, literally dismembered by the Lord. The text says they will be assigned a place with the unbelievers. Friends, I think that means "hell!"

The Lord is coming *suddenly* when he comes. There will be no chance to change anything. "The best way to be unready is to be an unbeliever." - Dr. Donald T. Williams

As a servant we will be judged and punished:

B. according to our knowledge (v. 47)

The more you know to do, the more you need to do. Not all of us are on the same level of maturity or knowledge, but all of us need to do the best we can with what we know and what we have been given. We can't do everything, but all of us should do something.

There seems to be degrees of punishment implied here. We should not look at this, however, as a way to identify a line we dare not cross if we want to make it into heaven. After everything Jesus has done for us, calculating the least we can do isn't a godly attitude.

C. according to our ignorance (v. 48a)

In one sense we cannot be completely responsible for things we do not know or understand. Yet, we are responsible for seeking God's will and doing our best to know what He wants. Ignorance will not be a viable defence for anyone.

Paul makes this clear when he says: **Romans 1:18-20 (NIV)** ¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

There will be a judgment made by Jesus:

D. according to our quality of work (v. 48b)

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

If we have been called and blessed by God, we have a clear responsibility to share that wealth with others. We are not to do just enough to get by, but our best. Paul tells us:

I Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV) ¹⁰By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

“The problem in the parable, though, is not that the master was gone away too long, but that he came back too soon and caught the servant unprepared.” - Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 192

Conclusion: The suddenness, and for some the unexpected nature, of Jesus' second coming will catch many off-guard, unprepared, and set for eternal punishment. Those who are wise, who have been watchful, prepared and faithful in this interim will be rewarded, not with harps or clouds as their company cars, but with new areas of service (worship) for our King and Savior.

I hope you are watching and ready for the return of Christ. Do not keep putting off your stewardship for him. Find yourself busy doing his will and helping others come to know our gracious and loving Master.