

Be ready for the Lord's return (Luke 12:35-59)

We're studying the Gospel of Luke. Today we'll look at the last part of cp. 12. Let's skim this chapter quickly. Jesus spoke his teaching, seeing the future persecution against believers, some of their martyrdom, and the time when they would stand before the angels of the Lord. We can feel the sense of impending crisis throughout this chapter.

Jesus told that the parable of "the rich fool" whose life would be demanded that very night. "The warning against worry": that we should turn our heart to heaven. The parable of "the servant who is watching for his master's return" and the parable of "the faithful and wise servant". And "the warning that we should know how to interpret this present time". All of these have airs of tension, with the awareness of death, second coming and judgment. "This present time" is the time of impending crisis with such airs of tension.

As we live in this time of impending crisis, the first half of cp. 12 says: "Don't just make up appearance. Don't be greedy and become someone who is not rich towards God. Don't worry so much about food and clothes that you forget that you live by God's grace."

And today, we will continue to study the latter half of cp. 12. The theme is "Be ready for the Lord's return."

1. Be always ready to meet the Lord

35-40

³⁵ "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."

We should always be ready to meet the Lord. First of all, the Lord, who loves us with all his heart, is now coming! How can we be sleeping?

"Master puts on an apron, sits them down at the kitchen table, and he serves them a midnight snack. (37)" This cannot happen in our usual practice. But, Jesus literally did that to his disciples. Jesus showed his disciples the full extent of his love. This Lord Jesus is coming to us! How can we be carelessly sleeping?

Jesus invited sinners to join meals with him and his disciples. (Mark 2:16-17) They cannot by themselves even come near Jesus, who is holy God, let alone to have fellowship with him. They cannot change that status by themselves. But, it was Jesus who welcomed them.

Holy God receives sinners. This cannot happen naturally. But, in order for this impossible thing to be realized, Jesus died on the cross, paid all the cost of sins, and completed reconciliation. And he resurrected, and he is coming back to us again for fellowship with us. How can we be carelessly sleeping?

We should always be ready to meet the Lord. Secondly, the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (40)

Suppose a notorious thief, like mysterious thief Lupin, or Lupin the 3rd if you are familiar with Japanese cartoon, told in advance to an art museum that he would steal a precious painting on such and such day. What would they do? I suppose they would strictly guard the museum, using some high technology devices, so that they can prevent the thief from stealing the painting. But in the movie, even then, the thief can steal the painting.

The point is this. If they knew the thief was coming, they would prepare with their best. They would not just let the thief take it without any preparation usually. That's normal.

However, when it comes to things concerning to the Bible, faith and Jesus, somehow we tend to put it off till later. (Is it just me?)

After the last supper, Jesus went with his disciples to his usual place of prayer. Jesus went a little farther away from them, and prayed. When he returned to them, they were sleeping. So he said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (Mat 26:41) Then, Jesus went away to pray one more time. But, again they fell asleep. Jesus went away once again, and prayed the third time. But, again they fell asleep.

When Jesus came back to them, now a large crowd armed with swords and clubs arrived and arrested Jesus. The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answers, "Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." (John 18:21)

When asked about Jesus, Peter answers, "I don't know him." (Luke 22:57) Other disciples also, every one of them deserted him, fled and disappeared.

Jesus foretold his disciples that he was going to be betrayed (Luke 9:44) and be killed. But the disciples were not at all ready. They were struck by fear and panicked as if something totally unexpected had happened.

Now, the Lord has promised that he would come back and take us to be with him. (John 14:3) He will not come as a thief. He will not come to be seized again and be crucified. He will come as King of kings, Lord of lords, "with power and great glory." (Luke 21:27) But the Son of Man will come at an hour when we do not expect him. (Luke 12:40) That is why we need to be ready. We know that he is coming. So, we will get ourselves ready. We shouldn't repeat the mistake of the disciples.

2. Be wise and faithful

How can we prepare ourselves? What do we need to be mindful of in preparing for his coming?

41-48

⁴¹ Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" ⁴² The 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? ⁴³ It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But 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. ⁴⁶ The 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. ⁴⁸ But 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.

What can we learn to be mindful of in preparing for his coming?

First of all, we need to be “wise”.

Then, what does it mean to be ‘unwise’? An unwise person would think “my master is taking a long time in coming” (v.45), and to forget that he is a steward, and forget he has responsibility and a role to fill.

On the other hand, a wise man knows the importance of his role. He understands how much blessings he can bring to others through fulfilling his role. And he knows how much his master trust in him. And he works according to this knowledge.

Secondly, we need to be “faithful.”

What happens if we are unfaithful? An unfaithful servant will use what is entrusted to him to do his master's business for his selfish enjoyment. He would use it to fill his own pocket. Moreover, he might use others to satisfy himself by taking advantage of his position. A faithful servant will be responsible for his role which his master trusts whether his master is around him or not.

What the Lord values is whether the person is faithful or not. It is not how successful he is, how good his performance was, how much he produced. So we should also not evaluate ourselves by comparing our work or result of our work with those of others. And don't think the Lord loves you because of your success, or He dislikes you because of your failure or mistakes.

When we are faithful before the Lord, we will serve Him attentively. And we know our priority. We will not be self-centered. But we will feel honor and joy because the Lord has used us for his glory.

Then what is our responsibility entrusted by the Lord? What is our role to fill? Let's move on with this question in mind.

3. Messenger of the gospel of reconciliation

I will tell you the answer first.

1 Peter 2:9

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

It is not just telling how wonderful God is by words only. But our renewed lifestyle itself reveals God's greatness and glory, and the blessedness and joy of His people. Our way of being as Christians itself is the advertising pillar for the gospel.

Let's go back to Luke cp. 12.

Jesus said,

49-50

⁴⁹ "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! (NAS)

We can understand the baptism mentioned in v.50, which Jesus was going to undergo is the cross. And in v.49 the fire mentioned, which Jesus cast upon the earth, and wish it were already kindled. Some commentators understand it as "judgment". They relate the content from v.51 to 53, the division with "judgment". Some people understand this fire as the Holy Spirit. I also think it is natural to understand it as the Holy Spirit. V.49 and v.50 are parallel to each other. These two verses are related.

At Luke 3:16, Jesus is called to be the one who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Spirit and fire are synonymous.¹ The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus. But the work of the Holy Spirit is not yet spread all over the world. How much Jesus wished the work of the Spirit would spread all over the world! In order for the work of the Holy Spirit to be spread all over the world, he cannot avoid the cross. And after Jesus resurrected and went into heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured on disciples like flames of fire. The fire of the Holy Spirit will not be quenched, but will spread all over the world.

¹ Bob Utley, *Fire Bible Commentary*, Bible Lessons International, 2013.

51-53

⁵¹ Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵² From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Jesus came to the earth as "Prince of Peace." But, it is also written that there will be division because of Jesus.

Jesus didn't preach the gospel to cause division. Jesus didn't heal the sick, drive out demons, and testify for the Kingdom of God in order to cause division. But there are two responses to Jesus.

Gospel hearers are divided into two, and only two. They will be divided into two groups by how they respond to Jesus and His message (cf. Luke 24:44-49). That is, whether they would accept him or reject him. There is nothing in the middle. And there will be conflict between those who accept Jesus and those who reject Jesus. That is because we cannot leave this matter unanswered. For whether we receive Jesus or not will decide our eternity. It is such an important issue.

It may be a little out of context, but let's look at one thing. There are divisions a church cannot avoid, because of the gospel.

1 Cor. 11:18-19

¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. (NAS)

Apostles Paul wrote to the young Christians at Corinth to help them deal with their many problems. Although they were richly blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they were letting sinful practices creep into their lives. (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11, 15:33)

The early church was started by the Holy Spirit's remarkable work, but

they were not without problems. Apostle Paul wrote to his young disciples as follows:

1 Tim. 6:5

⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Tit. 3:10

¹⁰ Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, (NAS)

And also there are divisions and conflicts the church cannot avoid in order for a church to keep the purity of the gospel.

In the early church, sometimes the icing-gospel was preached (2 Tim. 4:3-4), false teachers distorted the truth (Acts 20:29-30), and a different gospel was introduced (Gal. 1:7). They had experienced unavoidable divisions and conflicts in order for them to keep the purity of the gospel and to keep the church as church.

But the work entrusted to us is not for us to actively cause division.

2 Cor. 5:18

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

We are sent into the world as messengers of peace for the kingdom of God, and we proclaim the gospel of reconciliation. This gospel cannot be just shared by words, but it will be shown by our actions. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we will bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The blessings of the kingdom of God is flowing and spreading through who we are. And it is not for an individual, but for the church.

"The church is the community that lives by the biblical vision. The church proclaims in her worship as well as in her service, message and lifestyle that the existence of the universe and human history can only be understood and make sense within the purpose of God, manifested in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit."²

² Samuel Escobar, *A Time For Mission*, IVP, 2003, (p168)

4. To interpret this present time

54-59

⁵⁴ He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. ⁵⁵ And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? ⁵⁷ "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

It seems, in the time of Jesus, there was also something like weather forecast. And it was quite accurate. At all times and places, people knew how to predict the weather, by the movement of a cloud and the direction of the wind. And they will act, according to their prediction. They will bring an umbrella, if they think it will rain (or it will be very sunny day here). They will reinforce the roof, if they think the cyclone or typhoon will be coming.

Jesus asked the people.

56-57

⁵⁶ Listen, hypocrites! You can predict the weather by paying attention to the sky and the earth, but why can't you interpret the urgency of this present moment? ⁵⁷ Why don't you see it for yourselves?

"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near." (Mark 1:15) The Lord's second coming is definitely drawing near. I hope we will not just spend days aimlessly, or repeat the same things without purpose. But I hope we will receive wisdom from the Lord to interpret this present time clearly, and will become effective witness in this present time. Let's act wisely as people redeemed by Jesus life. And let's faithfully fulfill our roles as people entrusted with this gospel.