

Until He Returns

Luke 12:35–48

The Gospel of Luke, Volume 5 (Luke 10–12)

Because Christ will return suddenly, faithful servants stay ready and awake, trusting that the Master who was torn for us will examine us with pleasure, seat us at his feast, and entrust us with eternal work.

In This Lesson

- Review the Teaching Helps section.
- Start with a Hook—engage the group in the discussion for the night.
- Review the sermon and Scripture under discussion.
- Work through the discussion questions.
- Pray—use the included prayer guide.

Teaching Helps

Summary of the Sermon

One of the great doctrines of the New Testament is the Second Coming of Christ—the return of the King who will rule, renew, and heal all things. The promise sounds almost too good to be true: we will be with Christ, made like him, clothed in glory, seated at a feast, and given a share in his rule. Luke 12:35–48 gathers several of these promises under the call to readiness. Jesus tells his disciples to stay dressed for action and keep their lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast. The return is sudden and unexpected. While we wait it is easy to drift into spiritual sleep—living as if the present age is permanent and ordering ordinary days as if the Master will never knock.

When Christ returns he will render a verdict. Blessed are the servants he finds awake and doing his will; the unfaithful who beat fellow servants and get drunk will be cut in pieces and placed with the unfaithful. The language is severe because we all live for a verdict. We spend our lives collecting proofs of worth, hoping someone will finally say “enough.” Yet parents, spouses, bosses, and children can only offer partial verdicts—they themselves need the same one. Despair comes when we look up and find the bench empty. The gospel answers this: two thousand years ago the Son of Man stood before the Master in our place. Though faithful, he received our guilty verdict, was beaten and torn for us. His perfect verdict is now conferred on all who trust him. The examination is already passed; the Master is pleased.

The pleasure of the Master is shown in a surprising reversal: he will dress himself for service, seat his servants at table, and serve them. Heaven is not a thin, endless worship service. Creation will be renewed, appetites transfigured, and the feast we have always hungered for will be served by the King himself. In God there is no need that must be filled by servants—only fullness that overflows. Finally, the faithful are set over all the Master’s possessions. Work in this age—cleaning, preparing meals, managing budgets, writing code—is not busy work to be discarded. It is apprenticeship for the vocation of eternity. The resurrected body is the same body glorified; our work will be raised, magnified, and entrusted with greater responsibility. “To whom much was given, of him much will be required.” Until the knock comes, we stay dressed, keep the lamps burning, and do the work he has given us.

Approaching This Week's Lesson

Lead the group to this bottom line: we live as servants waiting in the dark, dressed for work with lamps glimmering, because the Master has promised he will return, examine us with pleasure (the verdict already secured in Christ), seat and serve us, and entrust us with eternal stewardship. Do not let the conversation stay at the level of “try harder to be ready” or “don’t get too comfortable.” Press until people feel the suddenness of the return and the emptiness of living for partial human verdicts. Then refuse to leave them with a better technique for staying awake. The only lasting readiness is the knowledge that Christ was already torn in our place so that we might hear “Well done.” Keep returning to the cross as the proof that the Master is for us, and show how ordinary faithfulness today is the first draft of the work he will magnify forever.

Teaching Outline

Start with a Hook

What would change in your ordinary day if you truly believed the Master could knock on your door tonight?

Most of us order our days as if the present age is permanent. We make plans, build careers, and settle into routines that assume tomorrow will look a lot like today. Jesus’ call to “stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning” cuts against that assumption. Use the question to surface how easy it is to live in spiritual sleep—unaware of the reality of Christ’s promised return—then open the text together.

Read the Passage

Luke 12:35–48 (ESV)

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.”

41 Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” 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. 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. 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.

Outline the Passage

- vv. 35–36 – Stay dressed for action and keep lamps burning, like servants waiting for the master returning from a wedding feast so they can open the door at once.
- vv. 37–38 – Blessed are those found awake; the master will dress himself for service, seat them at table, and serve them—even if he comes in the second or third watch.
- vv. 39–40 – Just as a householder would stay awake if he knew when the thief was coming, so you must be ready, for the Son of Man comes at an unexpected hour.
- v. 41 – Peter asks whether the parable is for the apostles or for all.
- vv. 42–44 – The faithful and wise manager gives the household their food at the proper time; when the master finds him doing so, he sets him over all his possessions.
- vv. 45–46 – If the servant says the master is delayed, beats the other servants, and gets drunk, the master will come unexpectedly, cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unfaithful.
- vv. 47–48 – The servant who knew the master’s will and did not act receives a severe beating; the one who did not know receives a light beating. To whom much was given, much will be required.

Discussion Questions

- How does the suddenness of Christ’s return (vv. 35–40) challenge the way we order our ordinary days? Where do you see spiritual sleep in your own life?
- The sermon describes us as people who spend our lives building a case for a verdict. How does knowing that Christ already received our guilty verdict and confers his perfect one free us from both inferiority and pride?
- What does it mean that the Master will seat his servants and serve them (v. 37)? How does this surprising reversal deepen your hope for the new creation?
- Jesus says the faithful will be set over all his possessions and that “to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (vv. 44, 48). In what small, unnoticed tasks is God currently apprenticing you for eternal stewardship?

Prayer Guide

- Thank God for the promise that Christ will return suddenly and bring his people into the joy of their Master.
- Confess ways we have drifted into spiritual sleep or lived as if the present age is permanent.
- Ask for grace to stay awake and faithful in the ordinary work he has given us today, treating every assignment as from the Master.
- Pray that our hearts would rest in the Master who was torn for us so that we might hear “Well done, good and faithful servant” and enter his joy.