

YOU MUST BE READY

- Many well-meaning Christians speculate about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. The problem is that there is tremendous (but legitimate) diversity among the end-time perspectives, more so than most people even realize, and more importantly, many (if not most) of the discussions and studies about this subject create more fear and stress than they do holiness of living. But when we hear Jesus' teaching about the end of the world, he focuses us in a direction that is quite different than many of today's popular ideas. When he talks about the end, his focus becomes intensely practical—painfully practical, I'm afraid. More practical and down-to-earth than I think many of us are even comfortable with.

Luke 12:35-40, “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,³⁶ like 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.³⁷ It 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.³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.³⁹ But 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.⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”⁷⁷

- From the movie, *Night and the Museum 2: Battle for the Smithsonian*
 - Kah Mun Rah
 - Ivan the Terrible
 - Why are you wearing a dress?
 - **Kah Mun Rah**, “A dress? A dress? This is not a dress. This is a tunic. It was at the height of fashion 3,000 years ago, I assure you.”
 - Napoleon
 - Al Capone
- ³⁵**Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,**
- **KJV**, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning...”
- Literally *Stand, your waist having been belted.*
- It is the image of a man who has tucked his long robe up under his belt in order to be able to run without hindrance (i.e., tripping over his tunic).
- The image can be seen frequently in the Bible and other Jewish literature.¹
- The use of the perfect participle, “having your waist belted,” envisions someone who, instead of waiting until the last moment, is always prepared to act.²
- Marriages often took place in the evening. It was the duty of the servants to meet the wedding party with lighted torches.
- ³⁶**like 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.**
- Jewish wedding feasts in the first century could last for as long as a week, so the time of someone's return was not always predictable.
 - Servants were to be ready & prepared whenever the master came home from the party.
 - Disciples are to live in the same expectation.
- In this case, the passage refers to the second coming of the Lord (at the end of history).

¹ Cf. Luke 17:8; Exod 12:11; 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 4:29; 9:1; Eph 6:14; 1 Pet 1:13; cf. also 1QM 15:14; 16:11.

² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, in The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 535.

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.

- “It will be good,” is literally “*he will be blessed.*”
 - The interpretation of the parable is part of the parable itself.
- The image of the “Lord” serving his servants at the parousia is unexpected and powerful.
 - How blessed indeed are those whom the Lord will serve when he returns!

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.

- There were 2 different measurements for keeping track of time through the night in ancient Palestine—the four watches of the Romans and the three watches of the Jews.
- Luke probably was thinking of the Roman practice of dividing the night into four watches.³
- The **Roman** “watches” were:
 - 6–9 p.m.
 - 9–12 p.m.
 - 12–3 a.m. and
 - 3–6 a.m.
 - Roman time would therefore be around midnight.
- The **Jewish** “watches” were:
 - 6–10 p.m.
 - 10 p.m. –2 a.m.
 - 2–6 a.m.
 - The Jewish time system would have been around 2:00 a.m.
- Whichever Jesus meant, the point remains—the Lord was returning late (and unexpected).
- Between Jesus’ 1st and 2nd coming, would his servants become impatient & worldly?
- Everyone knows what it means for the boss to be away. Many take advantage of such a time to relax and ‘go slow’ for a while. After all, no one is closely watching!⁴
 - Yet for the Christian, there should be a continual awareness of God, and an hour by hour anticipation of the Lord’s return. The faithful and watchful servant would be served by his master (v. 37), for he lived in constant readiness for his return.⁵

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.

- “Broken into” is literally “*dug through.*”
- Palestinian homes were typically made of mud-brick.
- So when a thief would “break in,” he/she would literally *dig through the walls.*⁶
- Robbers were called “mud diggers” because they dug through the mud-thatched walls.
- J.C. Ryle, “This teaches that, since the Lord’s coming will come as a surprise, there is no safety for Christians except constant readiness for it.”⁷

⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

³ Note the four sets of guards in Acts 12:4; cf. also Matt 14:25; Mark 13:35.

⁴ Gavin Childress, *Opening Up Luke’s Gospel* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 118–119.

⁵ Gavin Childress, *Opening Up Luke’s Gospel* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 118–119.

⁶ Robert Stein, *Luke*, in *The New American Commentary* series, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 357.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Luke* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), Luke 12:39.

- A present middle imperative. Which simply means: This is our responsibility!⁸
- *Psalm 90:12*, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”
- The challenge is that we can’t really “gain a heart of wisdom” unless we can gain some perspective as to what’s a stake.
- Moses understood this, and in anticipation of such a need, he provides the needed point of view.
- *Psalm 90:11-12*, “Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. ¹²Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”
- As of today, I have lived **15,876** days (counting today, Sunday, April 18, 2010)
- If I should live to the age of 85, I have **15,329** days remaining.
- In the parable, the master is away & he has left his servants to their various responsibilities.
- When” the master returns *he expects* to find the servants *watchful* and *faithful*.
 - *Michael Wilcock*, “Amid all the practical concerns of this life, do they always have an eye to his possible return, or will his coming be an complete surprise?”
 - Furthermore, will they occupy themselves with *his* business, or will they take advantage of his delay to waste their opportunities, eating and drinking and making merry, and showing themselves no better than the rich fool (12:45 and 19)?⁹
 - Thus he distinguishes between those whom he finds awake, faithfully serving; and those who are caught sleeping and abusing their privileges.
 - Do they act as though it is *their* business, *their* money, *their* property, their . . . everything, and use it all for their own desires and interests?

Application

- The question is: What does it mean “to be ready & watching” and how do we prepare?
- Luke gives us the answer just prior to our immediate passage.
- *12:31-34*, “But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³²Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- Our readiness for Christ’s return is reflected in our on-going, principled self-denial for the sake of the gospel.
- We “seek the kingdom” through our deliberate rejection of this world, its priorities and values, and that, according to Jesus, includes our possessions.
- *D.A. Carson*, “The lesson to be learned is startlingly clear: Put the . . . gospel at the center of your principled self-denial. [In Philippians] Paul’s deepest hopes for his own immediate future turn neither on the bliss of immediately gaining heaven’s portals nor on returning to a fulfilling ministry and escaping the pangs of death, but on what is best for his converts. Often we are tempted to evaluate alternatives by thinking through what seems best *for us*. How often do we raise *as a first principle* what is best for the church? When faced with, say, a job offer that would take us to another city or with mortal illness that calls forth our diligent intercession, how quickly do we employ [the Bible’s] criterion here established: What would be best for the church? What would be best for my brothers and sisters in Christ?”¹⁰

⁸ Robert James Utey, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 3 vols. (Marshall: Bible Lessons International, 2004), 3:A.

⁹ Michael Wilcock, *The Savior of the World: The Message of Luke’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 136–137.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 30.

- There are two antithetical kingdoms: The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. You must decide which kingdom you will live in/for.
- **J. C. Ryle**, “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven.”¹¹
- **C.S. Lewis**, “A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in.’ aim at earth and you will get neither.”¹²
- Perspective is crucial. Sometimes when we are going through particularly difficult situations, everything seems hopeless and pointless. Only after some time do we gain perspective so that events come into focus and the lessons become obvious.¹³
- Believers are supposed to live prospectively, knowing that Jesus is returning and that all will give an account for their stewardship.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:2-4**, “For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.³ While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”
- **2 Peter 3:10**, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”
- Probably most everyone here has known someone or heard about someone that quite unexpectedly received a diagnosis from their doctor that they had cancer (or some other fatal illness) and that they only had 3 (or 6 or 12, or whatever) months left to live.
- In most of those situations, the people suddenly went through an unbelievably fast and radical transformation in their lives.
 - CEOs rapidly scale WAY back on their work & spend every spare moment with their families.
 - Men who lived somewhat reckless lives abruptly pull everything together and begin to live with heretofore unheard of discipline.
 - Women that had previously given almost no thought to God, suddenly become remarkably devout.
 - The prospect of death brings remarkable focus to a life that previously was noted for being so scattered. And invariably, those in such situations make comments to the effect that, “If only I had made these changes sooner. Why didn’t I prioritize my life from the beginning?”
 - **John Piper**, “Sometimes massive suffering comes so close to home that for a brief season the fog of our foolish security clears, and we can see the sheer precipice of eternity one step away. The cold wobble passes through our thighs, and for a moment everything in the universe looks different. Those are good times for pastoral realism. Oh, how hollow much of our lives and ministry seem in those moments! The last thing we regret then is being less professional.”¹⁴

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Heaven* (Ross-sire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 19.

¹² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 118.

¹³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke in the IVP New Testament Commentary* series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

¹⁴ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), ix.

- **Wesley & Christ's Return**, "A lady once asked John Wesley that suppose he were to know that he would die at 12:00 midnight tomorrow, how would he spend the intervening time. His reply: "Why madam, just as I intend to spend it now. I would preach this evening at Gloucester, and again at five tomorrow morning; after that I would ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I would then go to Rev. Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, talk and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at 10 o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in Glory."¹⁵
- **Martin Luther**, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my little apple tree and pay my debts."
- **Paul Lee Tan**, "St. Francis of Assisi, hoeing his garden, was asked what he would do if he were suddenly to learn that he was to die at sunset that day. He said: "I would finish hoeing my garden."¹⁶
- By living a *godly life* that reflects the abundant truth God has given us. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11–13).
- By *joyful service*. "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like 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" (Luke 12:35, 36).
- Roll up your sleeves, turn on the lights, get ready—Jesus is coming soon!¹⁷
- **So what seems to be the problem?**
- According to Greek mythology, there was a sixteen year old deer-hunter named Narcissus, that was strikingly good looking. One afternoon, he came to a pool of water to quench his thirst, but when he saw his reflection on the surface he fell in love with it (i.e., the reflection). Quite obviously, he could not obtain the object of his love, but neither could he tear himself away from looking at his beautiful image, so he ultimately died.¹⁸



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¹⁵ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers* (Garland: Bible Communications, 1996), n.p.

¹⁶ Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, n.p.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 60–67.

¹⁸ "Narcissus," <http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Narcissus.html>, <Accessed: January 9, 2010.>

¹⁹ "Narcissus," by Caravaggio, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(mythology)), <Accessed: January 9, 2010.>